

Adolescent Adaptation to Parental Incarceration

Sarah Vernon Kautz¹

Published online: 11 February 2017
© Springer Science+Business Media New York 2017

Abstract This qualitative transcendental phenomenological study considered the lived experience of having a parent or parental figure incarcerated during one's adolescence. The study analyzed 15 in-depth, in-person, semi-structured interviews with six participants between the ages of 18 and 29 from the city of Chicago. Textural-structural analysis indicated five separate results: the influence of parental incarceration on the developmental experience, the emotional influence of parental incarceration, the social influence of parental incarceration, the spiritual influence of parental incarceration, and the three key aspects of the experience (truth, the kind of relationship the participant had with the incarcerated parent, and the availability of an attuned subsequent caregiver). The analysis indicated that an adolescent's adaptation to the world after experiencing this phenomenon fell into one of three spheres of adaptation. A number of clinical and social justice implications were identified along with avenues for future research to better understand the phenomenon and how it affects those who experience it.

Keywords Transcendental phenomenology · Adolescents · Parental incarceration · Adolescent experience · Adaptation

Introduction

A 2007 United States Justice Department report estimates that 1.7 million children have an incarcerated parent (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). This same 2007 report found that 47.4% of the children aged 10–17 years old from this population had a parent in state prison and 50.4% had a parent in federal prison (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). These are truly staggering statistics especially when the reader takes into account that this is a conservative estimate since the criminal justice system has no standardized way, on the state or federal level, to track the number of children and adolescents affected by this phenomenon (Johnston, 1995). As the number of inmates in prisons has risen, so too has the number of research studies about incarceration. However, there has been little to no research on the adolescent experience of parental incarceration. How can we effectively work with these adolescents if we do not have information about their experience? Therefore, this study examined the adolescent experience, specifically focusing on the following question: What is the lived experience of having a parent or parental figure¹ incarcerated during one's adolescence?

The following article describes how the study was conducted and the understanding gleaned from the results. The literature review presents a short synopsis of the literature pertinent to the adolescent experience. The methodology section dissects how this transcendental phenomenological study was conducted. The results are grouped into five areas: the influence of parental incarceration on the developmental experience, the emotional influence of parental incarceration, the social influence of parental incarceration,

✉ Sarah Vernon Kautz
svernon@icsw.edu

¹ The Institute for Clinical Social Work, 401 S. State Street, Ste. 822, Chicago, IL 60605, USA

¹ In the interest of clarity, going forward "parent" is used to stand in for both parent and parental figure.

the spiritual influence of parental incarceration, and three key aspects of adaptation.² A more nuanced description of the results is presented in the unpublished dissertation manuscript in preparation for a doctoral defense by the author (Kautz, 2017). The *discussion* section further examines the experience and what influenced the levels of adolescent adaptation. Lastly, the *implication* section discusses clinical and social justice implications from the study, limitations of the study, and possible future research areas.

Literature Review

There is a plethora of research on incarceration. However research on the impact of parental incarceration on the adolescent experience has not been adequately addressed. The presented study was influenced by many areas of the current literature about the impact of parental incarceration on children. Surprisingly, there was no literature about the child and adolescent experience beyond program and research studies in clinical settings such as a hospital inpatient unit. Thus, this study attempted to fill a gap in the literature. The following literature will briefly be explored before discussing the presented study: studies on the potential effects of parental incarceration on adolescents, studies on subsequent caregivers, studies on the knowledge of parental incarceration, studies on maintaining contact with the incarcerated parent, and studies on issues facing adolescents of incarcerated parents. It is important to note that the author's doctoral research also reviewed the following literature that was not included here because it was outside the scope of the article: adolescence, attachment in adolescence, the parent-child relationship, loss and parental incarceration, and psychodynamic theory, adolescence, and understanding parental loss.

Studies on the Potential Effects of Parental Incarceration on Adolescents

There are many potential effects on children when a parent goes to prison. One major effect is that the parent-child relationship changes when a parent is imprisoned. Research by Arditti (2012) showcases how the parent-child relationship is influenced by the following aspects before, during, and after the parent's incarceration: the type of crime the parent was convicted of, how involved the parent was prior to the incarceration, the

gender of the parent, and whether the parent resided with the adolescent prior to incarceration. Incarceration also affects many aspects of parenting. Boudin and Zeller-Berkman (2010) indicate that the role of providing guidance, support, nurturance, and protection, which is normally the parent's role, often is reversed when a parent is imprisoned. Therefore, parental incarceration cheats both the adolescent and the parent out of everyday aspects of parenting. The natural progression of gradually decreasing reliance on the parent that occurs during adolescence becomes impossible when that parent is in prison. When a parent is imprisoned, this individuation happens abruptly.

When support cannot be obtained from the incarcerated parent, the adolescent will look elsewhere for the support they needed, such as to subsequent caregivers and peers. Boudin and Zeller-Berkman's (2010) study reveals that most children and adolescents feel they cannot tell their peers about their incarcerated parent because of shame and stigma. The same study indicated that when a child or adolescent does not have a supportive and accepting peer group, there is an increased chance of feeling isolation, shame, and stigma (Boudin & Zeller-Berkman, 2010).

Other potential parental incarceration effects on adolescents do not involve the parent-child relationship. The literature states that children and adolescents with an incarcerated parent can suffer from the following: trauma-reactive behaviors; dysfunctional subsequent caregiver and peer relationships; identification with the incarcerated parent, which could lead to intergenerational crime and incarceration; premature independence from the parent-child relationship; decreases in school performance and behavior; and increases in maladaptive behaviors and cognitive thought processes (Johnston, 1995; Reid & Eddy, 2002; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010). As the reader can see, many negative factors can influence the adolescent's adaptation to the experience.

The research literature highlights protective factors that can shelter a child or adolescent from the potential effects of parental incarceration. These protective factors include, but are not limited to a supportive family environment, engagement in extracurricular activities (such as church, sports, or theater), positive individual attributes (such as intelligence and easy temperament), ability to problem-solve, impulse control, and the involvement of supportive people outside the family (such as school, religion, and peers) (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010; Todis, Bullis, Waintrup, Schultz, & D'Ambrosio, 2001; Werner, 1993, 2000). Although this research is important for understanding resiliency in the face of an adverse event such as a parent's imprisonment, this section of the literature was not used to initially understand the experience, since the researcher wanted to approach the

² The online version of the Miller-Keane Encyclopedia and Dictionary of Medicine, Nursing, and Allied Health (2003) defines adaptation as the following: "a dynamic, ongoing, life-sustaining process by which living organisms adjust to environmental changes" (Miller-Keane Encyclopedia and Dictionary of Medicine, Nursing, and Allied Health, 2003). This article uses this definition of adaptation.

research endeavor without any preconceived ideas about the phenomenon.

Studies on Subsequent Caregivers

The subsequent caregiver for the child or adolescent is determined by which parent was incarcerated. Glaze and Maruschak (2008) and Mumola's (2000) research shows that overall, before any arrest, mothers were more likely than fathers to be the child's or adolescent's primary caregiver. Thus, when a father was incarcerated, his children or adolescents resided with their mother; when a mother was incarcerated, her children or adolescents most often resided with a grandparent (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Travis & Waul, 2003). Glaze and Maruschak (2008) report that 43.8% of incarcerated parents in 2007 had minor children living with them in a single-parent household prior to their incarceration. This move from one family member to another increased the child's or adolescent's chances of feeling the effects of poverty and the loss of the incarcerated parent's income (Hairston, 2007; Travis & Waul, 2003). Hanlon, Carswell, and Rose's (2007) study indicates that the child's or adolescent's experience of living with a grandparent could be satisfactory—although difficult for everyone—despite the grandparent's fixed and frequently meager resources. The money that grandparents had saved often does not cover the increased expenses of having one or more grandchildren residing in their home after a parent goes to prison (Hairston, 2003). Nesmith and Ruhland (2008, 2011) uncover that grandparents try very hard to provide adequately for their grandchildren; however they also carry the burden of being the gatekeeper of communication with the incarcerated parent.

Studies on the Knowledge of Parental Incarceration

Many factors influence how much information the child or adolescent has about a parent's incarceration. Research shows that subsequent caregivers are hesitant to expound on the details of a parent's incarceration (Hairston, 2007; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Hairston's (2003) research illuminates the ambivalence the subsequent caregiver many feel about telling the truth and giving a non-stigmatizing answer to the child as to why the parent is absent. The non-stigmatizing answers ranged from the parents being on vacation or off at college to the parent being in the military (Hairston, 2003). Not all subsequent caregivers experienced this hesitancy and ambivalence. Some caregivers were more likely to share the true whereabouts about the incarcerated parent if others in the community where they lived were dealing with the same issue (Hairston, 2003; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Another study indicated that there was a third group, consisting of children and adolescents who had

watched their parent struggle with addiction and knew the parent was in prison (Siegel, 2011). Siegel (2011) indicates these children were relieved that their parent was locked up because the parent would no longer be in danger and could get the help they needed.

Studies on Maintaining Contact with the Incarcerated Parent

There are three ways a child or adolescent can maintain contact with an incarcerated parent: a prison visit, the mail, or a phone call. The prison system has strict policies and regulations for each form of communication. Not all prisons allow visits. The prisons that do allow visits limit all visitors to specific visiting days and times, and many subject them to strip searches and require specific paperwork to be completed before a child can visit his or her parent in prison (Hairston, 2003; Marton, 2005; Siegel, 2011). In most states, prisons are built in rural areas making it difficult and expensive for urban or poverty-stricken families to visit (Travis & Waul, 2003).

When a prison visit is not an option, another avenue of communication is the mail. Letters sent to and from prisons are read by staff for safety reasons and stamped with the correctional facility's name, thus announcing to the sender and anyone else who sees the mail that the receiver is getting mail from prison (Hairston, 2003). Lastly, phone calls are another form of communication. However, for security purposes, prisons can send only collect calls, often charging the receiver extraordinarily high rates, as high as \$1 per minute, to talk with a loved one (Hairston, 2003; Poehlmann, Dallaire, Loper, & Shear, 2010; Siegel, 2011; Travis & Waul, 2003). Phone calls place an additional financial strain on meager family resources when a parent is incarcerated. The adolescent is thus left with three difficult modes of communication.

Studies on Issues Facing Adolescents of Incarcerated Parents

There are specific issues facing adolescents other than knowing that the parent is incarcerated or maintaining contact with them. Studies indicate that these other issues include involvement in criminal activities, premature sexual relationships, substance use, interpersonal problems, and school delinquency (Johnston, 1995; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2003; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010). Several other studies discovered that adolescents with an incarcerated parent had challenges with conduct problems, internalizing problems such as depression, and an increased potential for criminal convictions as an adult (Huebner & Gustafson, 2007; Kinner, Alati, Nayman & Williams, 2007; Murray & Farrington, 2008; Murray & Murray, 2010; Murray, 2010). These issues are far

from well understood and require more research in order to fully understand the implications for adolescents.

Many children, adolescents, and families are affected by parental incarceration every year. Though a great deal of research has been done in this area, there are still holes in our general knowledge about the effects of parental incarceration on adolescents. As stated before, this study identified a problem not only in the real world but also in the literature and tried to address it. This transcendental phenomenological research study looked at pertinent literature to help build a study that attempted to account for what the literature stated, as well as to allow flexibility in understanding the adolescent's experience. This study attempted to add to the current literature by exploring the adolescent experience in a non-clinical setting.

Methods

The presented study was designed to illuminate the essence of what it is like to have a parent incarcerated during one's adolescence. This study discussed the lived experience of its participants through the use of transcendental phenomenology. This qualitative method captures the essence and description of each participant's experience through in-depth in-person interviews. The study's participants, sampling, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of findings were done under the direction of the author's dissertation chair and followed all ethical standards set up by the Institute for Clinical Social Work's (ICSW) Institutional Review Board (IRB). Pseudonyms were used to protect each research participant's anonymity. Participants' identities and identifying information were also changed to ensure anonymity.

Participants

To participate in the study, all research participants had to fulfill the following requirements: they were between the ages of 18 and 29, had a parent incarcerated during their adolescence (which was defined, for the purposes of this study, as being between 15 and 17 years old), the incarcerated parent was incarcerated for at least two years³, the par-

ticipant lived with the incarcerated parent for at least a month prior to the parent's incarceration, they were willing to be interviewed up to four times, and they were comfortable with being digitally recorded at each interview.

This phenomenological study adopted a reflective stance on the lived experience of having a parent incarcerated during one's adolescence. Therefore, the study's participants had to have completed adolescence. The rationale for interviewing 18- to 29-year-olds for this study was to help the researcher capture the lived experience more thoroughly. Participant interviews from this age range provided deep, rich, and thoughtful descriptions of the lived experience because the participants at this stage in life had a greater cognitive ability to reflect and describe the experience (Polkinghorne, 1989). The rationale for narrowly defining adolescence as being between 15 and 17 years old was in part because it is during this part of maturation that the majority of the changes to the parent-child relationship occur (Blos, 1962; Kaplan, 1991; Lidz, 1983).

This qualitative transcendental phenomenological study identified and interviewed young adults from neighborhoods with high crime and high incarceration rates in order to better understand the adolescent experience. Thirty-nine potential participants from the city of Chicago expressed interest in the study. Out of the 39 interested participants, 18 potential participants fit the study's criteria. There was some difficulty in reaching potential participants. Some could not be contacted because the phone number they initially gave was no longer in service. Others were unable to participate for various reasons: the potential participant would not call the researcher back; the potential participant set up an interview but then never showed up and did not answer the researcher's phone call to follow up; and some either could not find childcare or could not get time off from work or school.

Ultimately, six research participants shared their experiences through a total of 15 in-depth, in-person, semi-structured interviews. With qualitative research, the standards in the field emphasize the quality of the data over the number of participants. A transcendental phenomenology study can have anywhere between three and 25 research participants (Creswell, 2007; Polkinghorne, 1989; J. A. Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) further suggest that the total number of interviews of all participants is more important than the number of participants. They recommend anywhere between four and ten interviews in total among all participants (J. A. Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The presented study reached data saturation at six participants. The research literature states that data saturation occurs when interviewing new participants does not lead to obtaining new information (Creswell, 2007). The number of participants and interviews in this study fell within the accepted range suggested by the

³ This study defined incarceration based on the current literature. Incarceration was considered as serving a sentence of two years or longer in a state or federal prison (Crayton, Ressler, Mukamal, Jannetta, & Warwick, 2010). The general public commonly uses the terms "jail" and "prison" interchangeably. However, there are major differences between the terms. The presented study used the following definitions: Jail is a place that holds people for a short amount of time when they have been arrested but not convicted of crimes. State or federal prison is a place that houses individuals who have been tried and convicted of crimes (Crayton, Ressler, Mukamal, Jannetta, & Warwick, 2010)

research literature. Although the study's findings are not generalizable, the participants' narratives elucidate what is experienced and how the phenomenon is experienced. This information could both provide a starting point for future research and be useful to the public.

The research participants' ages ranged from 19 to 29 years old. All participants were African American, with half the participant sample being young men and the other half young women. The research participants' parents were convicted of the following crimes: gun charges, conspiracy charges, drug charges, and murder charges. All participants reported finishing high school, with one participant completing high school through a GED program. At the time of the interviews, none of the participants reported finishing college or vocational school, although most participants had finished at least one college course. Two-thirds of participants shared their plan to go back to school during the interviews. All participants reported that their subsequent caregivers⁴ worked during their adolescence. One-third of participants reported that their subsequent caregivers were married while the participant was an adolescent. All participants reported being single, were not married, and had no children of their own. At the time of the interviews, three of the research participants were working, and it was unclear whether the other half held a stable job. Lastly, one-third of the participants reported having served jail time. The following paragraphs provide a short introduction to each research participant.

Jamal, a 29-year-old man, lived with his mother, who was his subsequent caregiver. His story was about an incarcerated father figure. Jamal was about to become a teenager when his father figure went to prison with a life sentence. He maintained a relationship with his father figure and was able to communicate with him over the years.

Diamond, a 28-year-old woman, lived with various family members and friends until her father became her subsequent caregiver. Her story focused on her mother's incarceration. When Diamond was in preschool, her mother went to prison and was not released until Diamond was a young adult. Her mother was sentenced to serve at least 20 years. Each of her subsequent caregivers had a different opinion about whether Diamond should have a relationship

with her mother. Therefore Diamond did not have a sustained relationship with her mother until she was an adult.

Jada, a 26-year-old woman, lived with her maternal grandmother, who was her subsequent caregiver from an early age. Her story included the incarceration of both her mother and father. Jada's mother was in and out of prison starting from Jada's early life. Her father has been incarcerated for her entire life and will remain there because he is serving a life sentence. Jada has no relationship with her father and has a tenuous relationship with her mother.

DeShawn, a 19-year-old man, initially lived with his mother, but ultimately his grandmother became his subsequent caregiver. His story was about his father's incarceration. DeShawn was about to become a teenager when his father went to prison, and DeShawn's father has been in and out of prison since then. He reported not having much of a relationship with either of his parents.

Andre, a 29-year-old man, lived with his mother, who was his subsequent caregiver. His story was about his father's incarceration. As Andre entered high school, his father went to prison, and he was released three years later. Andre had a relationship with his father during and after the incarceration.

Asia, a 29-year-old woman, lived with her mother, who was her subsequent caregiver. She spoke of her father's incarceration. Asia's father went to prison before she became a teenager and was released after she was in her twenties. She described having a relationship with her father both while he was in prison and after he was released.

Sampling

The study recruited participants from January 2015 to June 2015 in the city of Chicago. The study also used purposive sampling to identify people who experienced having a parent incarcerated. Research participants self-selected to participate in the study by responding to a recruitment flyer. Recruitment flyers were hung in community centers, public libraries, and public spaces in Chicago neighborhoods that had high crime and high incarceration rates. The logic behind selecting high-crime and high-incarceration rate neighborhoods was to increase the likelihood that potential participants would be more willing to talk about the experience because of the increased incidence in those areas. The neighborhoods were chosen using the Chicago Police Department (CPD) crime maps (Chicago Police Department, 2014). The CPD CLEARmap reporting and analysis application identified the city's high-crime neighborhoods. As presented in Kautz (2017), a dissertation manuscript in preparation for doctoral defense, the following CLEARmap categories with the timeframe of the year 2014 were used in identifying neighborhoods for the study: summarized by

⁴ The presented study used the following definition of subsequent caregivers based on the current literature: A subsequent caregiver, sometimes known as kinship care, is considered to be a grandparent, other parent, family relative, foster care agencies, foster homes, or friends who nurture and protect the child and who are there for the child full time (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Mumola, 2000; A. Smith, Krisman, Strozier, & Marley, 2004).

community areas, Index Crimes⁵ (serious crimes), and Non-Index Crimes⁶ (less serious crimes) (Chicago Police Department, 2014).

In an effort to recruit the widest range of experiences, the researcher did not turn away participants whose parental incarceration spanned multiple developmental stages or involved specific types of crimes, so that there would be a diverse pool of experiences. The researcher stressed to the participants that this research study was interested in their experience as an adolescent. When the research participant started to talk about experiences outside of this developmental stage, the researcher gently guided the participant back to the focus of the research study and back to the adolescent experience.

The researcher expected the participants to be predominantly participants who were African Americans or Hispanic, since African American children are almost seven times more likely than their White counterparts to have an incarcerated parent and Hispanic children are almost twice as likely as their White counterparts to have an incarcerated parent (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). A report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2015) stated that African American men were 4–10.5 times more likely, and African American women were 1.5–4 times more likely, to be incarcerated at higher rates across the United States than their White counterparts (Carson, 2015). Therefore the researcher expected to get a skewed racial sample, since this phenomenon occurs more often to minority groups.

The ICSW's IRB approved the research study. The study met all ethical standards and monitored the safety of its research participants and data. Prior to starting the research interviews, participants were given the study's consent form and time to read through the document. The researcher reviewed the form with each participant, asking him or her to state their understanding of the study and confirming that the participant had a clear understanding of what they were consenting to and their rights as a human research subject. The researcher took measures to protect the participants by stopping the formal research interview if the participant became emotional (such as by displaying any significant changes in body language or voice) to check in with the participant and evaluate the participant's

emotional state. If the evaluation determined that the participant was in significant emotional distress, the researcher would immediately end the research and debrief the participant to assess the participant's need for further professional response. The researcher had referrals for a number of local agencies where the research participant could receive additional professional help. None of the research study's participants needed this option, but it was available to them.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data Collection

The study used three sources of data: participant interviews, researcher observations from the field, and any audiovisual materials shared by research participants. These three sources of data are considered to be three out of four valid forms of data in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). The research observation notes included unspoken aspects of the room such as the emotional temperature, participant dispositions, and researcher reactions or thoughts in the interview. The researcher wrote memos that included initial thoughts and analysis of interviews to further formulate the experience. These memos helped form new questions from the research participant interviews.

This study employed a multiple semi-structured interview protocol. The semi-structured interview used the following questions as a starting point with participants: What was it like finding out about the parent's incarceration? What stood out for the participant in life after the parent went to prison? What was the experience like for the participant during the parent's incarceration? How did the participants carry on with life after the parent was incarcerated? What or who helped them make sense of the experience of having a parent incarcerated? The first, second, and third interviews lasted between 45 and 60 min. The fourth interview, which was optional, lasted for no more than 30 min.

Prior to the first interview, all potential participants were screened using a pre-interview phone call to determine participant eligibility. Once participants were determined eligible for the study, a first interview was set up at a local community center or library. The first interview covered consent forms and used non-intrusive questions to ease participants into the research process. In the second interview, the participant and researcher explored the experience of having an incarcerated parent in more depth. The third interview allowed for further exploration and following up on any specific questions or themes that surfaced from the interview process and initial data analysis. At the end of the research interviews, the timing of which was determined by each participant, the participant was given a \$30 Visa gift card in compensation for their participation in the study. The fourth and final interview was optional and was

⁵ CPD (2014) defines the following crimes as Index Crimes: homicide (first and second degrees), criminal sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, aggravated battery, burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft, and arson.

⁶ CPD (2014) defines the following crimes as Non-Index Crimes: involuntary manslaughter, simple assault, simple battery, forgery and counterfeiting, fraud, embezzlement, stolen property, vandalism, weapons violation, prostitution, criminal sexual abuse, drug abuse, gambling, offenses against family, liquor license, disorderly conduct, and miscellaneous non-index offenses (violations of laws or ordinances).

used for member checking after participants read the results (Creswell, 2007). Two-thirds of the participants took part in the final interview and reported that the findings were representative of their experience. One-third of participants did not participate in the final interview. They received the results but could not be reached, even after multiple attempts, to set up the fourth follow-up interview.

Data Analysis

The researcher conducted and transcribed all research interviews. The researcher used ExpressScribe transcription software, which allowed her to start the data analysis as she transcribed interviews. The researcher took several steps to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the data during the data collection and data analysis. During the data collection and analysis, the researcher met regularly with an expert in the field to discuss the interview, data collection, and data analysis processes. These discussions about the data and the research process improved the reliability, accuracy, and validity in the process of understanding the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Lastly, the researcher used the fourth and final interview for “member checking” purposes. In qualitative research designs, the last interview is defined as “member checking” since it allows the research participants a chance to examine the research results to determine if the findings are representative of and consistent with their experience of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

The analysis of the presented study used a modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method as delineated by Moustakas (1994), which has four basic steps. This transcendental phenomenological method of analysis is described below. Prior to starting the interview process with participants, the researcher obtained her own description of her experience with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). This first step allowed the researcher to acknowledge her experience, assumptions, and biases that could unduly influence the data and analysis if not acknowledged. The researcher acknowledged that she did not have any personal experience with the phenomenon, but she had friends and former patients who had experience with the phenomenon. The researcher acknowledged her own loss of a parent, since she expected that this perspective would influence how she heard the data.

The second step in the analysis dictates that the researcher obtain descriptions of the participant’s experience with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Each of the participant’s interview transcripts was analyzed in the following way (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122). Each statement the participant made was examined for its significance to the description of the experience. All significant participant statements were identified. All non-repetitive,

non-overlapping, and meaningful statements were listed; these statements are called invariant horizons. Each of the invariant horizons was then examined for its meaning unit and then clustered into themes. A textural description was created through analyzing invariant meaning units and themes. The textural description illustrates “what” was experienced with this phenomenon. A structural description was created through reflection and imaginative variation. The structural description illuminates “how” the phenomenon was experienced. Imaginative variation makes the researcher look at the phenomenon and try to account for all the different situations that could have influenced this phenomenon. Then a textural-structural description is created from the meanings and essences of the experience. The third step includes the researcher completing these seven actions with all research participants’ interviews from verbatim transcripts (Moustakas, 1994). Lastly, the researcher then synthesizes all of the participants’ experiences and creates a composite textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience for a universal description of the phenomenon that is representative of the group’s experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Results

The results of the presented study were expansive and profound. The categories used and the structure of the presented study’s findings grew organically out of the data. Six invariant horizons illustrate the textural description of this lived experience: the influence of parental incarceration on the developmental experience, the emotional influence of parental incarceration, the social influence of parental incarceration, the spiritual influence of parental incarceration, practical aspects of parental incarceration, and the external environmental aspects of the experience. Two imaginative variants elucidate the structural description through discussing psychodynamic forces and assumptions about parents. Taken together, these results create the textural-structural analysis of the experience, which culminated in the three key aspects that influenced the participants’ experience of the phenomenon: truth, the kind of relationship the participant had with the incarcerated parent, and the availability of an attuned subsequent caregiver. Participant narratives led to the natural construction of this article’s structure of findings: the influence of parental incarceration on the developmental experience, the emotional influence of parental incarceration, the social influence of parental incarceration, the spiritual influence of parental incarceration, and the three key aspects of the experience. The research study’s findings were then explored from four theoretical positions in connection to the literature on loss, trauma, development, and attachment.

However, those theoretical discussions are beyond the scope of this article.

Influence of Parental Incarceration on the Developmental Experience

The influence of parental incarceration on the developmental experience refers to the concepts that participants described as shaping their experience in adolescence. Participants described many concepts that influenced their psychological development which included growing up fast, learning lessons from the incarcerated parent, the experience being out of their control, “I still had to grow up,” what is lost, vulnerability, mastering the experience, dehumanization, and a sense of time. However, this article examines only growing up fast, learning lessons from the incarcerated parent, and how the experience was outside their control, since these concepts seemed to influence the participants’ experience the most. By understanding what shaped their internal experience, the reader will have greater insight into what is experienced when a parent goes to prison.

Growing up fast

Well, you know, hearing it come from him, knowing that I always looked up to him, it was um, like a little tear for my momma. Because it was like me at a young age jumping into being a man, grown man, so I am looking like, man he just told me to watch over the fence, now I’m the man of the house, I feeling like stick my chest out like, like the things that goes on in the house now, I got the say so.

The above quote from Jamal is illustrative of how all participants felt that this experience made them grow up faster than they might have. Not only did participants psychologically grow up faster, but some had extra responsibilities because of a subsequent caregiver’s work schedule or because the caregiver abdicated parental responsibilities. This feeling is succinctly captured in Diamond’s description of growing up fast: “So then I kind of, you know, got put in a role of being head of the house, watching my little sister and making sure, you know, things were okay. Dinner was cooked and stuff like that.” Participants were aware that their peers did not have the same experience. The push to grow up fast made them perceive themselves as different from their peers. Diamond’s quote below highlights what made her and the other participants different from their peers:

It was just, it was so many things where you kind of felt like I’m different by default because of this and

this, single father and mom’s in prison. So it’s like ... and then it’s a single father who you, like in my head I didn’t think was like a normal dad. Like a normal upbringing, you know...

Learning lessons from the incarcerated parent

How I understand things or how I help other people understand it but that is pretty much me and my philosophy, watching my dad going in and out of [prison] and definitely not going to end up like him. I am okay with having the experiences but as long as I come out with a different outlook.

The above quote from Asia illustrates how participants learned lessons from their incarcerated parents. Participants reported that they learned these lessons in direct and indirect ways. Some incarcerated parents directly shared lessons, and other lessons were learned indirectly through watching the incarcerated and subsequent parents. Andre learned one of these lessons indirectly from his father’s experience of being incarcerated:

Um, maybe the knowledge but I wouldn’t say that it shaped me because I wouldn’t feel that um, he was always, he was the man of the house anyway. So I wouldn’t feel like his jail knowledge influenced me but it pretty much it taught me that that it is a place that I would never want to go.

Interestingly, narratives indicated that some participants tried to teach their incarcerated parents lessons. There seemed to be an unspoken assumption that the incarcerated parent should learn something from his or her time away. Some incarcerated parents were receptive to these lessons whereas other incarcerated parents were not. DeShawn was one participant whose father was not receptive:

Yeah. It was like, I don’t know. It was just like, I felt like I didn’t want to see him get locked up, you know. I mean nobody want to see people get locked up, so you know trying, to talk to him and stuff like that. And when you just come to the realization that the person is not going to stop doing what they doing you got to be like, you know, I cannot keep telling you this if you not going to listen, you feel me? If you are not going to listen there’s no reason for me to keep wasting my breath.

Participants like DeShawn did not want to give up on their incarcerated parents, even when they were not receptive to learning lessons.

Experience being out of the participant's control

There was nothing I could do...I just like, if he was there. So like I could not, you know, say it was a bad thing, I cannot say it was a good thing. I was a kid so it was, I would just, I didn't want him to go.

Andre's quote above illustrates how participants felt that this experience was thrust upon them, as well as being an experience they would not have willingly chosen. Many aspects of this experience were described to be out of the participants' control, such as communication failures with a parent because the prison was on lockdown or decisions made by the criminal justice system that had enormous impacts on the participants' lives. Diamond's experience of the criminal justice system captured the helplessness participants felt: "Like after the verdict...we were just like AHHH, it just felt like the biggest part of your life was just taken away from you. From those...after those few sentences." Not having control over what was happening was difficult for participants.

Although each participant's experience was different, their narratives as a whole indicated that there were similar aspects to their internal experience that affected their development. Although participants appeared to take the experience in stride, they recognized the uniqueness of the experience. Participants seemed to be aware that this phenomenon impacted their developmental experience in a way that their peers did not experience.

Emotional Influence of Parental Incarceration

The phenomenon of having a parent incarcerated was a very emotionally laden experience for all participants. The emotional influence refers to many aspects of participants' emotional lives that were influenced by parental incarceration. These aspects include the following: external and internal demands placed on participants, stigma, trauma, grief and mourning, the role of fantasy, needs and desires, unanswered questions, trust, and truth. Stigma, unanswered questions, trust, and truth are explored here since these aspects shaped the emotional experience of the phenomenon the most.

Stigma

It was, okay, my mom is away, what did she do? Then you get the like oh, are you crazy too? I used to get, you know, and they used to be a little joke like whenever we were growing up, but um, yeah. It was nothing like you cannot really disclose that and it was not

really easy to talk about because it was like, I mean people say yeah, my parent murdered somebody.

Diamond's quote above was a perfect example of the shame, stigma, and embarrassment participants felt both internally and externally about having an incarcerated parent. Most participants felt they carried the burden of their parent's actions and were judged for their parent's actions and not their own. This aspect made it more difficult to talk freely with others about having an incarcerated parent. This burden influenced some participants to be different from their incarcerated parent and to behave better. It is important to note that not all participants felt the heavy burden of shame and embarrassment with their close group of peers. Andre's quote explains how he had a small community of peers because his father was a father figure to others as well:

Well, I wouldn't talk to...teachers; I wouldn't bring my personal issue [to them]. But friends, I was like yeah. They like, they pretty much, they knew what was going on. Like I was able, you know, my father was a male figure for, you know, for my friends sometimes too. And man, but it wasn't like um, they knew they had their fathers but it was like man they knew I wouldn't share [their situation] I wasn't like going through anything emotionally so it's like it would not show.

As Andre's quote identified, even though he was comfortable talking about his father's incarceration with his peers, he still sensed he could not discuss it with a larger group of people due to societal stigma towards incarcerated people.

Unanswered Questions

All participants expressed having unanswered questions about their parent's incarceration. Many did not know the full story about the incarcerated parent during their experience. Participants described obtaining answers in two ways: asking questions of the incarcerated parent and/or subsequent caregivers or overhearing extended family members discussing the incarcerated parent's situation that landed them in prison. Some participants described asking the incarcerated parent or their subsequent caregiver about the full story and receiving it. Others got the full story only from overhearing family members discuss the situation. A few participants did not ever receive the full story about their incarcerated parent and were left with many unanswered questions. Jada was one of the participants who was left with many questions about her incarcerated father: "Do you think, do you think about me? Do you imagine how I

look? How I turned out?” Jada’s quote below is an example of how even with having a relationship with her formerly incarcerated mother, she still has unanswered questions:

I have little issues with my mother, you know, um, I got a lot of unanswered questions...a lot of questions, that, questions that I want to ask her but I know that I would never ask her because if I ask her...Um, ‘cause she is my mom and I think she owes me a lot of answers. Questions to...a lot of answers. Um, I think, with me that maybe things with her, that maybe; she thinks that I’m not ready for, I don’t really know.

As the reader can see, Jada has many questions but does not feel like she can ask them for one reason or another. Her inability to ask her questions is representative of the emotional turmoil felt by participants.

Trust

All participants, through an explicit statement or as inferred through their narrative, indicated that trust was incredibly important. Participants described that the experience of their parent being imprisoned broke the bond of trust between them. Diamond’s quote below stresses the importance of trust and how it influenced her decision to have no contact with her mother while she was in prison: “... ‘cause once you lose trust with someone, I think um, that’s another reason why it is easy for me to lose touch. If I feel like I cannot trust you, I don’t need to talk to you.” Participants who had communication with the incarcerated parent while the parent was in prison spoke about how honest and open communication helped them rebuild trust within the parent–child relationship. Participant narratives highlighted an important factor that influenced trust, namely, the subsequent caregiver’s ability to facilitate and tolerate communication between the adolescent and incarcerated parent. If the subsequent parent could tolerate this communication, it increased the ability to trust between the adolescent and the subsequent and incarcerated parents. “So they all build a bond and go, because communication be the number one key for all that. If you can’t sit in and talk to him and tell him what you been through it really don’t work.” Jamal’s quote illustrates how trust and communication between himself, his mother, and his incarcerated father figure allowed them to rebuild their relationships with each other.

Truth

All participants described their search for truth. Truth was connected to finding answers to questions. Finding the truth was not always easy. Some participants received the truth from the incarcerated parent. Andre’s quote below highlights how he got the truth from his incarcerated father:

He was open about it. I just wanted to know what happened in there but... yep... No he talked about I know he had talked about what straight up like what landed him what happened in jail up until he got out of jail.

Other participants received the truth from family members, and a few participants were never told the truth. Truth seemed connected to the participant’s identity and their ability to trust parents and others. The narratives of participants who did not have the truth about the incarcerated parent indicated ambivalence towards their parents, questions about their own identity, and a struggle with unanswered questions. Jada’s quote below showcases the unease about what it meant to be connected to an incarcerated mother:

Whenever I would go somewhere with my grandmother she would say, oh, this is Kendra’s daughter. OH! That used to burn me up with my grandmother. I think that when I would tell my grandmother or get mad when she would say that I am Kendra’s daughter.

Truth is an important aspect of the emotional experience of having an incarcerated parent. Adolescence is a time of emotional upheaval and the phenomenon of parental incarceration makes the phase more complex for those who experience the phenomenon. In this section the reader obtains a greater understanding of what parts of the adolescent’s daily emotional lives were influenced by parental incarceration.

Social Influence of Parental Incarceration

Participants descriptions described the aspects of their social lives that were impacted by parental incarceration. The social influence of parental incarceration refers to the aspects of the adolescent’s social world that were changed by this phenomenon. The study found many concepts within the social experience that were affected by a parent’s incarceration: who gets told and who can be told, the role of friendship, the role of family, “doing you,” and the need to share. However, this article explores the impact of the phenomenon on only the following concepts: who gets told and who can be told, “doing you,” and the need to share. These three concepts were the most important in shaping the adolescent’s social world when a parent is incarcerated.

Who Gets Told and Who Can Be Told

“And then my grandfather finally came and told us. But I do remember, like, don’t talk about it, don’t tell anyone. ‘Cause I got in trouble for telling someone.” Diamond’s quote highlights how many participants first experience this phenomenon socially. Many participants described how

they were explicitly told or had a sense that they could not tell anyone outside of the family about the parent's incarceration. Participants expressed that the shame, secrecy, and stigma connected to the experience created feelings of isolation and loneliness. Some participants shared this heavy secret with others as a teenager; others waited until they were an adult to share this secret. In the quote below, Jamal describes how he combated the loneliness and isolation he felt as an adolescent by not keeping it a secret:

And that is what I do, I normally go speak to somebody, or you know, or I set up at Bible studies at the church, tell them the situation and what is going on. And the majority of people say we just pray on the situation, you know, do something to keep my mind focused. And that is normally what I do, that is how I get through my day, you know, routine, it is speaking to others about it, especially the youth 'cause now, you know, there is not a lot of leaders out there and a lot of people, little kids getting locked up or killed for no reason.

Not everyone felt they could take the same route as Jamal. Most participants shared that they had a desire to talk about it with peers but felt they could not for one reason or another. A few participants indicated that it would have been easier if the parent had died rather than having gone to prison. They felt that there was less stigma associated with death, as well as there being prescribed way to handle the loss of the parent.

“Doing You”

“That anyone in this situation has three options: to live around it, come to terms with it, or go crazy.” Jada's quote is indicative of the options that participants felt they faced when they had an incarcerated parent. All the participants indicated feeling pulled in multiple directions and that they could have easily lost themselves in the experience of the phenomenon. Participant narratives indicated that at some point each participant came to the realization that they needed to put their needs first: thus, “doing you” and not “doing it for them,” meaning the subsequent caregiver or incarcerated parent. This experience was so overwhelming for participants that they all described a conscious choice to put themselves first.

The need to share

Well, you know, like I um, I normally like go to little meetings and be talking to people, talking to guidance counselors or old employers that I used to work for, you know. I keep in touch with them and be talk-

ing to them and stuff like that. You know, it is a lot of people that came into my life since the incident happened that, you know. I, sometimes, I will call them on certain days and we will just talk, you know, iron out what's been going on since the last time we talked and, you know, work our way through it or he may have some problems that occurred and asked me my opinion on it. And we go like that till kind of basically get the situation resolved. Get a clear head or better understanding of what we just went through.

Jamal's quote above demonstrates a feeling all participants reported, namely, the need to share the experience of having an incarcerated parent. Jamal was one of the few participants who spoke openly as an adolescent about having an incarcerated parent. Most of the other participants expressed that they kept their experience to themselves even though they longed to tell someone about it. These same participants verbalized how good it felt to finally share it with another person or other adult figure.

Participant narratives indicated that this phenomenon affected not only their internal world, but also their external support system. The participants' social interactions were modified because of having an incarcerated parent. This phenomenon makes transcending adolescence and the task of relying on peers an even more complex process than it already is during adolescence.

Spiritual Influence of Parental Incarceration

Participants described this phenomenon as a very disorganizing experience. The spiritual influence of parental incarceration refers to how faith and the church provided organization to the chaos felt, for the participants who believed in a higher power. Although participants described the role that God and the Bible played in their lives, this article focuses on how faith was an organizing force when a parent went to prison. It is important to note that not all participants believed in God or ascribed to one particular religion.

Faith as an Organizer

Participants who engaged in a faith system described how their faith in a higher power helped them make sense of the whole experience. Asia described her faith in this way: “For me, because of the way I was raised with my mom, like very spiritual, I have faith... I know that even when I feel physically alone I am still not alone.” Participants described how their faith helped them feel less isolated because they were connected to something and someone. Faith was described as giving tangible guidance, lessons to learn, and a sense of community. “It was already there.

Yeah, it was a support system that was already there. I grew up from grammar school through high school throughout the church.” Andre’s quote highlighted how a faith community can provide connection and needed support. Narratives indicated that belief in a higher power and membership in a community of followers gave the participants a place to feel connected and a safe place to process the experience.

Imaginative Variants: Psychodynamic Forces and Assumptions About Parents

Two imaginative variants, psychodynamic forces and assumptions about parents, influenced how the phenomenon of having a parent incarcerated during one’s adolescence was experienced. The participant interviews indicated not only what was experienced, but also how it was experienced. Unspoken forces and rules seemed to influence how the phenomenon was experienced. The first imaginative variant, psychodynamic forces, included the defenses of denial, deidealization, and deidentification; emotions, coping; how one psychologically survives; and the self. These psychodynamic forces help give context to how the phenomenon was experienced and the behaviors connected to what was experienced.

Assumptions about parents were the second imaginative variant that surfaced from the participants’ interviews. These assumptions were another unspoken aspect of the experience that influenced each participant’s experience of the phenomenon. The following were the ten assumptions about parents that shaped the experience of the phenomenon: every child wants to love and be loved by their parents; every child wants to keep a connection with his or her parents/child will make necessary adjustments to accommodate parent/each child wants to be good enough; child’s desire for parenting from parent; desire for a “normal” family; an “essential other” is important to this process; truth is essential; desire to master/understand the experience; this experience was traumatic for some participants; stigma is real; and active is better than passive. These assumptions help the reader conceptualize how the participants made sense of their experience of the phenomenon. The imaginative variants were included so the reader can follow the methodology but a deeper discussion is outside of the scope of this article. A more detailed explanation of each imaginative variant can be found in Kautz’s (2017) dissertation manuscript in preparation for doctoral defense, *Making Sense: The Untold Stories of Parental Incarceration*.

Three Key Aspects of the Experience

Together the horizons and imaginative variants create the essence of the phenomenon of having a parent incarcerated during one’s adolescence. The analysis delineated

three key aspects that influence the experience of having a parent incarcerated. These three key aspects constitute the textural-structural analysis. The key aspects were truth, the kind of relationship the participant had with the incarcerated parent, and the availability of an attuned subsequent caregiver. These key aspects influenced how the participant adapted to the experience of parental incarceration. A short synopsis of each aspect follows.

As previously discussed, truth was important to the experience. The phenomenon of having an incarcerated parent was disorganizing, both internally and externally. Therefore, not being told the truth about the situation made the experience even more disorganizing. Participants who were told the truth got to ask follow-up questions, no matter how difficult the conversation was or how hard the information was to hear. It seemed that participants who were told the truth had more trust in the people around them. On the other hand, participants who were not told the truth were left with questions. These participants seemed less trusting of the people who were supposed to protect them and keep them safe.

The second key aspect was the kind of relationship the participants had with their incarcerated parent. Participant narratives revealed three kinds of relationship an individual could have with an incarcerated parent. The first was an open and honest relationship characterized by an incarcerated parent who told the truth, was willing to be influenced by their adolescent, and helped the adolescent through the experience. The second kind of relationship included communication with the incarcerated parent, but the adolescent did not receive honest communication, nor was the parent willing to be influenced by their child. The third kind of relationship was having no relationship with the incarcerated parent. It did not matter who (the adolescent, incarcerated parent, or subsequent caregiver) made the choice for having no relationship; what mattered was that there was no relationship with the incarcerated parent. The kind of relationship the adolescent had with their incarcerated parent seemed to influence how the adolescent connected to others in his or her life.

The last key aspect was the availability of an attuned subsequent caregiver. Participant narratives indicated that the subsequent caregiver’s ability to be present and attuned to the adolescent influenced how the adolescent made sense of the experience. Participant narratives indicated three types of subsequent caregivers. The first type of subsequent caregiver was someone who was attuned to the adolescent and helped them to regulate and process the experience of parental incarceration. The second type was someone who was somewhat attuned to the adolescent and helped process only some parts of the experience because they vilified the incarcerated parent. This type of subsequent caregiver struggled to keep their emotions and opinions from

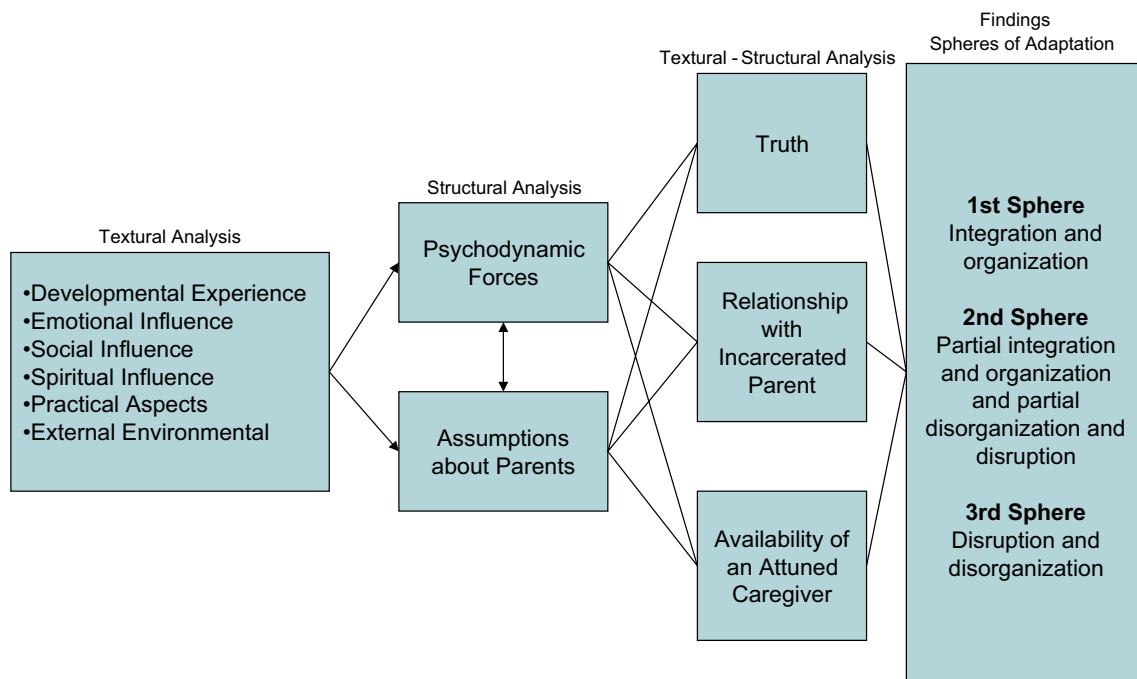


Fig. 1 Transcendental phenomenology model depicting participant themes and concepts of the impact of parental incarceration during adolescence

influencing the adolescent's subjective experience. The last type of subsequent caregiver was dysfunctional. This was someone who was not attuned to the adolescent and could not help modulate any part of the adolescent's experience. Therefore, this adolescent was on his or her own in processing the experience of having an incarcerated parent.

As the reader can see, the textural-structural analysis illuminates three key aspects that have a large influence on how the phenomenon was experienced. These three aspects create a window into understanding of how disorganizing this experience can be on an internal and external level for a person affected by parental incarceration. Therefore, these three aspects of the phenomenon are important to understanding the experience and in creating avenues for support and change.

Discussion

Participant narratives illustrated how internally and externally disorganizing the phenomenon of having an incarcerated parent could be. How participants organized and adapted to the real world after the phenomenon is directly related to the three key aspects of the experience: truth, the nature of the relationship with the incarcerated parent, and the availability of an attuned subsequent caregiver. As illustrated in the model shown in Fig. 1, three spheres

of adaptation to the world stemmed from the participant experiences from the textural-structural description. Each sphere of adaptation described below was born out of the analysis of participant narratives.

The first sphere of adaptation included the adolescent having the truth, an open and honest relationship with the incarcerated parent, and an attuned subsequent caregiver. Having these three things allowed the adolescent to take a disorganizing experience and process it with help from both parents. This kind of communication allowed for trust between all parties to grow, which helped the adolescent integrate all parts of the experience with less ambivalence and shame. Because of this integration, these adolescents needed fewer defenses to manage their internal and external experience. These adolescents had fewer unanswered questions, which helped them have a greater sense of their own identity in relation to the phenomenon. Overall, participants operating from this sphere of adaptation had more stability in all relationships, a more integrated sense of self and identity, and had integrated this phenomenon into their life in such a way that their interactions with the world were less defensively motivated.

The second sphere of adaptation included the adolescent not obtaining the truth and having a relationship with the incarcerated parent but not a relationship with the subsequent caregiver. With this combination, the adolescent experienced more disorganization than did those in the

first sphere but less disorganization than those in the third sphere. These adolescents desperately wanted to find out the truth and stayed connected to the incarcerated parent in hopes of hearing the truth some day. The subsequent caregiver was not experienced as a helpful figure in processing the experience. However, these adolescents found some other adult figure, such as a teacher or preacher, who helped them begin to integrate and process this phenomenon into their internal world. Participants in this sphere of adaptation used defenses to help them manage the disruption felt in the external world, as well as in their internal world. Further, they had instability in their relationships, a less integrated sense of self and identity, and had partial integration of the phenomenon.

The last sphere of adaptation included having the truth but not having a relationship with either the incarcerated parent or the subsequent caregiver. Participants in this sphere experienced the most disruption and disorganization out of all spheres because they were left to process their experience of the phenomenon on their own. This group was prone to being overwhelmed by many emotions, such as anger, sadness, and helplessness, with no one to help them regulate the experience. This group also had the least amount of integration of the phenomenon. They experienced as much disorganization externally as they did internally and used the most defenses to prevent further deterioration and disorganization in their lives.

As one can see, within the three spheres of adaptation, there are three main drivers of the experience that influence how one interacts with the larger world after experiencing this phenomenon. The importance of truth and the relationships with the incarcerated parent and subsequent caregiver greatly influenced the types of interactions that occurred among the participants' experience of the phenomenon, their internal reactions, their emotions, and the greater world, and how these are integrated into one's narrative.

Implications

The clinical and social justice implications of the presented study arose from the nature of the data collected. It became clear from participant interviews that there are many ways society could help this population. The specific implications mentioned in the article are only some of the many implications of the research study. Beyond the presented study's implications, significant policy changes to the criminal justice system are needed. However, a comprehensive discussion of policy changes is outside the scope of this article. The study's limitations and avenues for future research with this population are discussed below.

Clinical Implications

The study uncovered many clinical implications, but this article will cover only the two most important ones. The first implication involves working clinically with both adolescents who experience the phenomenon and their subsequent caregivers. By working with these two populations, social workers and social service providers can decrease isolation, stigma, and potential dysfunction within the new family constellation. Specific work with subsequent caregivers about their parent-child relationship with the adolescent could help the dyad build trust and safety which are essential to processing the experience. Helping subsequent caregivers explore their relationship with the incarcerated parent could help the subsequent caregiver be aware of how their emotions influence the adolescent's relationship with the incarcerated parent. The final clinical implication is fostering connection. Connection and relationships with subsequent caregivers, the incarcerated parent, peers, and others are important to fighting the shame, stigma, and isolation felt in the experience. Fostering connection with others also helps the adolescent process and integrate the experience so that psychological development can continue.

Social Justice Implications

Much like the clinical implications, the social justice implications grew out of the data collected. Two of the three social justice implications will be discussed in this article. The first implication is to fight stigma. Participants described time and time again how they were stigmatized and judged for their parent's actions and not their own. Therefore, we as a society need to work on our attitudes and actions towards not only incarcerated people, but also the families of the incarcerated. The second social justice implication involves the "system." Participants described the "system" as the criminal justice system, police, education, and the parole system. Participants described feeling failed by the system that was supposed to help them. "I wish we had ... had counseling... I asked her parole officer too. But... they didn't have... yeah... that never happened. I wish I had ah, looked harder. For myself and found something for us, instead of relying on something." Diamond's quote above is just one example of how the "system's" safety net was failing the populations it is supposed to protect. This is one area where policy changes and funding increases would go a long way to benefiting those in need.

Limitations

There were a number of limitations to the presented qualitative study. Due to the small number of participants, the

findings cannot be generalized (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). However, the findings can add to the general knowledge about experiences connected with parental incarceration. Another limitation to the study was that the research participants self-selected to be in the study. This limits the understanding of the phenomenon since only a small portion of the population affected by this phenomenon chose to participate in the research study. Self-selection into the study might have limited the examination of all aspects of this phenomenon. That the study's participants were all African American could be seen as a limitation since the findings are based on only one racial group's experience of the phenomenon. Another limitation of the study was that the sample was drawn from neighborhoods that had high crime and high incarceration rates. This limited the cross section of potential participants that could have been included in the study, had it been publicized everywhere in the city. The last limitation of the study was that it sampled from only one northern metropolitan city. The scope of the presented study was small since the research study was part of a doctoral program requirement. All these factors limited the research study's generalizability to the overall population affected by this phenomenon.

Future Research

More research is needed to further explore the adolescent experience of parental incarceration. Two potential qualitative avenues that could be explored are the experiences of the adolescent—incarcerated parent dyad and the adolescent—subsequent caregiver dyad. Understanding these relationships and attachments could illuminate the adolescent experience and development. There is still much to learn and understand about the experience of having a parent incarcerated during one's adolescence, and studies that have a comparative sample could be useful. However, this transcendental phenomenological study of participants from the city of Chicago helps to illuminate the many forces that influence the experience and how the participants adapt to the world afterwards.

Acknowledgements The author would like to thank her dissertation chair, James N. Lampe Ph.D., and dissertation committee for their guidance throughout the project. A special thanks to Ida Roldan Ph.D and Denise Duval Tsoles Ph.D. for your comments and notes on the project.

Funding This study did not receive any funding from grants or patrons. This study was self-funded, as it was part of a doctoral program

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest There is no conflict of interest, since the first author is the sole author.

Ethical approval At the time of submission, the data presented in the article is part of a dissertation manuscript written for completion of a doctoral program at the Institute for Clinical Social Work. At this time, the author has not yet defended this thesis; therefore, the Institute for Clinical Social Work as an institution has not fully vetted the completed project. This study involved human research participants, and ethical approval was received prior to the start of the study. All procedures performed in the study involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

References

- Arditti, J. A. (2012). *Parental incarceration and the family: Psychological and social effects of imprisonment on children, parents, and caregivers*. New York: New York University Press.
- Blos, P. (1962). *On adolescence: A psychoanalytic interpretation*. New York: The Free Press.
- Boudin, K., & Zeller-Berkman, S. (2010). Children of promise. In Y. R. Harris, J. A. Graham & G. J. O. Carpenter (Eds.), *Children of incarcerated parents: Theoretical, developmental, and clinical issues* (pp. 73–101). New York: Springer.
- Carson, E. A. (2015). *Prisoners in 2014*. (No. NCJ 248955). U.S. Department of Justice: Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- Chicago Police Department. (2014). CLEARmaps: Citizen law enforcement analysis and reporting. Retrieved June 24, 2014 from http://gis.chicagopolice.org/CLEARMap_crime_sums/startPage.htm.
- Crayton, A., Ressler, L., Mukamal, D. A., Jannetta, J., & Warwick, K. (2010). *Partnering with jails to improve reentry: A guidebook for community-based organizations..* Washington D.C.: The Urban Institute.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. London: Sage Publications.
- Glaze, L. E., & Maruschak, L. M. (2008). *Parents in person and their minor children*. (No. NCJ 222984). Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice.
- Hairston, C. F. (2003). Prisoners and their families: Parenting issues during incarceration. In J. Travis & M. Waul (Eds.), *Prisoners once removed: The impact of incarceration and reentry on children, families, and communities* (pp. 259–282). Washington D.C.: The Urban Institute Press.
- Hairston, C. F. (2007). *Focus on children with incarcerated parents: An overview of the research literature*. Toronto, Canada: Annie E. Casey Foundation.
- Hanlon, T. E., Carswell, S. B., & Rose, M. (2007). Research on the caretaking of children of incarcerated parents: Findings and their service delivery implications. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 29, 348–362.
- Huebner, B. M., & Gustafson, R. (2007). The effect of maternal incarceration on adult offspring involvement in the criminal justice system. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 35, 283–296.

- Johnston, D. (1995). Effects of parental incarceration. In K. Gabel & D. Johnston (Eds.), *Children of incarcerated parents* (pp. 59–88). New York: Lexington Books.
- Kaplan, E. H. (1991). Adolescents, age 15 to 18: A psychoanalytic developmental view. In S. I. Greenspan & G. H. Pollock (Eds.), *The course of life volume four: Adolescence* (pp. 201–233). Madison: International Universities Press, Inc.
- Kautz, S. V. (2017). *Making sense: The untold stories of parental incarceration during one's adolescence*. Manuscript in preparation for dissertation defense.
- Kinner, S. A., Alati, R., Najman, J. M., & Williams, G. M. (2007). Do parental arrest and imprisonment lead to child behavior problems and substance use? A longitudinal analysis. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 48, 1148–1156.
- Lidz, T. (1983). *Chapter 10: Adolescence. The person: His and her development throughout the life cycle* (pp. 306–375). New York: Basic Books, Inc.
- Marton, C. (2005). *Loving through bars: Children with parents in prison*. Santa Monica: Santa Monica Press.
- Miller-Keane Encyclopedia and Dictionary of Medicine, Nursing, & Allied Health. (2003). Adaptation. Retrieved from <http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Psychological+adaptation>.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. London: Sage.
- Mumola, C. J. (2000). *Incarcerated parents and their children*. (No. 182335). Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- Murray, J. (2010). Longitudinal research on the effects of parental incarceration on children. In J. M. Eddy & J. Poehlmann (Eds.), *Children of incarcerated parents: A handbook for researchers and practitioners* (pp. 55–74). Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press.
- Murray, J., & Farrington, D. P. (2008). Parental imprisonment: Long lasting effects on boys' internalizing problems through the life course. *Development and Psychopathology*, 20, 273–290.
- Murray, J., & Murray, L. (2010). Parental incarceration, attachment, and child psychopathology. *Attachment and Human Development*, 12(4), 289–309.
- Nesmith, A., & Ruhland, E. (2008). Children of incarcerated parents: Challenges and resiliency, in their own words. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 30, 1119–1130.
- Nesmith, A., & Ruhland, E. (2011). Caregivers of children with incarcerated parents. *The Open Family Studies Journal*, 4, 105–116.
- Parke, R. D., & Clarke-Stewart, K. A. (2003). The effects of parental incarceration on children: Perspectives, promises, and policies. In J. Travis & M. Waul (Eds.), *Prisoners once removed: The impact of incarceration and reentry on children, families, and communities* (pp. 189–232). Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press.
- Poehlmann, J., Dallaire, D., Loper, A. B., & Shear, L. D. (2010). Children's contact with their incarcerated parents: Research findings and recommendations. *American Psychologist*, 65(6), 575–598.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1989). Phenomenological research methods. In R. S. Valle & S. Halling (Eds.), *Existential-phenomenological perspectives in psychology: Exploring the breadth of human experience* (pp. 41–60). New York: Plenum Press.
- Reid, J. B., & Eddy, J. M. (2002). Developmental effects of parental incarceration on adolescents (over age 11). "From Prison to Home" Conference, Virginia. (pp. 15–17).
- Shlafer, R. J., & Poehlmann, J. (2010). Adolescence in the context of parental incarceration: Family, school, and community factors. In J. M. Eddy & J. Poehlmann (Eds.), *Children of incarcerated parents: A handbook for researchers and practitioners* (pp. 121–140). Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press.
- Siegel, J. A. (2011). *Disrupted childhoods: Children of women in prison*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Smith, A., Krisman, K., Strozier, A. L., & Marley, M. A. (2004). Breaking through the bars: Exploring the experiences of addicted incarcerated parents whose children are cared for by relatives. *Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, 85, 187–195.
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretive phenomenological analysis: Theory, method, and research*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Todis, B., Bullis, M., Waintrup, M., Schultz, R., & D'Ambrosio, R. (2001). Overcoming the odds: Qualitative examination of resilience among formerly incarcerated adolescents. *Exceptional Children*, 68(1), 119–139.
- Travis, J., & Waul, M. (2003). Prisoners once removed: The children and families of prisoners. In J. Travis & M. Waul (Eds.), *Prisoners once removed: The impact of incarceration and reentry on children, families, and communities* (pp. 1–29). Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press.
- Werner, E. E. (1993). Risk, resilience, and recovery: Perspectives from the Kauai longitudinal study. *Development and Psychopathology*, 5, 503–515.
- Werner, E. E. (2000). Protective factors and individual resilience. In J. P. Shonkoff & S. J. Meisels (Eds.), *Handbook of early childhood intervention* (2nd edn., pp. 115–132). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.