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Parenting Through Re-Entry: Ecologically-Grounded Perspectives of Parents Returning to the Community after Incarceration

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Abstract

This study uses in-depth, qualitative interviews to examine the facilitators/supports and barriers/challenges faced by parents reentering their communities after incarceration. Findings are framed within the context of Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework. Parents reentering their communities after incarceration often face a host of challenges related to their reentry experience (e.g. finding housing/employment) and their parenting experience (e.g. navigating familial relationships). Parenting scholars have urged communities to adopt holistic intervention methods at each level of the ecological model—including an individual's microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem to help families experiencing this trauma thrive. In order to examine which areas within the ecological system families are receiving support (and which areas are still lacking), this study uses qualitative data from 14 semi-structured interviews with parents who recently reentered their communities after incarceration and had a minor child at the time of reentry. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded based on a priori themes. Participants listed both barriers/challenges and facilitators/strengths at reentry that fell into three main categories including 1. Access to children or resources, 2. Social connections, 3. Personal introspection related to parenting. Barriers and supports are described within each level of the ecological model. Findings suggest interventions are needed to buffer, support, and help reentering parents gain parenting skills/knowledge, spend quality time with their children, and access reentry programs to help parents/children develop healthy attachment and promote smoother reintegration into their community. These interventions should be implemented at various levels within the ecological model.

Keywords Parenting · Reentry · Incarceration · Ecological model · Intervention development

Highlights

- We examine the experiences of parents during incarceration and reentry using Bronfenbrenner's ecological model.
- At the microsystem level, parent/child relationships were strained because of lack of connections, problematic behavior, and lack of social support.
- At the mesosystem level, parents experienced challenges with reentry programming, prison policies, and custody issues.
- At the exosystem level, parents discussed difficulty finding housing/employment that was sufficient for their families.
- At the macrosystem level, parents described how wide-spread policies (e.g., background checks, prison policies) impacted them on an individual level.

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Parental incarceration is widespread in the United States, where nearly 2 million people are currently incarcerated in jails and prisons (Kang-Brown et al., 2021); a rate higher than any other country in the world (World Prison Brief, 2018). Roughly 50% of all incarcerated adults are parents to minor children (Maruschak et al., 2021). The collateral consequences of incarceration affect not only the individual who is imprisoned, but also the individual's family members, communities, and whole populations through increased poverty, mental health issues, and morbidity and

mortality concerns (Collier, 2014; DeFina & Hannon, 2009; Weidner & Schultz, 2019). Additionally, the process of reentry is essential to consider for parents who have been incarcerated. Nearly all (95%) adults who are incarcerated in prisons will ultimately reenter their communities (James, 2015) and often have difficulty securing employment, finding housing, and adjusting to life post-incarceration (Kjellstrand et al., 2022a, b). Like other incarcerated adults, the vast majority of incarcerated parents are also released from prison (Charles et al., 2019). However, parents may face a range of unique challenges as they return to the role of parenting their children. Supporting parents as they reenter will not only increase the likelihood of better outcomes for the parents and families (Travis et al., 2005), but also help individuals desist from crime (Coupland & Olver, 2020), thereby increasing public safety. Unfortunately, research suggests that these families often are not receiving the help they need as they reunite and work toward reestablishing their family dynamics (Hoffmann et al., 2010; Travis et al., 2005).

Psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner is widely credited for his influential work at developing holistic intervention programs (Lang, 2005; Wildeman et al., 2018). In 1977, Bronfenbrenner published an important theoretical framework that underpins intervention strategies for families: the ecological model. The ecological model highlights the ways that an individual's experiences and behavior are impacted by individual, family, community and systemic factors within their environment. Per Bronfenbrenner, individuals are embedded within an intricate web of systems at various levels including the microsystem (one's family, peer groups, and close institutions such as schools), the mesosystem (connections between microsystem levels such as parent-school communication), the exosystem (external institutions and influences such as neighborhood resources), and the macrosystem (cultural and societal factors, including poverty and systemic oppression). In recent years, interdisciplinary parenting scholars have stressed the need to attend to this ecological framework when creating interventions that support families who have been impacted by incarceration since parental incarceration substantively impacts families and communities across many domains of life (Wildeman et al., 2018).

Arditti (2005) placed parental incarceration in the context of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological model, highlighting how both risk and protective factors can influence family outcomes at every system level. Using children of incarcerated parents as the focal group, Arditti showed that at the microsystem level, ambiguous loss (e.g., sometimes being around the parent while other times feeling the parent is gone) may be a risk factor for children, whereas social support and "ecologically-sensitive" casework (i.e., utilizing strength-based efficacious

interventions) may serve as protective factors. She similarly described risk and protective factors for children at each level of the ecological model including the mesosystem level (involving the linkages between home and prison), the exosystem level (involving the conditions and practices within the institutions), and the macrosystem level (involving specific laws and societal norms). Arditti offers an important framework for developing specific interventions that facilitate the development of policies and interventions that contribute to risk and protective factors at each level of the ecological model thereby more comprehensively reducing the negative familial outcomes that often accompany parental incarceration. She argued that by examining the risk and protective factors that families face at each level of the ecological model, interventions can be developed to more thoroughly address the needs of families. However, though Arditti's work was published in 2005, research is still lacking in what types of interventions or supports families impacted by incarceration are receiving (and feel supported by) at each level of the ecological model. Thirteen years after Arditti's article was published, Wildeman et al. (2018) edited an interdisciplinary book published by the American Psychological Association with a call to create comprehensive interventions for families impacted by incarceration that utilize the principles laid out in Bronfenbrenner's ecological model. This ecological model, then, becomes a tool to better develop intervention strategies. Researchers can examine the risk and protective factors at each level of the model and examine whether clients are being served at these levels as a way towards creating more holistic care.
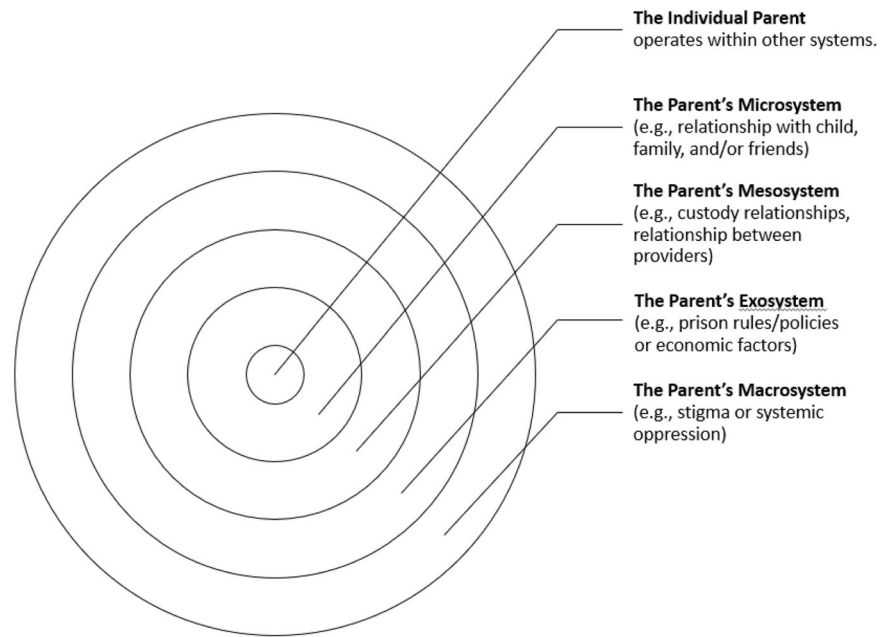
The current study responds to this call by using a qualitative approach to understanding the perspectives of parents who are reentering the community after prison regarding what supports they received at reentry and what they still lacked. Findings were coded and placed within the context of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model in order to gain insight into how to best support families going through this traumatic experience and inform intervention development that addresses the adverse consequences of parental incarceration more comprehensively (Fig. 1).

Background

Microsystem

In the context of reentry for parents, the heart of the microsystem level is a parent's ability to effectively parent their children and develop a strong attachment. Contrary to common perceptions of families with an incarcerated parent, many incarcerated parents are actively involved in parenting before, during, and after incarceration

Fig. 1 The ecological model for parents during reentry

The Individual Parent
operates within other systems.

The Parent's Microsystem
(e.g., relationship with child, family, and/or friends)

The Parent's Mesosystem
(e.g., custody relationships, relationship between providers)

The Parent's Exosystem
(e.g., prison rules/policies or economic factors)

The Parent's Macrosystem
(e.g., stigma or systemic oppression)

(McKay et al., 2018). However, the separation of parent and child, intensified by other factors occurring at the meso-system, exosystem, and macrosystem levels, can strain the parent-child relationship, creating further problems for both the parents (e.g., mental/physical health concerns) and the children [(e.g., feeling a sense of growing up faster than peers, missing developmental experiences, trauma associated with parental arrest and incarceration (Foster, 2012; Metcalfe et al., 2023)] during reentry. Additionally, such interruptions in parenting can impact both parenting behaviors and confidence and lead to substantial challenges in re-establishing relationships with children following incarceration (Menting et al., 2017).

Unfortunately, the period of incarceration combined with the strain placed on the parent during this time can result in the development of insecure attachment in the child due to changes in relationships in their lives (Murray & Murray, 2010). This insecure attachment can persist beyond reentry and lead to long-term internalizing and externalizing issues for the child (Murray & Murray, 2010). For example, the incarceration of a parent can impact the stability of the larger family unit, result in the child living with a new caregiver, or lead to unstable caregiving settings for the child (Anderson & Wildeman, 2014). Additionally, stigma around incarceration can cause the child to be rejected from their larger social networks (Murray & Murray, 2010). Children who experience insecure attachment are more likely to also experience poorer self-regulation skills, exhibit externalizing and internalizing problem behaviors, develop language at a slower rate and attain less education (Moullin et al., 2018).

Some scholars hypothesize that the relationship between parental incarceration and insecure attachment may be moderated by other factors prior to incarceration. These might include the child's attachment to the incarcerated parent and the child's exposure to other adverse childhood experiences prior to parental incarceration (Murray & Murray, 2010) since parental incarceration is just one of several adverse childhood experiences that may impact long term outcomes (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2021). Other adverse childhood experiences (that may accompany parental incarceration) include physical abuse/neglect, sexual abuse, houselessness, or parental drug/alcohol use disorders (CDC, 2021). Upon release from incarceration, change in a child's attachment security as well as the parent's own attachment security may present challenges for parents attempting to repair the parent-child relationship. Separation between the parent and child may persist post-incarceration as well due to custody agreements and limitations on allowed contact, putting the child at additional risk of attachment insecurity (Murray & Murray, 2010). Although the possible adverse impacts of parental incarceration on children are well-established, there is scarce literature connecting these concerns to the specific parenting concerns and practices of parents post-incarceration.

Arditti (2005) emphasized the value of protective factors for children such as social support, family resilience, and ecologically sensitive casework, all of which may continue to have utility during the reentry stage and help support parents and children through this adverse life event. There is substantial variability in the types, contexts, and

implementation of these programs with research still lacking on what is most effective (Dallaire & Shlafer, 2018). Individuals entering these interventions designed to help at the microsystem level are impacted by exosystemic institutions within the larger community and government and how the institutions work together to implement effective interventions that target a parent's microsystem (Eddy & Burraston, 2018).

Mesosystem

Mesosystemic factors (defined as the connection between key microsystem levels) impact parents both during parental incarceration and at release. During parental incarceration, the link between prison and home is at the heart of mesosystemic factors related to their parenting. Unfortunately, parents often have difficulty maintaining contact with their children during incarceration due to such barriers/challenges as money and caregiver gatekeeping (Dawson et al., 2012; Tasca, 2016). This lack of contact can negatively impact child attachment (Foster, 2012); a concern that continues to be relevant during the reentry process. After incarceration, mesosystemic factors include the navigation of custody relationships and the linkages between home and various institutions such as the criminal justice system (CJS) (including parole or probation requirements), the child welfare system, reentry intervention programming, employment, and social networks.

These mesosystemic relationships can impact parent-child relationships and the parenting process in various ways. For example, parents often experience difficulty establishing positive social networks (Kjellstrand et al., 2021) and this lack of social support can result in increased poverty-related stress within the family unit (McDonald et al., 2020). Furthermore, parents often face barriers related to securing housing or employment (Rydberg, 2017), additionally complicating the familial socioeconomic level and increasing stress/hardship. Likely due to a combination of these life stressors and other stressors at both the exosystem and macrosystem levels, evidence suggests that children (similar to their parents) may be rejected from helpful social networks (Murray & Murray, 2010) which can potentially result in additional difficulty related to the parental incarceration experience.

Arditti (2005) emphasized the importance for children of creating policies both in prison and at reentry to better facilitate connections between these children and the institutions with which they are forced to participate (such as prison and child protective services), recommending "family-friendly visiting" policies/procedures and "child-centered collaboration between CJS and child welfare." Further, families would benefit if parents were supported as they interacted with their children from prison and then at

reentry especially as they were navigating custody relationships, employment, social networks, and interventions. While some evidence suggests that parenting interventions aimed to better support parents through these critical experiences have become increasingly common in recent decades, many of these interventions are developed "in-house" with little empirical evidence supporting them (Buston et al., 2012). Emerging parenting interventions for incarcerated parents, adapted from evidence-informed practices, show substantive promise but are not widely available (Metcalfe et al., 2022; Eddy et al., 2008). After reentry, parents may have access to community-based and income-based parenting interventions. However, there are few processes or systems in place to ensure that reentering individuals are guided into specific parenting interventions. Further, the experiences of previously incarcerated parents receiving these services have not been well studied.

Exosystem

Exosystemic factors include aspects of the indirect environmental context that influences families both within prison and at reentry. Within prison, harsh prison policies, conditions, or institutional practices can make parent/child communication difficult (Arditti, 2005), further threatening the parent/child attachment security (Foster, 2012). This may also influence the process of parenting during reentry. After reentry, local resources and community support may vary. Individual demographic factors (e.g., socioeconomic status, race) may impact access to parenting opportunities including a child's likelihood of living with a co-parent and access to programs supporting parents (Metcalfe et al., 2022). Additionally, community factors such as the local economic context can also affect parenting. For example, exosystemic factors within communities of concentrated disadvantage may limit a parent's ability to locate a job or childcare, which in turn may result in differences in parental stress or ability to provide relevant resources to children. Opportunities for rehabilitation services (i.e., focusing on root issues such as mental health or substance use) and community outreach (i.e., strengthening relationships between potential employers or landlords) are also important exosystemic considerations. This aligns with Arditti's (2005) emphasis on the importance of rehabilitation within prison contexts, alternatives to incarceration, and community outreach.

Macrosystem

The macrosystem refers to broader institutional and cultural structures and perspectives (e.g., legal, social, economic, political, and educational systems) that influence how individuals experience their environment during incarceration and upon reentry (Arditti, 2005; Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

Attitudes on crime and public safety that have led to policies that support higher rates of incarceration and longer sentences have resulted in increasing numbers of children and families directly impacted by incarceration (Poehlmann et al., 2010). Per a 2016 survey, about 47% of incarcerated men and 58% of incarcerated women are parents to minor children; numbers which have increased over the past three decades by 48% for fathers and 96% for mothers (Ghandnoosh et al., 2021). Macrosystemic factors of incarceration are also evident through racial disparities in incarceration rates that in turn lead to disproportionate numbers of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) children experiencing parental incarceration (Ghandnoosh et al., 2021; Poehlmann et al., 2010).

During incarceration, societal attitudes around "incarceration as punishment" impact funding decisions and prison policies that alter the experience of incarcerated parents during incarceration and reentry. For example, the belief that physical removal of an individual from society is an important component of carceral punishment often leads to purposeful isolation of incarcerated parents from their children and positive social support networks. This can have a detrimental impact on the parent's ability to maintain connection with their child, provide support and parenting, and mitigate traumatic experiences while incarcerated. Further, it can make the transition back into parenting upon reentry more difficult (Arditti, 2005). Limited access to education, job training, and other reentry resources for the parent can make successful reentry even more challenging (Arditti, 2005).

Societal attitudes toward culpability can lead to the blame and stigma of incarcerated individuals and, by association, sometimes to the family members of incarcerated individuals as well. As a result, while the incarcerated person's children and family are navigating the loss of that family member to incarceration (causing potential emotional, economic, and caregiving strain) that family is unlikely to receive the level of support of people who have lost family members due to factors deemed more socially acceptable (Arditti, 2005). They may even be treated adversely due to their incarcerated family member (Arditti, 2005). After incarceration, reentering parents face similar stigma and social exclusion when seeking employment, housing, and social support from their communities (Cooper-Sadlo et al., 2019).

Arditti (2005) emphasized the importance for societies to implement policies that help curtail the detrimental impacts of these macrosystemic levels, including utilizing restorative justice practice and seeking overall criminal justice reform. Other scholars take this a step further and advocate not just reform, but a complete abolition of current criminal justice practices (e.g., Purnell, 2021; Roberts, 2016). Regardless of the exact changes necessary, evidence suggests the current institutional macro-level practices are working toward disenfranchising families.

The Present Study

Previous research has examined some of the myriad factors related to prison reentry that may impact families and has examined potential familial interventions (Metcalfe et al., 2022; Travis et al., 2005). However, research focused on parents during reentry has not yet addressed how these parents explain their experiences in the context of an ecological framework. The present study uses qualitative interviews from parents during reentry to examine how parents' experiences of barriers and facilitators of parenting connect to ecological considerations. This contextualization allows for a more thorough examination of existing support and persisting needs within reentry across system levels.

Methods

Participants

Participants in this study were a part of the Sponsors Life Study, a larger randomized controlled trial (RCT) of a mentorship program for corrections-involved adults who had recently reentered the community from prison. The RCT was conducted among individuals who had applied to and been accepted to a nonprofit transitional housing program (Sponsors, Inc., Eugene, Oregon) to investigate the influence of mentoring on individuals' reentry experiences. Important to note is that all individuals at Sponsors, Inc. came from one of any of Oregon's state prisons (including minimum, medium or maximum security), were convicted of a crime as an adult, were ordered to parole or post-prison supervision, were indigent, and were assessed as at least medium risk for recidivism. Participants for the RCT were recruited while incarcerated and randomly assigned to either a control or intervention group. Control participants were offered all applicable resources provided by Sponsors, Inc., except for a mentor. These resources included clothing, food, 60–120 days of transitional housing, as well as therapeutic treatments, training programs, and health services (depending on the service provisions of the individuals' case management). Intervention participants additionally were assigned a volunteer mentor (i.e., a local, safe, stable adult with similar interests and demographic backgrounds as the mentee who could commit to spending at least 6 months as the mentor). The mentor began meeting with the participant before release and continued throughout the duration of the study.

Purposive and random selection sampling strategies were used to recruit a subset of participants for the current

Table 1 Demographics

Variable (N = 14)	M (SD)
Age	35.64 (7.71)
Time spent in prison (months)	36 (39.06)
	% (n)
Gender	
Male	50.0 (7)
Female	50.0 (7)
Race	
White	92.9 (13)
Black or African American	7.1 (1)
Convicted crime	
Assault	42.9 (6)
Theft	21.4 (3)
Burglary	14.3 (2)
Distribution of a controlled substance	14.3 (2)
Possession of a controlled substance	14.3 (2)
Unlawful use of a weapon	14.3 (2)
Unlawful possession of a firearm	14.3 (2)
Child neglect	7.1 (1)
Driving under the influence	7.1 (1)
Kidnaping	7.1 (1)
Unlawful use of a motorized vehicle	7.1 (1)
Robbery	7.1 (1)
Reported alcohol problem	71.4 (10)
Reported drug problem	71.4 (10)
Reported serious mental health diagnosis	7.1 (1)

All participants reported on in the study are parents to minor children who have reentered their communities a maximum of 6 months prior to the interview. Demographic variables were all collected during participants' involvement with the carceral system

qualitative study. Participants were eligible for the qualitative study if they had been released from prison at least six months before the interview was conducted. At the time of recruitment, 128 individuals were eligible for the present study. To maintain diverse viewpoints, we randomly selected an equal number of men and women and an equal number of control and intervention participants. In total, a representative sample of 26 participants were selected and agreed to participate (90% of those contacted). Of these 26 individuals interviewed, 14 were parents to minor children. For the purposes of the current study, we limited the data analysis to these participants. It is important to note that the current study is not designed to examine the Sponsors Life Study, but rather used that study as a recruiting tool to find participants who were willing to discuss their experiences parenting while reentering their communities after incarceration.

Basic participant demographic information (e.g., age, gender, race/ethnicity, ages of children) for each participant was collected through self-report surveys. This information was supplemented with administrative data on participants' substance use behaviors, mental health diagnoses, time spent in prison, and crimes of conviction. Participants agreed to share this data with researchers as part of their informed consent process when they began participation in the Sponsors Life Study. Participant ages ranged from 28–58 years (M = 35.64, SD = 7.71). Half of the participants (50%) identified as female and half of the participants (50%) as male. Participants self-reported as White (92.9%) and Black or African American (7.1%). This 92% White demographic is the same as the demographic makeup of the post-prison population within the county in which data were collected (Bozievich et al., 2015).

Eight participants reported having two children, five participants reported having three children, and one participant reported having five or more children. The youngest child of each participant ranged in age from 0–14 (M = 7.10, SD = 4.39). Participants' time spent in prison ranged from 9–164 months (M = 36 months, SD = 39.06). A majority (71.4%) of participants were diagnosed with alcohol use disorder, a majority (71.4%) were diagnosed with substance use disorder, and one participant (7.1%) had a diagnosis for a serious mental health disorder. The participants had been convicted of a wide variety of crimes. Table 1 displays complete demographic information of the participants and information on the crimes individuals were convicted of.

Procedure

Data were collected via semi-structured in-depth in-person interviews (Merriam, 2009; Weiss, 1994) conducted over a period of three months in 2018 at Sponsors, Inc. Participants were asked to describe their reentry experience including identifying supports that were helpful during reentry and challenges that they faced. Questions were written in a way that allowed participants to define reentry personally and then interviewers used follow-up prompts to gather more detailed information from each participant. The full interview guide is included in appendix A. Two research assistants conducted each 30 to 60 min-interview (one asked questions while the other took notes and controlled the audio recorder). Participants received a $25 gift card to a local retail store after completing the interview. Research assistants transcribed the interviews verbatim.

Several strategies were implemented to improve the quality of the data collection. To begin with, interviewers were provided qualitative training on interview techniques including building rapport, active listening, acknowledging participant words/feelings, and probing for follow up questions. This training was provided by a an expert in qualitative research. Each potential interviewer then attended an interview with the

Table 2 Code map: parenting

First Iteration A Priori Broad Themes (Primary Codes)	Social Support Parenting Basic Needs	
Second Iteration Emergent Broad Themes (Primary Codes)	Substance Use Ostracism, Exclusion, Barriers Success Other	
Third Iteration Emergent Parenting Secondary Codes	Parenting Barriers and Challenges Parenting Facilitators and Supports	
Fourth Iteration Emergent Parenting Tertiary Codes	Parenting Barriers and Challenges Child behavior Re-entry into normal tasks Time management Access to resources needed for child rearing CPS/custody Feeling a lack of connection with children Lacking support Not being able to bring kids to program-specific activities Worries about the future	Parenting Facilitators and Supports Positive custody relationships Motivation for parenting Parenting skills training or information Children as resources Quality time with kids Specific resources that improve access

All participants in the study are parents to minor children and have been incarcerated in a state prison in Oregon. All interviews were conducted within 6 months post incarceration

principal investigator to watch the principal investigator conduct the interview. The potential interviewers were then observed interviewing one time by the principal investigator before they conducted any interviews without the principal investigator present to ensure consistency of data collection across the interviews. Each interview included two interviewers. One person would conduct the interview. The additional member of the research team was present to assist with technical issues and note-taking. All interviewers used a script which included a description of the project as well as the interview questions. Finally, senior qualitative researchers provided debriefing, support and mentoring to the interviewers to address any issues that arose during the interview process. All materials and study processes were approved by the Oregon Research Institute's Institutional Review Board (Project Number: FWA00005934).

Analysis

The research team uploaded transcripts of the interviews to Dedoose Version 8.0.35 (2018) and coded interviews over multiple iterations (Anfara et al. 2002; see Table 2). The team began by creating a set of a priori and emergent broad codes and then generated more specific codes to organize participants' experiences.

For the current study, two coders (the first and second authors of this study) worked collaboratively to code all excerpts related to the a priori broad code labeled "Parenting." When disagreements regarding codes arose, coders discussed together until they came to a consensus. The coders created secondary and tertiary codes to classify the coded excerpts into more distinct emergent themes and subthemes. Two secondary codes emerged which were termed "parenting barriers or challenges" and "parenting facilitators and strengths," which represented barriers/challenges and facilitators/supports to effective parenting at reentry. A final iteration of the data was completed where the team identified nine subthemes as discrete barriers/challenges to effective parenting at reentry and six subthemes as specific facilitators/supports to parenting at reentry. After coding was completed, all five authors met and discussed the codes in depth (with all parties having read the codes thoroughly). Relevance of the codes to the ecological framework was an emerging framework that became apparent when examining and discussing the coded texts.

Findings

Parents described a range of barriers/challenges to reentry as well as many facilitators/supports that helped them get through this challenging time. They discussed issues in their lives that could be categorized at various levels of the ecological model and fell into three general categories across each level: access, social connection, and personal introspection. Access referred to the accessibility to both their children as

well as resources and interventions. Social connection referred to the connections parents reported both with their children and other friends or family members. Personal introspection included worries and thoughts that served to both hinder and facilitate parenting relationships. No clear demographic (i.e., race/sex/gender) patterns in responses emerged.

The Microsystem Level

Participants discussed six types of barriers/challenges they experienced at the microsystem level. Three of these were related to social connection (i.e., lack of connection with children, child behavior, lack of social support) and three of these were related to personal introspection (i.e., worries about the future, feeling inadequate at typical parenting tasks, balancing responsibilities/needs). Participants discussed three types of facilitators/supports that they experienced at the microsystem level. Two of these were related to social connection (i.e., quality time spent with children, child-provided support) and one was related to personal introspection (i.e., children as motivation).

Barriers/Challenges

Lack of connection with children

Seven parents discussed the lack of connection they felt with their children at reentry (an issue that may impact the child attachment security). Two mothers discussed a lack of familiarity with the developmental stage of their children due to their time apart. One mother shared, "My kids were still in diapers when I got incarcerated." She went on to talk about some of the major changes that had happened in their development since that point. Another mother discussed her child growing up and acting in a way that was unfamiliar to the participant, stating she was "not used to her [the child's] behavior like that, it's kinda weird for me." Both mothers experienced emotional difficulty due to the physiological and behavioral markers of growth in their children that were not familiar to them.

Two parents reported feeling a lack of connection with their children due to their children not seeming to want or know how to relate to them. One father (who had both minor and adult children) discussed the pain he felt from his adult daughters not wanting to be in contact with him after his release: "when my girls get pissed off at me, that hurts, you know? When they tell you to lose your [telephone] number, you, that's about as bad as it gets, it's like no, I'm not losing your number." A mother also reported feeling hurt, but stated that her son did not know how to interact with her when she was released: "he didn't really know, and I was really worried about that, it kinda hurt my heart, even though, he wasn't being mean or anything, it was just like

he was really standoff-ish." Both parents shared that staying involved in their children's lives despite the difficulties they experienced helped improve their relationships over time.

Child behavior

Five parents discussed their own children's behavior as challenges which, in turn, could negatively impact the parent-child attachment. One father said his children "try to push buttons," and others used adjectives to describe their children such as "annoying" or "an asshole" or "super attitude-y." Despite these descriptions of their children's behavior, one parent recognized that the behavior of their stepchild was likely a result of trauma the child had experienced, "they're getting' there. They just, they've had a hard life too, 'cause their dad was in prison for a while too, but he's not being a dad…" Having parents who are incarcerated can be traumatic for children. Some parents struggled to help their children through this difficult trauma.

Lacking social support

Three participants discussed their lack of social support as a barrier/challenge to parenting at reentry. Each mentioned that having more social support from friends or family would make things easier for them. However, there were barriers/challenges to receiving this type of support. For example, one of the mothers described how she would like to discuss parenting challenges with her own mother, but did not because she wanted to protect her mom,

I kinda feel like I had to handle that kind of on my own, you know? 'Cause I, I mean, my mom worries too much, so I can't really talk to her about too much, 'cause then she's just such a worrier.

Another parent described feeling she needed to keep secret information about her children in DHS custody from a person that she is close to,

I haven't told her about my children yet because, I, she's had a lot of instability in her life um, so I feel having her understand the fact that I have two kids that are ten and eleven and her not meeting them is just too much.

Not having someone to share these parenting experiences with created an added burden on these parents.

Worries about the future

Three participants expressed their concern about the future for their children, often worrying their children would suffer

similar experiences as they had endured. A mother explained that her kids helped her focus on raising them well because of her worries about their futures,

> I don't want them to be the statistic of going to prison, because they had a parent in prison…I could not imagine my kids going to prison. I couldn't imagine my kids doing what I did. I would be heartbroken. But also like, you know, I realize that I did it and now they've seen it, so I have to be aware that there's a chance, but I'm going to do my darnedest to show them to overcome.

The other two parents echoed similar concerns for their children and similar desires to be supportive to their kids. For example, one father put it this way:

> I have to control my actions and my behavior because I don't want my kids to ape [mimic] them…if my kids watch me do crime, what are they gonna do? If my kids watch me go back to prison, what's the chances of them going back? It's actually extremely high. Because they're following their dad's footsteps…I don't want to see either one of them in there.

As parents reflected on their time in prison, they worried for the future of their children. However, this worry often served as an impetus to work harder at their parenting.

Feeling inadequate at typical parenting tasks

Two mothers discussed the challenges of re-entering and how they tried to complete regular parenting tasks after having been away for so long. For example, one who had served over six years in prison said that parenting was the biggest challenge for her since reentering the community. She was having a difficult time navigating basic aspects of parenting such as setting and enforcing rules for her children and communicating with them effectively. The other mother who had three children and had weekly visits from her children during incarceration, still struggled at reentry with parenting tasks because of the nearly four-year residential separation she had experienced. She said, "Trying to be a regular mom, and like, folding their clothes, for instance, like, I didn't know, like whose clothes were whose, it was just like, everything was overwhelming." After this period of absence from their children, returning to parenting was an understandable challenge.

Balancing responsibilities and needs

Two mothers discussed the difficulty they faced in making time for themselves and their kids while balancing their work schedules. One mother discussed how she was excited to be going to dinner with her children after the interview but lamented that "it doesn't happen very often because my work schedule's so crazy usually, I don't have this time." Another mother of two children said that she has no time for herself.

> I am so engulfed in work and my children that I don't have any adult time, I know that sounds silly, but like, I don't ever do anything and I'm kinda starting to feel it, emotionally or mentally you know…I mean, my daughter's telling me, my 11-year-old is saying, 'Mom, when was the last time you went and had fun?'

Though these mothers saw the value of quality time with friends and family, they both felt balancing life tasks did not allow room for this time on a regular basis.

Facilitators/Supports

Quality time spent with children

Five participants discussed the importance of spending quality time with their children. They listed activities such as sports, hobbies, holiday traditions, and just "hanging out" as valuable and enjoyable opportunities. For one father, when asked, "In your role as a parent, what do you think has been helpful for you as you've re-entered the community?", the first thing he mentioned was, "Hanging out with my kids…I enjoy it, they like spending time with me and it makes me happy." Another father told a poignant story of how being around his children helped convince him to avoid illegal activity. He explained,

> [While in prison] I ain't care 'cause I had decided I would never go home, let's-let's just do this let's do this gang thing, let's do this criminal thing let's make a name for ourselves in prison. And then I got out here and my two-year-old crawled up in my lap, and I'm looking at my eight-year-old who's playing video games, and I'm looking at my wife and I'm like, you know what…how can I protect my kids if I'm back in prison?

For these parents, being able to have quality time with their children brought them a great deal of joy and motivation to be positive role models in their children's lives.

Child-provided support

Three participants discussed how their children helped them during reentry. Two mothers mentioned the love and acceptance they received from their children. For example, one parent described her daughter, saying,

She's super open and forgiving…I thought that when I got out she was just gonna be like, 'Oh, I don't like you, Mom'…or not be warm to me but…the day I got out…they picked me up…at the gate and she was just like nothing had ever happened. So it was super easy to…jump back into parenting knowing that she was like forgiving and warm to me.

For the third parent, who was a father of both minor and adult children, the help was in the form of tangible resources that he received from his adult children. He said, "They've helped me, bailed me out a couple times…when I ran outta money, or…my two daughters went together and bought me a car, and so when I got my license back, I had something to work with." While our study focused primarily on parenting minor children, this father's comment may provide insight into how children support their parents over time. For all three of these parents, the emotional and tangible support provided by their children helped buoy them during reentry.

Children as motivation

Six participants discussed how their children motivated them to engage in prosocial behavior. One mother said of her children, "they help me be accountable and move forward." Another parent described how having children and wanting to spend time with them motivated her to abstain from using drugs.

The longer that I've been able to show that I'm staying clean, I have my children more and that keeps me going. Because um, they were adopted by my… husband's mom prior to…prison and my time with them was pretty limited and it was really structured and supervised and now…I pretty much can have them every weekend and… that was always a big goal was just to have them more so…it's rewarding so it's something to look forward to so that helps keep me going.

Yet another mother said of her children, "They keep me grounded. They don't even know that they help me be accountable and move forward." For these parents, knowing that they needed and wanted to raise their children helped motivate them to avoid harmful activities and move toward more positive behavior and feelings as they reentered.

The Mesosystem Level

Participants discussed various types of mesosystemic issues they faced in their incarceration and reentry experiences. These included the links between home life and various institutions (e.g., CJS, employment, reentry programming, religion). However, fewer parents discussed mesosystemic level issues relating to parenting specifically. All the issues that were identified related to access. Barriers and challenges included custody and exclusion from reentry programs. Facilitators/supports discussed included specific resources that improve access to children, skills training/information on parenting, and positive custody relationships.

Barriers/Challenges

Custody

Eight of the parents discussed the custody challenges they faced when reentering their communities and re-establishing relationships with their children. Some had no contact with their children and reported no intention of re-establishing contact again. Other parents did not have contact with their children but hoped to regain custody eventually. Still others had limited custody arrangements with some or all of their children.

The way participants described their feelings toward these custody arrangements varied. Sometimes participants described feelings of regret or sadness. Others described their frustration toward the Department of Human Services [DHS] system. For example, when asked what the biggest challenge during reentry has been, one father said, without hesitation, "DHS. They're the biggest challenge." His feelings of frustration were evident as he discussed the heartbreak he had experienced from not being allowed to visit his fiancé or his stepson because of DHS restrictions. At the time of the interview, he was counting down the days until when he would be free to have contact with his family again. Still others described their acceptance of the situation. For example, a mother who no longer had any contact with her children seemed to have come to accept the situation, "They are better off without me at this point. So the best thing I can do for them is to stay away." Another mother, who was not allowed to see her child, was still grappling with her emotions. She had seen her son by happenstance in the community. She did not talk with him and he did not recognize her since he had been very small when she had last seen him. However, the moment stuck with her as she tried to process the situation. "I had to turn because I can't have contact with them…That was a mind fuck. Um, I don't know if I've actually processed that yet. 'Cause you just don't want it to be real." Finally, a father described his regret over a decision he had made regarding a partner relationship. The DHS had determined that it was in the best interest of the child for his wife not to parent their children. However, he decided to stay with his wife; a decision which cost him his custody of his daughter. He said,

That decision has haunted me ever since. We can't tell the future we don't know what's gonna happen, but I could go back to that day and know now that it would have been better to have this state help me raise my daughter. It would have turned out a lot different. But I can't have those years back…It's in my mind every day.

Though these eight parents' feelings varied substantially regarding their custody arrangements, each made clear that custody issues were barriers/challenges to their parenting and/or personal well-being.

Exclusion from reentry programs

Three parents discussed reentry programs that they could not fully utilize because of their children. One father discussed being assigned a mentor with a sex offending criminal record that, due to the nature of the crime, prevented him from being with children. Because of this record, this participant did not feel comfortable with the mentor and instead chose to stop meeting with him. One mother discussed not being able to stay in reentry program housing because of her children's needs. Finally, another mother discussed not being able to attend reentry program activities because of a lack of childcare. Each of these participants were prioritizing the needs of their children, but this precluded them from accessing resources that would have otherwise been available to them.

Facilitators/Supports

Specific resources that improve access to children

Four participants mentioned specific programs and resources that helped improve their access to their children including programming offered during prison, reentry programs, and support from religious communities. For example, one mother of two children who served two years in prison was able to parent from prison in a way that helped her to maintain relationships with her children. She described her experience this way,

I feel like my experience in prison was a little, not different, everyone had a different experience, but, um, I had a lot of support. So, I was on the phone a lot which is extremely expensive, but I was like parenting from inside. And then, I was actually one of the first people that the Family Resource Center, um, was able to have the school do a conference with me on the phone, like an actual conference. So, that was really, really cool. It was a big accomplishment for FRC and for myself. Um, that helped transition with the kids, you know.

Though having access to such resources and programs was rare among participants, participants who mentioned these types of resources were grateful for the additional time with their children and more opportunities to parent.

Skills training or information on parenting

Two participants discussed specific information or skills training they received during incarceration or in reentry programming that helped improve their parenting. For one father, this information came informally from his judge and his caseworker as they gave him ideas on how to navigate custody relationships. A mother, however, mentioned formal programming both in prison (including a family reunification and connection intervention program) and at reentry (including a specific cognitive based treatment program). Feeling emotionally and socially distant from her child, she was able to utilize skills learned in one of these programs to re-establish and strengthen her relationship with her child. She said, "As time went on it got a little better. I used the coping skills that I got from Sponsors, and it seemed to have paid off, 'cause things are really w-, really good now." Through difficulties, both of these parents utilized skills and learned to enhance their relationships with their children.

Positive custody relationships

Two mothers discussed the importance of positive caregiver relationships. One parent said regarding her regular visits with her daughter, "So I was like really thankful like again I had my family that they were able to bring her to me and was only at [city name] so it wasn't too far." Because of the relationship she had with her child's caregivers, and the proximity of them to the prison, it was possible for her to maintain in-person contact with her child. Another mother described the positive co-parenting relationship she had with her stepchild's caregiver. Because of a positive relationship, they were able to share custody and she could maintain her parent-child relationship creating a more stable situation for the young child, "like she has her own room in our house and like she's there like she is a permanent person. God (laughs), she's this little pint-sized like wonder of the world." For both these parents, their relationships with their children's caregivers helped maintain their relationships with their children.

The Exosystem Level

At the exosystem level, parents discussed just one barrier/challenge they faced that related to access: resources needed for child rearing. They did not discuss any specific facilitators/supports within this domain.

Barriers/Challenges

Access to resources needed for child rearing

Five of the parents discussed the difficulty of gaining access to resources needed for child rearing, particularly housing. One mother said, "I still have a roommate and a small space for me and my two kids, so, I don't know how to get over that hurdle." Similarly, a father said,

> Because now I have to worry about a roof over their heads. So now I'm trying to find a good job that has a good income so that I can possibly look into buying my own house…I want a home. I want somewhere to raise my kids that I don't have to worry about losing. And that's – that's a hard part right now.

Though finding housing and other basic resources is a difficulty common to most people reentering after incarceration (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010; Petersilia, 2003), parents have an additional burden as they try to navigate obtaining these resources for their families.

The Macrosystem Level

While often not explicitly connected to macrosystemic factors, participants shared difficulties with policy-based social exclusion and meeting basic needs which were consistent with the research of Poehlmann et al. (2010) and Arditti (2005). Participants did not mention macrosystem facilitators and supports.

Policy-Based Social Exclusion

Multiple participants discussed how prison policies perpetuated social exclusion with respect to maintaining relationships with their children. One participant (as described above) noted how parenting over the phone was costly: "I was on the phone a lot which is extremely expensive, but I was like parenting from inside…I was actually…able to have the school do a conference with me on the phone, like an actual conference…that helped transition with the kids, you know." Another participant noted that participating in a program allowed her to bypass recorded phone calls with her family: "during family emergencies I was able to call from their office, with not having to worry about anybody recording and, you know, it was uh, that was really helpful."

While not explicitly connected to prison policy or broader societal views on social exclusion, participants reported varied levels of contact with their children while incarcerated from scant contact: "I didn't get to see them for the time that I was gone…They didn't visit me at all. I

would talk to them on the phone and, you know, we would send cards and letters and stuff," to more frequent: "they were coming to visit me almost every weekend the whole time I was away." Even participants with frequent family visits reported the difficulty of seeing their children in the prison setting: "she came and saw me, and I talked to her on the phone all the time. But it was hard seeing her in prison because it was like every time, she, the first couple times that she left they would have to like pull her off of me and that killed me you know. I'm like I don't want to bring her back and do it again but at the same time I didn't want not to see her."

Multiple participants reported policies separating them from their children persisted during reentry. One participant shared "I went to federal prison. And he got taken away from me because I was in prison when I got out, I wasn't allow to have a relationship with him." Another participant reflected on seeing her son and not being able to be in contact with him: "I walked in to the…school to pick up [name's] niece and my son is in her class…And he hasn't seen me in and I haven't seen him since 2012…I had to turn because I can't have contact with them…I don't know if I've actually processed that yet…Cause you just don't want it to be real."

Conviction History and Felon Status

Participants cited stigma and policy related to their conviction history and/or status as a felon as barriers to meeting basic needs for themselves and their children. Multiple participants reported repeated stigma from individual prospective landlords and employers prevented participants from being given a chance. One participant reported being denied housing due to the behavior of past tenants:

> Renters don't want to give felons or people with bad credit a chance because they've been burnt. And, I get it, I understand that, but some of us are still like genuine.

Other participants cited specific policies that required participants to disclose their conviction history and prevented their access to housing and employment. One participant reported that required background checks for housing and employment was a repeated barrier for him:

> You can…spend fifty dollars for [background check] fees to see if you are chosen. I did that like three times…and then they find out that I'm a felon and they're like, "heh, yep," you know…I've been turned down for several jobs I'm qualified for. Several. And I've had several interviews…and it's just, it's a horrible charge to have.

In contrast, when individuals did take a chance on hiring or accepting participants, participants reported success in maintaining these resources. While all individuals returning to the community after prison face similar stigma and policies, for parents, who may be supporting children, this challenge is more onerous for the individual and family as a whole.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the experience of parental incarceration through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological model in order to examine where and how interventions and policies can better support families. By asking parents directly what supports and barriers they experienced, our research sheds light on what participants felt they benefitted from and where parents need extra support. Utilizing the ecological model provides a basis for objectively addressing where policies/interventions may be falling short. Though we did not ask parents directly about each level of the exosystem, examining which parts came up organically in interviews provides a framework for examining which issues were most salient in the participants' lives.

Microsystem Level

Overall, parents in our study were most focused on challenges and facilitators that occur at the microsystemic level of the ecological model. This is not surprising given that this is the level closest to an individual's day-to-day experiences. Similar to Arditti's (2005) framework for examining children of incarcerated parents that suggests parent-child relationships may be strained due to the child's grief and loss, parents in our study expressed how their parent-child relationships were often difficult. They were strained by the lack of connection with their children, problematic child behavior, and an overall lack of social support. Further, parents described their own worries and feelings of inadequacy as added barriers to their relationships with their children. All of these identified issues point to a need to tailor interventions to better support parents mentally and emotionally through these difficult transitions.

In terms of protective factors at the microsystem level, parents discussed individual factors such as quality time spent with children and child-provided support. For parents, these moments of family time and support made it possible for healing/reconnection after incarceration. This is in line with "Individual and family resilience," one of three of Arditti's (2005) protective factors at the microsystem level. Given the evidence that suggests protective factors such as "social support" and "ecologically sensitive casework" are key to successful reentry at the microsystem level (Arditti, 2005), our findings suggest a need to create and provide interventions that focus more on helping individuals maintain and form positive social support networks as well as create systems for casework that are more ecologically sensitive.

Mesosystem Level

The main mesosystemic factors that parents discussed all related to child contact or programming that could be helpful. Some parents discussed the challenge of navigating child contact when there were custody hurdles to jump over, while other parents described positive custody relationships that helped them retain contact with their children. Additionally, some parents described being excluded from reentry programming because of conflicts with child-obligations while other parents described the importance they saw in reentry programming that provided information and support for parenting. These different views from parents suggest that policies within individual prisons or between systems are not uniform when it comes to "family friendly visiting" or "child-centered collaboration between CJS and child welfare" (Arditti, 2005). This suggests a need to revisit these policies on a deeper level, specifically across institutions and systems. However, it is important to note that parents in our study had different experiences based on the crimes for which they were convicted and, thus, specific requirements related to their sentences. This may have led to differences in reentry programming. For instance, certain housing programs do not allow children on site (especially when there are people involved in the program with histories of child maltreatment). It is important, then, to recognize that housing programs for parents should have alternate spaces for parents to spend time with their children. In other situations, DHS did not allow parents to use their social supports as providers of childcare and/or housing for them and their children. Both of these examples illustrate how participants were not allowed to use the resources they had access to in order to help them parent their children. In multiple cases, parents had to choose between giving up resources and giving up access to their children. This demonstrates the importance of allocating extra resources for reentering parents.

Exosystem Level

Though the exosystemic level was discussed only in regard to families struggling to meet their basic needs at reentry, this aspect impacted the lives of the parents and their children greatly. Parents expressed that they had difficulty finding both livable wage jobs to support their families as well as housing that was suitable for their children. There are several possible remedies that could help on this front. First, community outreach efforts to better facilitate integration of formerly incarcerated individuals into communities could be

helpful. This might involve opportunities to connect with interested employers and landlords prior to release, wider availability of transitional housing, and/or term limits of transitional housing based on a person's readiness to transition out instead of strict time limits. Second, it could be beneficial to dispel community-held stigma against this population and educate the community about the strengths of this population. This might include incentives for landlords/employers and/or program-sponsored internship programs with prospective employers. This could result in an increased willingness of landlords and employers to consider formerly incarcerated individuals as possible applicants for homes and/or jobs.

Macrosystem Level

Parents described how policies at the macrosystemic level impacted them on a personal level. These included expensive phone calls from prison or other barriers that prevented them from being able to contact their children. Barriers to contact often extended into the reentry experience. Parents also described policies such as background checks for housing that prevented them from obtaining basic needs at reentry. Similar to the work of other scholars' calls for large-scale criminal justice reform (e.g., Purnell, 2021; Alexander, 2010), our research implies a need for legislative advocacy to address policies that harm parents and families and act as barriers to successful reentry and explicit and conscious dismantling of stereotypes and fears that lead to community-held stigma against formerly incarcerated parents. For certain crimes (especially non-violent crimes), the CJS should expand the use of alternatives to incarceration where parents can remain at home with children while being monitored with GPS. Relevant programs that address the underlying problems (such as mental illness, substance use, or poverty) should be the main focus for these parents (rather than punishment).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Though our research study provides insight into the experiences of reentering parents, there are several limitations which should be noted. Some qualitative methodologists advise that researchers use the "member checking" tool. This is when participants in a study are allowed the opportunity to read the write-ups of the research and add to the data. This is a tool which helps with validation and enhances trustworthiness of the data (Birt et al., 2016). Unfortunately, our study did not have the resources/ability to confer with participants after data had been analyzed to utilize this member checking tool.

The rest of the limitations relate related to the generalizability of our findings. Our sample was from one county in Oregon and consisted of primarily white participants (congruent with the demographics of the local population). The experiences expressed by these participants is crucial for understanding how to develop parenting programs in similar locations. However, this study should be replicated in other areas as well. Experiences of parents in our population may not be generalizable to other regions and countries or to parents of other cultural and racial backgrounds. Within the United States, BIPOC communities are disproportionately impacted by incarceration (Nellis, 2021). Understanding the perspective of these communities is crucial in future research to help inform interventions addressing the unique issues and needs of these populations at each level of the ecological model.

Next, our interviews are based on one time point and do not provide insight into changing/developing parent-child relationships over the course of the entire reentry experience. Future research which follows parents long-term will gain important insight into barriers/challenges and facilitators/supports across time, and how these factors affect the children as they enter adulthood. Furthermore, our research is descriptive in nature and uses a small sample size meant to paint a picture of the experiences of these individuals. However, our research does not examine outcome variables of the parent (e.g., housing stability or recidivism) nor does it examine outcome variables of the child (e.g., academic achievement, mental health, or internalizing and externalizing behaviors). Additionally, sample size issues make it difficult to examine potential differences based on sex or gender of the parent. Though prior evidence suggests there may be parenting differences for mothers vs fathers (Kjellstrand et al., 2022a, b), we did not see any differences within our sample. However, given the small sample size of this qualitative study, and given that we never specifically asked parents about their experiences in relation to their sex or gender, we do not feel that we have the information in this dataset to fully understand what sex or gender differences there may be for these parents. Future research should use larger samples with to examine the impact of barriers/challenges and facilitators/supports on long-term outcomes for both parents and children and examine whether there are sex/gender differences.

Aside from sample size/demography and the exploratory nature of this study, there is another issue of generalizability. Given that all participants were part of a reentry program designed to support them through the reentry process, their experiences likely differed from other individuals who were not involved in any reentry programming or who may have been involved in a different type of reentry programming. Participants in the study may have felt supported in ways that other reentering parents do not feel. The findings of this study, then, may be based on a very conservative estimate of the needs of most reentering individuals. Future research should examine additional samples with individuals who did not receive reentry

programming or who received a different type of programming, to see if there are similar findings. Despite these limitations, our study provides insight into the experiences of reentering parents as they navigate challenges and capitalize on facilitators/supports while reestablishing relationships with their children and reintegrating into their families and communities.

Conclusion

The issues of family separation due to incarceration and the subsequent return to the role of parenting are salient problems. Our study provides greater understanding of parent experiences at reentry with strong implications for intervention development and wide-scale policy changes. Our findings suggest that parents need support in the form of interventions, policy, and system-wide changes. Interventions for parents may be improved by focusing on supporting parents as they develop social support networks and seek connection with their children. Policies encouraging sensitive casework that focuses on child-centered collaboration regarding custody and prison visitation may also be helpful. On a larger scale, policies within communities to smooth the reentry process by including incentives for employers and landlords to consider applications from formerly incarcerated individuals are important considerations to further explore. The widespread implementation of major criminal justice reforms should also be considered within the context of the negative impact that current practices have on families with children.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Appendix A

The Mentorship Program: Life Study
  Individual Interview Questions: May 2018
    Reentry
  In this domain, the interviewer will ask participants questions about their experience reentering a community after incarceration and how they view success in re-entry- what needs to be focused on and who to connect with to succeed.

(1) When you think about yourself and the idea of you succeeding—of you doing well in the coming years—how do you define success?

(2) What do incarcerated individuals need to know and be able to do to be successful once they re-enter their communities?

(3) What have been the 1 or 2 biggest challenges you have faced over the past six months? (find out what they have done to deal with/overcome each challenge)

(4) When you returned to the community, who were the most important people to help you to succeed (not the names of specific people, but the roles that those people play, like "myself," or "my case manager" or "the mother of my children")?

(5) What did these people do that was helpful? Can you give me an example of a challenge that this person helped you work through?

(6) What other types of people could have been helpful for you? Why?

(7) What else has been helpful as you've reentered? Why?

(8) What else could have been helpful? Why?

(9) *parents* *Ask this last question to just those who are parents to children 18 years or younger*. In your role as a parent, what was helpful to you as you reentered? What else could have been helpful?
    Mentor Program Impacts
  In this domain of the conversation, the interviewer will ask those participants who had a mentor to describe their experience participating in the Mentorship Program.

(10) Overall, what do you think of the Mentorship program?

(11) How would you describe your relationship with your mentor?

(12) In what ways was the program helpful? What is good about this program that should be continued in the future?

(13) In what ways do you feel that the Mentorship program fell short? What needs to be improved about this program so that it is more helpful to participants? What pieces are missing from this program?

(14) How many people do you plan to stay in touch and do things with after the Mentorship Program ends?

  a. If they mention at least one person ask "Who are they and what do you hope to do with them?"
  b. If they mention no one ask "Why is that?"

(15) What do you think is the most important thing about the Mentorship Program?
    Closing Summary Comments
  Lastly, the interviewer will ask some closing

questions to all participants.

(16) Is there anything else we haven't discussed that you think is important to know about reentry? Or the mentoring program? (only ask those who had a mentor the last sub-question)

Helpful example prompts for interviewer:

- "Tell me more about _____"
- "Help me understand_____"
- "You mentioned _____ before, but just now you mentioned _____. Can you explain that some more?"
- "Can you give me some examples of _____?"
- "Remember what you were saying about _____? Can you tell me more about that?"
- "Would you mind elaborating on that?"
- "How does that compare to what happened last year?

Non-verbal cues (nodding) or "uh-huh"

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