Chapter 7
Incarcerated Fathers
Implications for Father Involvement

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Unprecedented growth of the US prison population has led to a large number of incarcerated fathers. In 2007, US state and federal prisons contained 766,000 fathers of 1.55 million children; a 90 % increase since 1991. According to data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, nearly 13 % of young adults report that their biological fathers have ever been incarcerated (Foster and Hagan 2007). Reflecting racial inequalities in rates of incarceration, minority children are particularly at risk. Glaze and Mauschak (2008) estimate that African-American and Hispanic children are over 7 and 2.5 times, respectively, more likely than whites to have an incarcerated father in state or federal prisons. As Western and Wilderman (2009) note, these trends have made father incarceration an increasingly common experience within the life course, particularly for disadvantaged children.

Noting these trends, researchers have increasingly focused on the "collateral consequences" of father's incarceration for families, children, and communities (Braman 2004; Hagan and Dinovitzer 1999; Hagan and Foster 2007). At five to ten times the rate of other developed nations (Mauer 2003; Western and Wildeman 2009) and lacking a criminal justice system focusing on rehabilitation (Gottschalk 2006), issues surrounding father incarceration remain somewhat unique to the United States. Nevertheless, international studies and a growing body of qualitative and quantitative research provide insights into how current and formerly incarcerated fathers interact with their children.

It is important to recognize that father incarceration complicates father-child involvement in a number of ways. Current and formerly incarcerated fathers face a number of personal issues, including recidivism (Langan and Levin 2002), mental health problems and substance abuse (Mumola 2000), and difficulty in finding stable

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employment (Pager 2003, 2007). Contact during incarceration is often limited by distance, onerous and unpleasant visitation rules and regulations, and the stigma of prison itself (Nurse 2004). Given that a large majority of romantic relationships end during incarceration (Western et al. 2004), children may experience issues such as family instability, father-mother tensions, father absence, and male authority figures both during and after father incarceration (Braman 2004; Giordano 2010). In some cases, particularly those involving extreme criminality or domestic violence, father's incarceration may represent a relief of stressors within the family, leading to positive outcomes for children (Braman 2004; Nurse 2002). In these cases, the involvement of fathers would not be desired or advised. But in many cases, incarcerated fathers remain potentially important within the lives of children.

In this chapter, we discuss father-child involvement in the context of incarceration. We begin with an overview of father incarceration in the United States, using several theoretical perspectives to establish how father incarceration influences father-child involvement. We then proceed to discuss the impact of father incarceration on offenders and children. After discussing the impact of father incarceration on parents and children, we discuss implications for social and education policies. In doing so, we highlight some existing programs as examples of how policies and practices may lead to improved father-child relationships.

Overview of Parental Incarceration in the United States

Since 1970, the US jail and prison population has grown from 250,000 to 2.4 million individuals. Among males, the Bureau of Justice Statistics has estimated that one-third of African Americans, 17 % of Hispanics, and 5 % of whites (Bonczar 2003) will spend a year or more in prison during their lives. Less educated black males are particularly at risk, with nearly 60 % of black high school dropouts and 30 % of high school graduates spending a year or more in prison by their mid-30s (Pettit and Western 2004). Consequently, incarceration has become an increasingly common life course event among less educated and minority males.

With nearly 60 % of incarcerated males reporting having at least one biological child, the number of children experiencing incarceration has also grown exponentially. Mumola (2000, 2006) estimates that nearly 1.7 million children have a biological father in state or federal prison, while nearly 7 million children have a parent that is under correctional supervision (i.e., incarcerated or on probation/parole). As in the case of incarceration, minority children are disproportionately affected. Wildeman (2009) estimates that by adolescence 24 % of African-American children have experienced a biological father's incarceration, compared to 4 % of whites.

These demographic trends are disconcerting, given the number of negative children's outcomes associated with father's incarceration. Empirical research has found father's incarceration to associate with homelessness (Hagan and Foster 2007), family instability (Western et al. 2004), child mortality (Wildeman 2010), poor educational outcomes (Murray and Farrington 2008), childhood aggression (Wildeman

in press), adolescent delinquency (Murray et al. 2009), substance abuse (Roettger et al. in press), and mental health issues (Murray and Farrington 2008; Swisher and Roettger 2010). Given these risk factors, children of incarcerated parents are disproportionately likely to experience a number of problems in adolescence and young adulthood, creating heavy social costs. For every child in the United States, Cohen and Piquero (2009) place the future societal costs of dropping out of high school at $ 360,000–$ 540,000, becoming a heavy drug user at $ 865,000–$ 965,000, and becoming a career criminal at $ 2.6–$ 4.6 million. Consequently, the potential social and economic gains from educational and public policies that help to ameliorate these risks are substantial.

Although also on the rise, maternal incarceration remains uncommon in the United States, comprising just 8 % of incarcerated parents and involving 150,000 children (Glaze and Maruschak 2008; Mumola 2000). Nevertheless, using data from national surveys of state and federal prisoners, Glaze and Maruschak report that mother's incarceration can have a much greater effect on family instability; relative to incarcerated fathers, maternal incarceration more often results in children living with grandparents (44 % vs. 12 %) or in foster care (11 % vs. 2 %).

Theoretical Frames for Understanding Father's Incarceration

Several theoretical perspectives offer insights into both the rise of father's incarceration and its effects on father involvement and child outcomes. Recent legal scholars have noted the movement of US society to focus on punishment and overt social control in a number of areas that include education, criminal justice, and welfare reform (Garland 2001; Simon 2008). In this development, Simon emphasizes how families are increasingly governed through the criminal justice system. In child custody and visitation rights, Simon notes courts increasingly use histories of criminal convictions, drug use, and domestic violence to mandate how fathers are able to interact with children. Racial discrimination is invoked by some to explain the increasing punitiveness of American society. Collins (2005) and Wacquant (2007) argue that incarceration of males is a continuing form of societal racial discrimination. Wilson (1987, 1996) argues that poor blacks are often embedded in neighborhoods of concentrated economic and social disadvantage, from which single parenthood, poverty, and violence result. Under such conditions, aberrant cultural and social values may be transmitted from incarcerated fathers to children.

Social control theory suggests that children with an incarcerated father may lack positive social norms and values that serve as social controls, and that lead to prosocial behaviors and outcomes (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990; Laub and Sampson 2003; Sampson and Laub 2003; Thornberry 2005; Thornberry et al. 2003). An incarcerated father is also not physically present in the home to informally monitor and control their children's behavior.

Labeling theories emphasize other processes through which father's criminality and incarceration may lead to similar outcomes in children. For example, research by

Hagan and Palloni (1990) suggests that external labeling of parents as criminal leads to subsequent criminality among children through a process of intergenerational exclusion. Foster and Hagan (2007) suggest that the stigma associated with father's incarceration may discourage youth from being involved in school and other community activities. At the same time, such a stigma might make unstructured socializing with peers, particularly delinquent ones, more appealing. Given unstructured socializing is argued to be an important proximal mechanism facilitating delinquency, and drug use (Osgood and Anderson 2004; Osgood et al. 1996), decreased father involvement resulting from incarceration may increase negative peer influences among children.

Using a social learning and symbolic interactionist approach, several researchers (Giordano 2010; Giordano et al. 2006, 2007) reported that early exposure of children to father's drug use and crime leads them to engage in similar behaviors as adolescents and young adults. From this perspective, it is not so much incarceration, but father's preexisting antisocial behavior and negative interactions with children that produce the negative outcomes for their children. In such cases, father's incarceration may represent a relief from the stress of father's antisocial behavior (Giordano 2010).

Taken as a whole, existing theories present a mixed picture regarding the potential consequences of incarcerated fathers on their children, and of the benefits of their involvement. To the extent that father's incarceration is a reflection of the increasing punitiveness of American society or of racial discrimination, many incarcerated fathers may have much to offer their children in terms of positive engagement. On the other hand, in cases of extreme antisocial behavior or domestic violence, the involvement of incarcerated fathers may lead to more negative outcomes for children.

Effects of Father Incarceration on Father Involvement

Due to factors such as lengthy sentences, typically large physical distances of incarceration, patterns of preincarceration involvement, and variations in father-mother relationships, there is a complicated association between father's incarceration and father-child involvement (Braman 2004; Herman-Stahl et al. 2008; Mumola 2000; Phillips et al. 2006). Nevertheless, several common themes emerge from the existing research, which are differentiated according to effects occurring: (1) during father's incarceration and (2) after release of the father from prison.

Issues During the Father's Incarceration

Glaze and Maruschak (2008) and Mumola (2000) report that 80 % of incarcerated fathers have monthly contact with their children and that 40 % are in contact on a weekly basis. However, prison substantially decreases physical contact. Whereas nearly one-half of inmates reported living with their child and 80 % reported sharing the care of children with mothers prior to incarceration, only 30 % had monthly visits with their children while in prison.

For many children, father absence and family instability become major issues resulting from their father's incarceration. When the father's incarceration occurs early in a child's life, attachment to the parent is likely to be disrupted (Boswell and Wedge 2003; Johnston and Gabel 1995). Braman (2004) finds that children whose father is incarcerated complain that their father's absence results in a lack of guidance for handling difficult issues related to school and friends. As mothers form new romantic relationships and struggle with poverty, changes in living arrangements and household composition are also common (Edin et al. 2004; Nurse 2002).

Father incarceration may also lead to diminished psychological well-being and self-esteem issues (Murray and Farrington 2008). Friedman and Esselstyn (1965) found that children whose parents were incarcerated had poorer self-concept than control groups. In one small-scale study, Stanton (1980) observed lower self-esteem among children with incarcerated mothers than a control group of children whose mothers were on probation. This, in turn, may result in negative emotional outcomes, behavioral problems, and academic struggles (Bloom 1995; Johnston and Gabel 1995; Jose-Kampfner 1995; Wildeman in press).

Ethnographic studies suggest that father incarceration may also produce social stigma for children and families. Giordano (2010) finds that even young children know that their father's incarceration is associated with inappropriate and socially marginalized behavior, which may result in children experiencing social stigma and shame (Braman 2004). The stigma of incarceration and the "quasi-incarceration" experienced during prison visits often lead to mothers and families reducing contact between children and incarcerated fathers (Nurse 2004). Incarcerated fathers often must cope as well with mothers who are forming new romantic relationships, as many existing relationships sour during incarceration (Edin et al. 2004; Western et al. 2004). With 88 % of children of incarcerated fathers living with their mothers (Mumola 2000), mothers often act as "gatekeepers" limiting access to and levels of involvement with fathers. Due to the nature of incarceration, this gatekeeper role is greatly heightened relative to the general population (Nesmith and Ruhland 2008).

Father incarceration also creates financial hardships on families, which may lead to diminished father involvement. With most fathers employed and having incomes prior to incarceration, the loss of father income leads to loss of economic resources and child support (Edin et al. 2004; Griswold and Pearson 2003; Hairston 1998). With prison wages typically no more than a few dollars per day, families may incur thousands of dollars in expenses arising from phone calls, visitation, and legal fees. Incarcerated fathers who feel inadequate due to being unable to financially support their families, may pull away from involvement with their children (Braman 2004). With father incarceration heavily concentrated among low socioeconomic status men (Pettit and Western 2004); lost financial earnings, child support, and costs of incarceration may create additional family instability that further reduces father-child involvement.

Issues Following Incarceration

With over 75 % of incarcerated parents reporting a prior conviction and 50 % reporting a prior incarceration (Mumola 2000), the father-child relationship must often cope with multiple spells of incarceration and ongoing involvement of the father with the criminal justice system. While increasingly recognized as important for both rehabilitation purposes and child welfare (McKay et al. 2009), addressing issues of father involvement remains largely ignored by the criminal justice system and public policy (Hairston 1998; Western and Wildeman 2009). As such, many of the issues that begin during incarceration continue after release, with compounding factors increasing social and legal barriers to father-child involvement. Economically, fathers who leave prison face significant barriers to contributing to their children's well-being. Relative to those with no histories of incarceration, fathers with histories of incarceration face increased unemployment and reduced wages, with blacks and Hispanics most adversely effected (Pager 2007; Pager et al. 2009; Western and Pettit 2005). Formerly incarcerated fathers who do not have custody of children are often responsible for child support, and additionally may be responsible for thousands of dollars in legal fines and child support arrears that accrued while incarcerated (Edelman et al. 2006; Griswold and Pearson 2003; Hairston 1998). With most incarcerated fathers having no more than a high school degree and often of minority status (Mumola 2000), an inability to obtain well-paying jobs within the formal economy limits or precludes fathers from providing adequate economic support for their children upon release. The fact that formerly incarcerated fathers also tend to be disproportionately drawn from low socioeconomic status neighborhoods, further strains their ability to find and maintain employment (Clear 2007; Clear et al. 2003; Wilson 1987, 1996).

The inability to find work may also limit formerly incarcerated fathers from seeing their children. Nurse (2004) observes that while most young fathers plan on spending time with their children, mothers may substantially limit involvement with children. In many states, owing child support creates a legal barrier for formerly incarcerated fathers from seeing their children, providing a mechanism through which mothers may limit father-child contact (Phillips et al. 2006). Mothers, who often have new romantic partners and/or extended families that distrust the biological father, may seek to actively prevent the father from being involved with their children (Hairston 1998; Nurse 2004). While this pattern is generally observed among whites, Swisher and Waller (2008) found that black and Hispanic mothers were more likely than white mothers to permit involvement of a previously incarcerated father; they were also more likely to trust the father to take care of their children.

Relationships between formerly incarcerated fathers and mothers are often complex. Examining gatekeeping experiences among 40 fathers on early work-release from prison, Roy and Dyson (2005) found that fathers experienced "cycles of hope and mistrust" with mothers while seeking to be involved with their children that they termed "babymama drama."This "babymama drama" is consistent with research on maternal gatekeeping, where mothers control or encourage father involvement through actions such as excluding fathers from childcare, encouraging the role of the

father as breadwinner, and conditioning father-child interaction on fathers meeting high norms or standards (Allen and Hawkins 1999; Fagan and Barnett 2003; Trinder 2008). In approximately one-half of relationships, Roy and Dyson found that fathers reported mothers substantially restricting access to children due to fears of sporadic economic support, drug use, and violence. Three-fourths of fathers also reported that mothers encouraged some form of involvement, with many taking a "wait-and-see" approach that involved a "second chance" or signs of positive change. Roy and Dyson also note that both mothers and fathers struggled with substance abuse, poverty, and relationship/family instability that made father-mother relationships difficult to maintain.

As Giordano (2010) has noted, the return of a formerly incarcerated father to the life of the child can introduce several possible negative events, including illegal father behaviors (criminal activities, drug use), physical or sexual abuse, and father conflict with the mother, current romantic partner, or extended family. One of the most damaging of these is physical or sexual abuse, which can initiate antisocial behavior, intergenerational cycles of violence, drug use, mental health issues, and other adverse developmental outcomes (Ball 2009; Gilbert et al. 2009; Jaffee et al. 2003; Widom 1989). Absent sexual or physical abuse, father criminality may lead young children to be exposed to and participate in illegal behaviors such as theft, selling drugs, or alcohol or substance use (Giordano 2010; Giordano et al. 2006; Thornberry 2009). Under strained relationships, father involvement may also instigate complex family dynamics that expose children to conflicts between fathers and mothers, new stepparent/romantic partners, or the mother's family (Giordano 2010; Nurse 2004).

A major issue that formerly incarcerated fathers must overcome is "prisonization," a set of social psychological effects resulting from institutionalization and forced confinement (Hairston 1998, 2001; Haney 2001; Herman-Stahl et al. 2008). As a total institution which dictates nearly every detail of inmates' lives, over time prison inmates generally become emotionally dependent on others for decision-making, rules and schedules, and external constraints (Haney 2001; Sapsford 1978; Sykes 1971). In addition, due to a constant threat of violence and use of force, prison inmates also generally become hypervigilant, suspicious, and emotionally distant (Haney 2001; McCorkle 1992). For formerly incarcerated fathers, the resulting lack of trust, inability to show warmth or emotion, linkage of following rules to use of physical force, and rigidity can create substantial barriers to fathers forming positive, long-term bonds with their children (Festen et al. 2002; Haney 2001; Herman-Stahl et al. 2008). These mechanisms, in turn, may be responsible for anxiety, depression, and other mental health problems known to be correlated with father incarceration in adulthood (Murray and Farrington 2008; Swisher and Roettger 2010).

Such factors have led to a common view that the involvement of incarcerated fathers might be detrimental to their child's well-being (Hairston 1998). However, while the research literature strongly suggests that father abuse or criminality are associated with increased harm of the child, father involvement in the absence of these issues may, conversely, have positive effects for parents and children. For formerly incarcerated fathers who are nonabusive and not engaging in criminal behavior, father involvement can bring needed economic resources, childcare (both from the

father and the father's family), a more stable home environment, and presence of a father-figure that may benefit the child and mother (Braman 2004; Edin et al. 2004). The involvement of formerly incarcerated fathers may also provide highly effective motivation to desist from crime and engage in more prosocial behaviors (Edin et al. 2004).

Father Incarceration as a Potential Turning Point in the Life Course

The relationship a father has with a child in prison strongly correlates with father-child involvement following release from prison (Festen et al. 2002). Given the difficulty and effort of maintaining relationships during incarceration, the pattern of father-child involvement formed during this period may constitute an important turning point for the father-child relationship, which may improve the lives of both the father and child when successful, or decline as events lead to decreased involvement.

A wide array of issues may lead to father-child involvement deteriorating while the father is incarcerated. For the father, inability to maintain a functional relationship with the mother, issues of recidivism, mounting child support and debt, and continuing antisocial or violent behaviors may create legal or structural barriers preventing the father from interacting with the child. Due to the high rates of recidivism, ending of romantic relationships, family instability and economic issues (both for the father and household the child resides in), incarceration begins a period of decreased father-child involvement for the vast majority of cases.

However, as qualitative studies, such as Edin et al. (2004) find, this is not always the case. While incarceration is generally associated with negative outcomes for parents and children, incarceration may provide opportunities for turning points in the life courses of fathers. Finding almost all incarcerated fathers in their sample believed they would be worse off without their children, Edin et al. report that incarceration provided a means for fathers to take "time out" to reorient themselves; incarceration, combined with involvement with their children, provided motivation for desisting from crime, obtaining counseling or substance abuse treatment, seeking work/educational training, and learning to be a better parent.

Such activities not only provide opportunities for improving the lives of incarcerated fathers, but provide opportunities to increase father-child contact through improving relationships with the mother. Given that mothers typically function as gatekeepers and often feel pressured to limit father-child contact by new romantic partners or family (Braman 2004; Nurse 2002, 2004), incarcerated fathers can form cooperative relationships through demonstrating the benefits to mothers and children. Continued contact with their children is also dependent on the mother, providing ongoing motivation for current and formerly incarcerated fathers to change their behaviors.

Paternal Incarceration and Social Policy

As the above research suggests, the involvement of current or formerly incarcerated fathers with their children has a number of implications for professionals involved in educating and/or caring for young children. In this section, we suggest ways in which these groups may positively influence the welfare of children with fathers who have been incarcerated. Due to the negative outcomes associated with abuse, we separate our suggestions into occasions when father involvement: (1) should be limited due to paternal violence or (2) encouraged to benefit the welfare of children, fathers, and families. In the process, we discuss policies and associated benefits with encouraging father involvement when children are not exposed to violence, abuse, or criminal behavior.

Cases of Limiting Father Involvement

A critical nexus for educators and providers is determining whether to encourage father contact based on the behavior of the father. In cases where a current or formerly incarcerated father may engage in physical or children sexual abuse, expose or involve the child in criminal behaviors, or abandon or neglect the child, father involvement can have substantially negative effects on children (Giordano 2010; Jaffee et al. 2003). Experiences of violence or abuse can cause physical harm to children and result in similar behaviors among children (Widom 1989). Father criminality and drug use can similarly be reproduced in the life course, through children learning or adopting criminal behaviors (Hagan and Palloni 1990), exposure to and subsequent involvement with deviant peers or gangs the father may belong to, and even desires to bond with parents by engaging in deviant acts (Giordano 2010).

In such cases, the best interest of the child may be that the father has no involvement, or only under supervised visitation. For educators and providers, this may involve not extending invitations for opportunities in school or caregiving, while encouraging mothers to exercise a strong "gatekeeper" role limiting contact. As appropriate, referral of children, fathers, and family/caretakers to social services, law enforcement, psychological counseling, or substance abuse treatment may be beneficial.

Encouraging Increased Father Involvement

Outside of cases where children are exposed to violence or criminality, encouraging father-child involvement can enhance the lives of fathers and children. This may be accomplished through structured visits and activities, institutional policies, and support groups that incorporate the promotion of father involvement within larger reintegration programs. To facilitate such forms of involvement, schools/preschools

may facilitate workshops that invite mothers and fathers to learn about the benefits of father involvement to children, fathers, and the entire family. The benefits to children of such an approach may include increased economic resources, childcare and support by the father and his family, presence of a father-figure, and engagement in prosocial behaviors.

As noted above, formerly incarcerated fathers can accrue tens of thousands of dollars in child support, fines, and legal fees. When paired with an inability to find work, this severely limits their ability to economically support their children. However, as research by Braman (2004) and Swisher and Waller (2008) observe, the father can frequently provide some form of limited resources (groceries, clothing, etc.) and childcare (from both father and his extended family). Consequently, educators and other providers can encourage the mother to permit these contributions by the father in exchange for increased access to the child. Doing so can improve the situation of the child, mother, and father, in addition to increasing father-child involvement.

Current and formerly incarcerated fathers often find that a mother's new romantic partner actively seeks to limit the father's involvement, particularly if the father is viewed as a romantic rival (Johnson and Waldfogel 2004; Nurse 2002, 2004; Roy and Dyson 2005). In such cases, educators may alter the mother's gatekeeping behaviors by increasing awareness of the emotional and developmental benefits arising from contact with the father. For fathers who have completed incarceration, encouraging fathers to participate with their children in school-related activities such as helping with homework, attending school sporting events, or involvement in other extracurricular activities may provide opportunities for structured father-child interaction. Given that the father or his extended family may be recruited to care for the child (Roy and Burton 2007), educators may also increase father involvement by encouraging mothers to view the father and kin as potential resources for caregiving.

With incarceration disproportionately impacting less skilled minorities, children of incarcerated fathers disproportionately are born into households where a biological or stepfather is not present. As such, current and formerly incarcerated fathers may be one of a few stable male authority figures in the lives of their children, with substantial influence as role models and in teaching acceptable behaviors and values. Educators may influence this process by encouraging fathers to be more involved and encouraging of prosocial behavior by their children. Encouraging father-child communication and participation in school-related activities can improve father-child involvement. Through actions like encouraging fathers to take parenting classes, discouraging aggressive behaviors, and encouraging the pursuit of work and educational opportunities, educators may also help fathers promote prosocial behaviors that can improve relationships with gatekeeping mothers that take a "wait-and-see "or "second chance" approach (Roy and Dyson 2005). Recognizing the importance of improving fathering, many correctional institutions have begun offering fathering workshops, courses, and degrees in child development. An extensive listing of state and national programs may be found at the National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated (NRCCFI), available online at: http://fcnetwork.org/resources/directory.

Father Involvement and Father-Child Development

When encouraging father involvement, it is important for educators and providers to be aware of the developmental consequences for parents and children. The fact that incarceration can be a turning point for fathers is illustrative. During incarceration, fathers should be encouraged to be more involved with children, complete further education and vocational training, and to seek treatment for underlying addiction or mental health issues. Not only will these pursuits likely benefit the child, they are also likely to promote desistance of the father from future deviant behavior.

While father involvement can be highly influential in the development of the child, it is also important to note the "constellation" of difficulties that are associated with father incarceration. These commonly include issues such as family instability, family substance abuse, chronic poverty, lack of educational and social resources, and exposure to neighborhood violence and deviance. Analogous to the neighborhood research literature on "concentrated disadvantage" (Wilson 2003), these concentrated and overlapping issues place children of incarcerated parents at risk for adverse developmental outcomes in later life. Hence, as Giordano (2010) notes, the concept of child "resilience" must be considered within the context of relative life improvements, such as lack of criminal justice involvement, graduating from high school or college, and discontinuing patterns of abuse. While the long-term effects of programs targeting children of incarcerated fathers have not been extensively studied, social programs encouraging parental involvement are well documented as increasing the well-being of children as they age into adulthood. Participation in early preschool programs is associated with substantially reduced criminal involvement, relationship stability and completing high school (Muennig et al. 2009; Schweinhart et al. 1993). Programs that encourage parent-child involvement during incarceration or involve the mentoring of children report decreased recidivism among parents and increased child well-being (Carlson 2001; Hairston et al. 2003; Ichikawa and Selby 2009).

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have examined research on the effects of father's incarceration on father involvement with children. Father's incarceration is a growing phenomenon in the United States, impacting millions of fathers and their children. As an increasingly common life course event, father's incarceration significantly reduces the father's economic, social, and emotional contributions to their child's well-being. The considerable physical, institutional, and social barriers of incarceration reduce contact between the father and child, setting a pattern of involvement that highly correlates with father-child involvement upon release. For educators and service providers to young children with incarcerated fathers, policies and practices, such as enrollment in early child development programs, educational workshops for fathers and mothers noting the benefits of father involvement, and encouraging contact

during incarceration, may lead to improved child welfare and development under difficult conditions.

In most cases, it is important to realize that incarceration is associated with decreased contact and attachment to children both during incarceration and after release. For fathers who are incarcerated, the physical and institutional barriers to contact, the psychological effects of "prisonization," stigma of incarceration, the weakening or ending of relationships with their children's mother, and inability to contribute to their children's economic well-being can have a cumulatively negative effect on children. Upon release, these issues often create additional barriers in father-child involvement. In many cases, lack of father involvement is associated with children being exposed to family instability, deviance, chronic poverty, lack of educational resources, and negative neighborhood-peer influences that lead to adverse developmental outcomes in adolescence and young adulthood (Foster and Hagan 2007; Giordano 2010; Hagan and Palloni 1990; Wilson 2003). In these cases, policies and practices may improve father-child involvement or reduce harms associated with father incarceration.

At the same time, the significance of father-child bonds may serve as a powerful motivating force for fathers to make positive changes in their lives, including increasing involvement with their children, avoiding recidivism, and seeking employment (Braman 2004; Herman-Stahl et al. 2008; Nurse 2002). In turn, increased father involvement in childcare, economic support, and involvement may benefit children and mothers. Through actions such as facilitating workshops on the benefits of father involvement, assisting children to maintain contact with fathers during incarceration, encouraging enrollment of children into mentoring and early education programs, and encouraging mothers to involve formerly incarcerated fathers, professionals involved in early education and child development may substantially improve the lives of children who have a current or formerly incarcerated father.

Additional Resources

Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, Department of Health and Human Services

Description Provides a number of federal reports on issues related to incarcerated parents and children.

Website http://aspe.hhs.gov/_/topic/subtopic.cfm?subtopic=378.

The Center for Children of Incarcerated Parents

Description Founded by researchers Denise Johnston and Katherine Gabel, this center serves to provide information and education on parental incarceration, while also seeking therapeutic resources and family reunification.

Website http://e-ccip.org/about_us.html.

The Fatherhood Institute

Description A think tank on fathering. Centered in the United Kingdom, the Fathering Institute conducts research, provides training and educational materials for fathers and practitioners, and serves as a clearinghouse for information.

Website http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/index.php?id=6.

National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated

Description A national association that provides information, training, resources, support, and links to state and local organizations involved in assisting incarcerated parents and their children.

Website http://fcnetwork.org/.

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