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# Developmental Trajectories of the Children of the Incarcerated: From an Educational Psychological Perspective

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# Developmental Trajectories of Prisoners' Children: Perspectives from Educational Psychology

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2015 CONFERENCE

# Roundtable Outline

- ▶ Motivation for work in progress
- ▶ Purpose of this study
- ▶ Prevalence
- ▶ Review of the Literature

# Motivation for this Work in Progress

- ▶ Personal identification as “a child of an incarcerated person”
- ▶ Exposure to indigent defense
- ▶ Professional associations
  - ▶ Dr. Miah in Social Work at Valdosta State University
- ▶ Recent news coverage
  - ▶ Bernie Sanders article
  - ▶ Atlantic Article
- ▶ Interest in longitudinal, development research methods

# Goals

- ▶ To identify previous work examining educational outcomes of prisoners' children
- ▶ To apply an educational psychological perspective to previous findings
- ▶ To propose new research that utilizes educational research methods and fills gaps in existing knowledge
- ▶ Ultimately, better understand the barriers and supports for this population

# Prevalence – Who is actually affected?

- ▶ US Stats here
- ▶ Georgia stats here

# Review of Literature – Fields & Theories

- ▶ Fields concerned with this population include
  - ▶ Criminology & Legal Studies
  - ▶ Sociology
  - ▶ Social Work
  - ▶ Psychiatry
  - ▶ Psychology
- ▶ Corresponding theoretical frameworks include
  - ▶ Strain theory
  - ▶ Social Learning/Labeling theory
  - ▶ Family systems
  - ▶ Genetics
  - ▶ Ecological theory

# Review of Literature – Aims

- ▶ Aims of previous research
  - ▶ Descriptive
  - ▶ Predictive (risk factors)
  - ▶ Programmatic
  - ▶ Policy evaluation



# Review of Literature- Methodology

- ▶ Protected Populations
- ▶ Largely ethnographic
- ▶ Subsamples
  - ▶ Gender bias in terms of children observed
  - ▶ Gender bias in terms of parent incarcerated
- ▶ Lack of educational outcomes
  - ▶ Academic achievement measured by a 5-point scale (Murray et al., 2011)

# Obvious psychological perspectives

- ▶ Development hindered by traumatic experience
  - ▶ Varying degrees of severity depending on the following variables
    - ▶ Parent incarcerated
    - ▶ Family structure
  - ▶ Age not relevant
  - ▶ Unknown gender effects
- ▶ Role of moral development

# Theories of Learning in Educational Psychology

- ▶ Behaviorism
  - ▶ Learning is seen as a change in behaviors based on environmental factors
  - ▶ Parental incarceration seen as a change in environment
    - ▶ Punishment or possible negative reinforcement (protective factor)
- ▶ Social cognitive
  - ▶ Incarceration/Parents as models
    - ▶ Removal of a negative role model possible
  - ▶ Other role models
  - ▶ Vicarious learning (punishment)

# Major Gaps – Unbalanced Approaches

- ▶ Primary focus of previous research is criminality or anti-social behavior
  - ▶ Prosocial behavior is unexamined
- ▶ Risk factors have been calculated for negative outcomes
  - ▶ Parental incarceration as a protective factor is overlooked
- ▶ Despite longitudinal data collected, trajectories are not examined based on moderators
  - ▶ Cluster analysis or latent class analysis has not been attempted
- ▶ Measurement issues exist with educational outcomes
  - ▶ Multiple sources are used, but all are based on questionnaires and made into composite scores

# Unanswered ed psych questions

- ▶ Social cognitive
  - ▶ How does parental incarceration affect self-efficacy, metacognition, self-regulation, locus of control, motivation, etc.?
  - ▶ Do changes in these psychological phenomena affect learning?
- ▶ What about children of prisoners that are academically successful?
  - ▶ How do they differ from the antisocial students mostly studied?

# Future Directions

- ▶ Embedded quantitative work
  - ▶ Longitudinal data collection in areas with high incarceration rates
    - ▶ South Georgia
- ▶ More qualitative work based on referrals

# Comments and Questions?

- ▶ Thank you for your support and feedback
- ▶ See handout for selected references and contact information

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