

Examining the Relationship between Children's Behavioral Outcomes and Life Events among Incarcerated Mothers

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Abstract

Although there is much research examining maternal incarceration and children's emotional and behavioral outcomes, less is known about how these outcomes are associated with specific living arrangements and economic stability as life events, or stressors, prior to, and after, incarceration. The purpose of this project is to examine the behavioral outcomes among children of incarcerated mothers and the extent to which economic stability and living arrangements differ among this population. Specifically, the research question guiding the analysis is: What is the relationship between economic stability, living arrangements, and behavioral outcomes among children of incarcerated mothers? The data collected are derived from a sample of 200 recently released female prison inmates and questions relating to life events or stressors are derived from a survey addressing mother's employment status, hardships with finding a job, and the effects of residing in a bad neighborhood on parenting issues. Questions regarding living arrangements also address the length of time given to place children prior to incarceration, level of difficulty finding a place for the children to live, and number of placements for the children while the mother was in custody. Further, questions explaining the behavioral outcomes of the children were measured with mothers' reports of common reactions such as difficulty in school and anger resulting from perceived abandonment. Results show significant relationships between economic hardships, problems associated with living arrangements, and children's internalizing and externalizing symptomatology. Suggestions for future research are addressed.

Keywords Children's Behavioral Outcomes, Life Events, Mother's Incarceration

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Introduction

A review of current research suggests that the rates of incarceration among parents of minor children continue to increase (Dallaire & Wilson, 2009), and mothers, specifically, are at a higher risk of living in poverty with their children prior to, and after, their incarceration (Borelli & et.al. 2010). They are also more likely to have experienced victimization prior to their arrest and subsequent incarceration, and among those who engage in drug usage and suffer from mental illness, the likelihood of experiencing chronic social and economic instability is heightened (Borelli & et.al. 2010). Research has also shown that incarcerated women who suffer from a higher degree of psychopathology from having experienced repeated abuse are at a greater risk of having children with repeated behavioral problems.

African American women, in particular, continue to be disproportionately confined within the criminal justice system (Stringer, 2009), and their families, in turn, are devastatingly affected. These women are more than twice as likely to be incarcerated as Caucasian women (Stringer, 2009), and they are more likely to receive longer prison sentences with less opportunity for probation and parole. They also retain a higher record for holding the fastest rates of incarceration than any other racial-ethnic group (Stringer, 2009), and they are typically very young, undereducated and less likely to be employed compared to their counterparts who were never incarcerated (Geller & et.al. 2009). They tend to remain single and impoverished prior to their incarceration and upon reentry (Stringer, 2009). Research has also shown that their economic instability leads to a higher risk of continual exposure to violence that not only impacts their well-being but the well-being of their children.

Regarding familial patterns, nearly five percent of all children in America are affected by maternal incarceration according to the Department of Justice Statistics (Dallaire & Wilson, 2009), and these children often experience severe trauma during periods of separation while their mothers remain incarcerated. One study in particular revealed an increasing number of "at-risk familial environments" (e.g. substance abuse, maltreatment, etc.) among children as a result of maternal incarceration. Another study found that nearly 70 percent of incarcerated mothers reported dealing with physical or sexual abuse prior to incarceration, and among those, two-thirds were living with their minor children as the abuse was occurring (DeHart & Altshuler, 2009), further demonstrating the increased likelihood of children being exposed to violence prior to the incarceration of their mothers.

In order to understand the various influential factors of maternal incarceration, living arrangements prior to arrests must also be considered. According to one study, a disproportionate number of children of incarcerated parents lived with their mothers prior to the incarceration of either their mother or father (Park & Clarke-Stewart, 2001). Nearly half of the children with parents in either state (43%) or federal prison (57%) resided with their mother at the time of incarceration. Specific gender differences are found among incarcerated parents with mothers generally being the sole providers of their children at the time of their arrest. For example, more mothers were living with their children at the time of arrest at both levels: state (64%) and federal (84%) while nearly half of the fathers were residing with their children at the time of incarceration on both levels: state (44%) and federal (55%) (Park & Clarke-Stewart, 2001). Many women are arrested and become jail inmates immediately while others are given only a few days to make long term arrangements for their children. The drastic interruption of contact patterns between these mothers and their children, as well as the deleterious effects of maternal incarceration overall, warrant further investigation when examining the behavioral outcomes of children, many of whom, as studies have suggested, often serve the jail and/or prison time along with their mothers with regard to how they cope with the separation.

Concerning the cumulative effects of maternal incarceration, Lotze et al. (2010) found that the mother's imprisonment may not be the sole problem faced by children since more than half of these families generally exists in poverty prior to, and after, detainment (2010). According to the 2008 U.S. Census Bureau, for example, a higher percentage (54%) of African American youth in particular resides in a single parent home compared to their Caucasian counterparts (21%). When examining economic stability, studies show that it is more likely that children of incarcerated mothers experience greater risk factors for impoverishment, and among those residing in poor communities, a higher risk of adjustment issues exists.

When examining the "at-risk" population of children with incarcerated mothers, further studies have found higher rates of difficulties with externalizing emotions such as aggression, problem behaviors, and delinquency exhibited in both schools and surrounding communities. Further, internalizing issues such as depression, fearfulness, sleep problems and low self-esteem remain paramount in this regard.

Children with incarcerated mothers possess higher levels of anxiety and depression and they are more likely to associate with negative peers while experiencing problems in school (Dallaire & Wilson, 2009). Research also shows that children of incarcerated mothers reported long-term trauma due to the separation from the mother being incarcerated, and are more likely to experience emotional detachment from their new caregivers, regardless of their relationship to the caregiver. A substantial number of these children demonstrate symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, including depression, feelings of anger and guilt, and upsetting flashbacks associated with their mother's incarceration (Hanlon & Carswell & Rose, 2007).

Although there is much research examining maternal incarceration and children's emotional and behavioral outcomes, less is known about how these outcomes are associated with specific living arrangements and economic stability as life events, or stressors, prior to, and after, incarceration. The purpose of this project then is to examine the behavioral outcomes among children of incarcerated mothers and the extent to which economic stability and living arrangements differ among this population. Specifically, the research question guiding the analysis is: What is the relationship between economic stability, living arrangements, and behavioral outcomes among children of incarcerated mothers? The data collected are derived from a sample of 200 recently released female prison inmates and questions relating to life events or stressors are derived from a survey addressing mother's employment status, hardships with finding a job, and the effects of residing in a bad neighborhood on parenting issues. Questions regarding living arrangements also address the length of time given to place children prior to incarceration, level of difficulty finding a place for the children to live, and number of placements for the children while the mother was in custody. Further, questions explaining the behavioral outcomes of the children were measured with mothers' reports of common reactions such as difficulty in school and anger resulting from perceived abandonment.

Literature Review

Research has shown that parental incarceration is correlated with higher rates of maladjustment among children, and many of them are less likely to complete their education and are more likely to be arrested or incarcerated themselves.

Murray and Farrington (2008) found that youth whose parents were imprisoned were nearly five times more likely to be incarcerated compared to youth separated from parents for other reasons. Similarly, in another study, having an imprisoned parent was the strongest predictor of future problems with the law among youth, many of whom were more likely to have negative behavioral outcomes throughout adolescence (Aaron & Dallarie, 2009). Higher levels of delinquency suggest that generational patterns of violence may exist among many of the youth who reside in the homes of incarcerated parents.

When parents are incarcerated, children are forced to not only cope with the loss of a caregiver but with the forfeiture of financial stability that was once provided for by that parent. For example, studies have shown that parental incarceration depletes families' economic resources, and after release, most convicted felons find it even more difficult to find employment. As a result, some children may reside in unsafe neighborhoods, attend ineffectual schools, have poor diets and receive minimal health care (Geller, et.al, 2009). Children of incarcerated mothers are at the greatest at risk since a disproportionate number of women are the sole providers of their children prior to incarceration, and upon their reentry are unable to provide financial support for the children, many of whom are under the age of 18 (Geller, et.al, 2009). According to a three city study examining the possible prospects for formally incarcerated mothers, employers reported that they would rather hire those from other marginalized groups, including persons who have not held a job for more than year, rather than hire a female who is a convicted felon (Burkhardt, 2009).

Research examining the effects of post-conviction have consistently found a greater likelihood of incarcerated mothers experiencing a prolonged unemployment period upon release (Burkhardt, 2009), and children are more likely to experience some form of severe poverty due to the mother's inability to provide financial resources. Further, families with less income are forced to change homes on multiple occasions (Geller, et.al, 2009). Incarceration coupled with financial difficulties has been associated with problems in marital, cohabitating, or dating relationships, as research continues to demonstrate the decrease in the likelihood for long-term relationships among these women (Aaron & Dallarie, 2009).

In a study conducted on sudden separation resulting from maternal incarceration, it was found that parent and child separation may lead to the development of poor adaptation, low self-esteem, or delinquent behaviors for the child, and the problems associated with separation-reunion syndrome experienced by many families becomes even more pronounced in these settings (Geller, et.al, 2009).

Youth from single parent homes, particularly those in which the mother is the sole provider, often reside in poorer communities and possess a higher risk of adjustment issues. Familial influences in this regard remain pertinent factors when considering adolescent development. Children with limited monitoring engage in more delinquent behavior, and familial influence determines how successful the child or adolescent transitions into adulthood (Foster, 2011). Some research on reentry suggests that there is greater deviance among youth residing in single parent homes stemming from less time for parental involvement as a result of the mother's incarceration and subsequent release. According to Foster and Hagan (2009), a higher percentage of delinquent African American youth with previously incarcerated mothers (approximately 54 percent) reside in poorer homes compared to their white counterparts (approximately 21percent). In many instances, African-American children are more likely to reside in homes without the proper parental supervision, and this situation becomes more detrimental in families that are faced with mother's reentry without the proper resources to facilitate reunification (i.e., education, employment, family reunification programs, etc.). The quality of a parent-child relationship impacts both the internalizing and externalizing symptoms among youth facing higher risk factors such as neighborhood violence, and studies consistently show that many women are unable to effectively parent their children if they are released from jails or prisons with proper re-socialization experiences.

Recent research has suggested that with regard to adjustment outcomes, many minority youth disproportionately experience the negative effects of maternal incarceration, and have exhibited heightened mental health difficulties, and behavioral and school problems (Graham et al., 2010; Arditti, 2012; Bretherton, 2010; Cho, 2010). Additionally, they have demonstrated both externalizing (i.e., aggression, deviance) and internalizing (i.e., depression and anxiety) problems and additional studies have addressed difficulties in achieving school success as a result of dropout, excessive absences, and disciplinary infractions.

Incarceration alone serves as the context for maternal distress as many minority women are faced with the prospect of having their children live with either kinship care members, other relatives or in foster care whereas Caucasian mothers are more likely to leave their children with their fathers or in other care arrangements (Foster, 2011). Familial resources have been considered a significant and influential difference in relation to children, and for many minority women, their ability to effectively care for their children remains compromised. These women are less likely to have adequate time to make suitable arrangements for their children when faced with the prospect of imprisonment after arrest. Further, the children of these women will have differential experiences with parental incarceration in terms of daily disruption. Separation from children is believed to be the most damaging aspect of incarceration, creating additional problems for children, particularly those associated with developmental complications including anger at the mother for leaving and behavioral problems at school (Burkhardt, 2009).

While there has been much research on the deleterious effects of maternal incarceration on child development, less is known about the process of parental incarceration as issues arise for children not only during incarceration, but before and after detainment. Studies rely less on the life course perspective whereby the child and family experiences are considered as families are forced to cope with the disruption of a mother's arrest and subsequent incarceration. In fact, the indicators of maternal distress that women experience prior to incarceration such as poverty, low education, inadequate living arrangements for children, and living in violent neighborhoods can be seen as life events that can perpetuate the likelihood of children exhibiting increased negative outcomes including hostility and conflict (Foster, 2011). Researchers have addressed the need to examine "separation pain" in more detail as children respond to the absence of the ideal parent (mother) with increased disruptive behaviors as they "recycle" their sadness and pain into misdirected anger toward those in their environment. As a result, the rates of disciplinary problems and behavioral problems in school increase among those children, particularly minority children, who are unable to cope with the disturbance in their lives (Graham et al., 2010; Arditti, 2012).

As poverty, violence and cumulative disadvantage remain reflections of larger societal issues, the sudden impact of the mother's incarceration becomes more pronounced for the women in these families, many of whom already face economic deprivations, feelings of abandonment, shame, guilt and anger as they are viewed as the irresponsible caregiver who has abused or neglected her children (Cho, 2010). The sense of loss that children experience, coupled with the stigmatization that often occurs on the part of teachers and peers, creates a range of negative outcomes including diminished academic performance, resentment, and disruptive behavior at home and at school. In this paper, we draw from the literature that has addressed the life course perspective to examine the outcomes associated with specific living arrangements and economic stability as life events, or stressors, prior to a mother's incarceration. The intent is to examine the behavioral outcomes among children of incarcerated mothers and the extent to which economic stability and living arrangements as stressors differ among this population. The aim is to better understand how family well-being, or lack thereof, is influenced by a larger social environment that stigmatizes not only maternal incarceration but the children of offending women, making it difficult for mothers to parent and contribute to their children's progressive development.

Conceptual /Theoretical Framework

Strain Perspective

Previous research has shown that economic opportunities and social relationships are often strained as a result of parental imprisonment (Baker et al., 2009). While many have investigated the association between parenting and involvement in delinquency, few researchers have investigated how parental incarceration relates specifically to child behavioral outcomes (Burkhardt, 2009). It is known that parental confinement alters the functioning of familial groups, and severe disruption often occurs with cases of maternal incarceration. Mothers are more likely to care for the children if a father is detained, however, in situations where she is confined, relatives care for the children or they may be placed in foster care (Dallaire and Wilson, 2009). The situation is further exacerbated if caretakers lack the financial ability necessary to meet the demands of the expenses associated with rearing children.

Burkhardt (2009) found that the problems associated with obtaining adequate income, child-support of any kind (formal or informal) and access to government assistance causes additional financial suffering for mothers who are trying to parent their children, many of whom are more likely to rebel against their circumstance (Dehart and Altshuler, 2009). In an effort to explain the negative outcomes associated with maternal incarceration, the strain perspective suggests that crime and delinquency often result from the structural and individual tension placed on members of society. The viewpoint addresses the processes at the societal level which filter down and affect how the person perceives his or her needs. Specifically, if particular social structures are inherently inadequate or there is inadequate regulation due to a mother's incarceration, this may change the child's perceptions as to means and opportunities. Further, the legitimate means for achieving material success are not uniformly distributed among poor children in poor families, including those with mothers in prison (Miller, 2009). In other words, these children have considerably less access to legitimate means than do those who are economically advantaged. As a consequence, anomie, or strain, is generated and produces certain 'modes of adaptation', or (simply put) coping strategies, that the disadvantaged children use to deal with the pressures that are brought to bear on them. In this instance, the status and frustration that children experience as a result of the mother's circumstance, coupled with the stigmatization of maternal incarceration, may compel children to act out their aggressions in home and at school.

Control Theory

Another viewpoint that can be used to explain poor children's adjustment to maternal incarceration is control theory. Here Geller et al. (2009) suggest that familial attributes, especially those that relate to family structure, may have some association to low self-control among children and adolescents (Boutwell and Beaver, 2010). Children raised in disruptive homes, including those homes marked by the loss of a mother's presence resulting from detainment, have lower levels of control compared to children raised in homes with both parents. It has been hypothesized that lower levels of social control contribute to the causality of criminal and delinquent behaviors at varying levels. Hanlon et al. (2007) discovered a general trend among children raised exclusively by one parent or a caregiver.

The study suggested that children experienced extensive difficulties and negative behavioral outcomes from the sudden absence of a parent, including those caused by drastic circumstances such as maternal incarceration (Boutwell and Beaver, 2010). Control theory posits that effective parenting can promote conformity and prevent children from engaging in delinquency. However, maternal incarceration limits the amount and quality of social control and support in a variety of ways that can contribute to the likelihood of a child engaging in delinquency. The extended absence of a mother during incarceration has detrimental effects on positive reunification experiences for mothers and their children, many of whom remain bitter and angry at their mothers even upon their release and reintegration into the family. The stigmatization associated with her involvement in criminal activity has shown has also influenced the relationship between ineffective discipline, supervision abilities and delinquency among her children (Murray and Farrington, 2008).

Further, maternal incarceration depletes opportunities for effective parenting and child interaction, which prevents positive social control and parental attachment. Moreover the children's position in a single parent home enhances their chances of delinquency and association with delinquent peers (Murray and Farrington, 2008). The control theory of delinquency assumes that delinquent acts will result when one's bond or connection to society is weak or broken. The absence of control allows the child or adolescent to be free to weigh the benefits of crime over the costs of those same delinquent acts. The explanation provided as to why individuals conform to or deviate from social norms entails four variables: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. Attachment, in particular, can be applied to children's adjustment to maternal incarceration. This refers to the extent to which a child is attached to others, including a parent. As the child becomes more attached to others, he is far less likely to become delinquent. The primary attachments and interactions are with the parents, closely followed by the attachments to peers, teachers, religious leaders, and other members of a community. The concept of attachment is discussed separately from that of internalization, because attachment can be measured independently from deviant behavior, whereas internalization cannot. Regarding familial bonding and delinquency, as the mother's incarceration interrupts the emotional bonding process, the children are more likely to experience detrimental effects on their emotional and cognitive development. Delinquency, in turn, is more likely to ensue as children experience impaired attachment to a mother who has been released from prison.

Methodology

Surveys were conducted with 200 newly released female correctional inmates in Virginia, Maryland, District of Columbia, and New York. We recruited women to the study by requesting volunteers within female housing units prior to their release and obtaining information on other women who would be willing to address their experiences after incarceration. We specifically recruited women with children and the study reports on a convenience sample since random sampling was not available due to considerable transition and court dates. Women were surveyed at community health centers that provided services to ex-offenders and drug court across the four states upon their release. We are unable to report on the participation rate because of the transition within the units and the anonymity of respondents. We obtained informed consent, and research assistants collected surveys from the women who had been detained as long term jail inmates or prisoners. Women in the community health centers and drug court who were former jail or prison inmates received \$10 for each survey.

Regarding the specific design, questionnaire items examined familial background characteristics (i.e., living situation while growing up, family history of incarceration, and parental abuse of drugs and alcohol), the inmate's own situations including abuse prior to incarceration, history of drug and/or alcohol abuse, physical illness, patterns of treatment including drug/alcohol treatment, mental health counseling, medical attention, group counseling, parenting classes, and reunification counseling. Items also addressed the mechanisms that female inmates used to cope with their incarceration, particularly in instances where extended separation from children was involved. To further understand the experiences of women in jail and the manner in which they coped with being away from their children, we used a series of open ended questions for interviews addressing how the female inmates felt about being away from home, the impact that incarceration had on their lives, the degree to which they received support in jail to assist with rehabilitation, the factors that contributed to their ability to cope while in jail, their goals in life prior to incarceration, and the dynamics of dealing with criminal justice personnel. Questions also addressed how their children adjusted to their subsequent return as measured through internalizing and externalizing symptoms.

The racial composition of the sample was 45 percent Caucasian (N = 90) and 55 percent African American (N = 110). The education levels of the participants ranged from some high school to some college or more, 33 percent had some high school (N = 58), 38 percent had completed high school (N = 76), and 33 percent had some college or more (N = 66). Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 54. The largest age group, 42 percent, (N = 84) comprised the 35 to 44 year age range. Twenty-eight percent (N = 56) of the participants were between 45 to 54 and another 20 percent (N = 40) were between 18 to 24. The remaining 10 percent (N = 20) were 18 to 24 year olds. All women who participated in this study had at least one child, however many of them had more. Thirty percent (N = 60) of the sample had only one child, 23 percent (N = 46) had two children, and 10 percent (N = 20) had three children. Thirty-two percent (N = 64) of the women had four children while only five percent (N = 10) had five or more children.

The sample was comprised of women who provided information on marital status and employment status prior to incarceration. Twenty-four percent of the women (N = 48) were married and 36 percent (N = 72) were divorced. Only five percent (N = 10) of participants were separated and the remaining 35 percent (N = 70) had never been married. Women who were employed full time prior to their incarceration made up 34 percent (N = 68) of the sample, 23 percent (N = 46) were employed part time, 15 percent (N = 30) were unemployed and looking for work, and 28 percent (N = 56) were unemployed and not looking for work.

The current study analyzed the frequency with which women reported that individual problems with separation from children, limited contact with children, trouble finding adequate housing, and trouble finding a job affected their ability to parent, with a combined high score denoting increased problems with effectively parenting children (Cronbach's Alpha=.89). Additional data were analyzed through the utilization of the created scale that measures frequency of problems with parenting (pareprob). The child problems scale (probchil) consisted of two individual items, anger at mother for leaving and behavior problems at school. The (probchil) scale had a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of .95, whereby a combined high score denotes increased internalizing and externalizing negative outcomes. For the purpose of this study, individual items were examined to assess predicted correlations between the variables.

Analysis and Findings

Frequencies

Results from the frequencies of life events and child behavioral outcomes, in particular, show that 71.4% of the women had at least one child under the age of eighteen at the time of their arrest, and 68.6% of them were separated from their children for a period of six months or more as a result of their incarceration. While detained, only 32.4% of the mothers had regular contact with their children, while 67.8% of them reported having one day or less to make living arrangements for their children prior to their incarceration. Additionally, 61.0% percent of the mothers reported being the sole providers of their children prior to their detainment. These findings are consistent with previous studies that have highlighted issues of “separation pain” and stressors that are often placed on mothers already struggling with life circumstances such as poverty, instability and limited access to sources of support, further exemplifying the fact that incarceration alone does not signal the onset of specific problems (Loper et al., 2009). Questionnaire items also addressed life events and long term problems relating to economic deprivation experienced by the mothers and their children, and findings indicate that upon their release 67.6% reported having trouble with finding a place to live, while 46.9% reported having difficulty with maintaining an affordable, stable residence for more than three months.

Further, 62.3% of the mothers indicated that they experienced trouble finding a job, while 71.4% of them reported being unemployed for at least three months after incarceration. Additionally, 61.0% percent of the mothers indicated that they continued to live in a “bad” neighborhood with their children after their release from confinement. These findings are also supported by the literature in that reentry can be as stressful as incarceration itself as many women are forced to resume their roles in environments wrought with tension and violence as they search for affordable housing and steady employment with limited access to public assistance and government benefits (Arditti, 2102; Huebner and Gustafson, 2007).

Finally, remaining consistent with the literature (for example, see Graham et al., 2010; Park et al., 2002) that suggests that children of incarcerated mothers often face internalizing and externalizing negative outcomes, results from the current data show that 67.6% of the women reported having children who were angry at them for leaving, while 32.4% of them reported having children who were exhibiting behavior problems in school. Table 1 presents a frequency distribution of the results.

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Life Events and Behavioral Outcomes among Newly Released Mothers

	Percent (%)
One or more children under 18 years of age at the time of arrest	71.4
Separated from children for six months or more during incarceration	68.6
Regular contact with children while incarcerated	32.4
One day or less to make living arrangements prior to incarceration	67.8
Sole provider of children prior to detainment	61.0
Trouble finding a place to live after incarceration	67.6
Difficulty maintaining affordable, stable residence after incarceration	46.9
Experienced trouble finding a job after incarceration	62.3
Unemployed for at least three months after incarceration	71.4
Currently living in a "bad" neighborhood with children	61.0
Children were angry at the mother for leaving	71.4
Children exhibited behavior problems at school	32.4

Correlations

A predicted correlational design is presented to answer the research question: What is the relationship between economic stability, living arrangements, and behavioral outcomes among children of incarcerated mothers?

When analyzing the relationship of life events and child behavioral outcomes, several statistically significant correlations were discovered at the $p = .01$ and $p = .05$ levels. A positive, strong relationship ($r = .68^{**}$) was observed between lengthy separation and children's behavioral problems at school. Results further show a positive, strong relationship ($r = .78^{**}$) between limited contact and children's behavioral problems at school. There was a positive, moderate relationship found between lengthy separation and children's likelihood of exhibiting anger at the mother for leaving ($r = .58^{**}$). A moderate, positive association also exists between limited contact and children's likelihood of exhibiting anger at the mother for leaving ($r = .64^{**}$). Although significant, relationships between variables addressing economic deprivation (i.e., housing problems, employment difficulties) and children's behavioral outcomes were weaker than those addressing immediate disruption in the household or limited contact with children due to maternal incarceration. Overall, these findings point toward the importance of examining the impact of maternal incarceration on children, many of whom are at a higher risk of anti-social, delinquent behavior. The significant relationships suggest that the impact of life events or stressors on children's outcomes may be reflective of larger societal issues relating to cumulative disadvantage such as poverty and urbanization, as previously noted (Graham et al., 2010). Many of these children will "recycle" their sadness and pain into anger and behavioral problems toward an adult, namely the mother, in their immediate environment.

The results of the correlations indicate that the disruption in the household as mothers have lengthy separations from, and limited contact with, their children has a greater impact on the child's feelings and behavior than those factors relating to economic deprivation, as seen by the strength of association between these variables. The findings also support research that suggests that children of incarcerated mothers experience a sense of loss that influences emotional adjustment, and the subsequent separation from the mother leads to a range of negative outcomes both at home and in school (Graham et al., 2010). Hence, the findings provide evidence to suggest that children may already be at risk for delinquency before incarceration, and the likelihood of offending increases during, and after, the mother's detainment. Incarceration, then, only serves to intensify the vulnerabilities that already exist. The results of the correlational analyses are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix of Life Events and Child Behavioral Outcome Variables among Newly Released Mothers

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Separated for six or more months									
Limited Contact while incarcerated	.19*								
One day or less for living arrangements	.43**	.16*							
Trouble finding a place to live	.14*	.23**	.38**						
Trouble finding employment	.09**	.02*	.36**	.23**					
Unemployed for at least three months	.10**	.09**	.33**	.14*	.11**				
Child angry for leaving	.58**	.64*	.30**	.33**	.23**	.12**			
Child exhibiting behavior problems at school	.68**	.78**	.47**	.46*	.43**	.34**	.81**		

** $P < .01$, * $P < .05$

Conclusion

As increased maternal incarceration continues to pose a problem in our society, one can only foresee greater deleterious effects on the children left behind. While a causal relationship between family factors and child outcomes cannot be confirmed, the research in this study has indicated that there are negative outcomes for those children who suffer from the cumulative disadvantage of having a mother in confinement. The purpose of this study was to examine the responses from mothers recently released from jails and prisons to determine if economic stability and living arrangements are associated with children's negative outcomes.

A sample of 200 female ex-offenders was chosen to administer a personal data questionnaire. Comparisons were made across the mothers' reports of economic hardships, problems associated with living arrangements, and the negative outcomes of their children. Interpreting the results of the study should be done with caution. Studies are only generalizable to the degree in which the sample accurately represents the populations being studied. Subjects in this study may differ from populations in other geographical regions. Additionally, if generalizing to other populations, additional sample groups, testing instruments, and different incarcerating/aftercare facilities may be considered.

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions and implications can be drawn. The conclusions are limited to subjects who are similar to those who participated in the study.

1. Women newly released from correctional facilities are likely to report problems with living arrangements, economic stability and children's behavior resulting from cumulative disadvantage and marginalization
2. There is a statistically significant relationship when comparing indicators of family disruption relating to mothers' anticipated incarceration and children's negative outcomes.
3. There is a statistically significant relationship when comparing indicators of economic hardships relating to mothers' release from correctional institutions and children's negative outcomes.
4. It may be concluded that children's externalizing symptoms (i.e., behavioral problems) are more closely associated with issues relating to lengthy separations from, and limited contact with, their mothers during incarceration than are internalizing symptoms (i.e., anger at mothers for leaving).
5. It may be concluded that children's externalizing symptoms (i.e., behavioral problems) and internalizing symptoms (i.e., anger at mothers for leaving) are more closely associated with issues relating to lengthy separations from, and limited contact with, their mothers during incarceration than with issues associated with economic deprivation upon their release.

Findings from this study demonstrate a need to further investigate the impact of maternal incarceration on children's behavior. Exploring the results of responses on several different types of self-reporting instruments is warranted.

It is obvious that other factors such as a child's relationship with peers and other parental figures, the consistency of discipline, and /or the amount of parental supervision in the home may also be involved in the formation of behavioral problems, and could prove to be influential in the prediction of delinquent behaviors among children of incarcerated mothers. Investigations that target multiple factors that encompass a young person's childhood may highlight the most significant influence on the development of delinquent behavior before, during, and after mother's incarceration. Arditti (2012), in her assessment of the impact of mass imprisonment, suggests that the obstacles to parenting that women face are exacerbated by the fact that the separation is unexpected and fast, and when children are able to visit their mothers, they often encounter difficulties in transportation, visitor hour changes, and financial burdens, while their mothers must deal with limited communication with lawyers and less access to parole boards compared to men. The experiences of prison isolation, depression, and guilt over being separated from children continue to surface as women are faced with adverse family situations, unresolved emotions, physical illness, drug dependency, abandonment from husbands, and the frequent loss of privileges within the correctional setting.

While they are more likely to be non-violent offenders, they are still viewed as a threat to the moral conscience of the dominant society since they fail to meet the standards of appropriate motherhood (Graham et al., 2010). However, what is often overlooked is that upon the release of many of these women, they are deprived of the opportunity to learn the necessary skills to fully integrate into society. They are forced to struggle with issues relating to permanent housing, suitable employment, regaining custody of children, and obtaining adequate services, as evidence in the current study. Even less attention is placed on the need for extensive follow-up and proper case management. Arditti's (2012) description of the criminal justice system's attempt to provide "vengeful equity," whereby criminal women are treated in manners similar to criminal men, is further supported here in that women with drug convictions are often prohibited from receiving welfare benefits for life. Additionally, female offenders are less likely to negotiate plea reductions since their drug crimes are normally at the lowest level of the drug hierarchy. Many of the drug crimes committed by women, most of whom have small children, are not for adventurous purposes but are instead committed to self-medicate in an effort to escape a traumatic experience.

This, coupled with the fact that minority and poor women with children are more likely to be economically marginalized and disadvantaged, severely affects public policy decisions, many of which are not based on providing greater opportunities to women and effective treatment, but are instead based on a series of “get tough policies” which only serve to further dismantle the family structure of many women confined for non-violent offenses.

Regarding motherhood and confinement, almost 60% to 80% of all incarcerated female offenders have minor children. Most of these women have at least 2 children, and it is estimated that 1 out of 12 women are pregnant during their incarceration (Loper et al., 2009). Prior to their confinement, many women were either single, divorced or separated, and the sole providers for their children. Separation from children is deemed as one of the worst situations a female offender can endure as she is faced with the disintegration of her family on the outside while attempting to adjust to a new environment inadequately prepared to give her proper medical care, counseling, and mental health treatment (Arditti, 2012). Studies continue to indicate that the incarceration of a mother disrupts a family more than the incarceration of a father, although only 6% of women with children have been convicted of a violent crime compared to 45% of men with children (Arditti, 2012). More than ½ of all incarcerated mothers have reported no personal visits with their children, creating even more emotional barriers that force many women to experience diminished feelings of control and personal worth (Graham et al., 2012). The negative consequences among children with mothers in confinement are often influenced by the age of the child at the time of the separation, the length of the mother’s incarceration, the strength and resiliency of the mother-child bond, the type of crime committed by the mother, the level of family and community support, and the child’s relationship with the custodian. These children, like their mothers, will experience a host of emotions such as fear, anxiety, loneliness, anger and guilt, while researchers have also noted that the incarceration of mothers may produce similar crime patterns among their daughters in that an estimated 44% to 64% of all girls detained in the juvenile justice system have mothers who have either been arrested or incarcerated (Graham et al., 2010). Situations for these women are worsened by their poor educations, limited resources, and their location in high crime neighborhoods, as seen in the findings of the current study.

This is particularly problematic since it has been suggested that the children of incarcerated women may be the next generation of prisoners without access to successful intervention programs and the necessary financial resources to escape poverty and violence. The findings of this research study have clearly indicated a need for parenting programs, mental health counseling, vocational/educational training, basic life skills training, and perhaps most importantly, programs for reuniting the mother and child and maintaining contact while she is incarcerated. Only then can we lay the foundation for treating and rehabilitating women in the “concrete womb,” many of whom are forced to parent their children behind bars. Additionally, there is a dire need for the critical evaluation of existing programs to further determine what is effective, what contributes best to the reduction of recidivism, and what promotes the greatest mental health outcomes among the diverse population of women in prison and the children that they leave behind.

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