

University of Northern Iowa
UNI ScholarWorks

Graduate Research Papers

Student Work


2002

The effects of a mother's incarceration on her children

Jane Elizabeth Mayer

Copyright ©2002 Jane Elizabeth Mayer

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp>

 Part of the [Child Psychology Commons](#), [Counseling Commons](#), and the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

The effects of a mother's incarceration on her children

Abstract

This study examined the effects of a mother's incarceration on her children. Benefits, as well as problems, associated with facilitating a mother-child visitation program were discussed. Guidelines were presented for parents, caregivers, children, and prison staff on a successful mother-child visitation program. Conclusions were drawn from the literature and recommendations were made for the future facilitation of a mother-child visitation program.

The Effects of a Mother's Incarceration on her Children

A Graduate Research Paper

Submitted to the

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Early Childhood Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by

Jane Elizabeth Mayer

June, 2002

This research paper by: Jane Elizabeth Mayer

Titled: The Effects of a Mother's Incarceration on her Children

has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts
in Education.

Charles R. May

Director of Research Paper

8/16/02

Date Approved

Jill M. Uhlenberg

Graduate Faculty Reader

8/16/02

Date Approved

Rick Traw

Head, Department of Curriculum and Instruction

8/19/02

Date Approved

Abstract

This study examined the effects of a mother's incarceration on her children. Benefits, as well as problems, associated with facilitating a mother-child visitation program were discussed. Guidelines were presented for parents, caregivers, children, and prison staff on a successful mother-child visitation program. Conclusions were drawn from the literature and recommendations were made for the future facilitation of a mother-child visitation program.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION 1

 Background of the Study 1

 Purpose of the Study 3

 Need for the Study 4

 Limitations 5

 Definitions 5

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE 7

 The Nation’s Female Prison Population 7

 Children’s Reactions to Parental Incarceration 8

 Available Support for Children of Incarcerated Parents 9

 Alternatives to Incarceration 10

CHAPTER 3 GUIDELINES FOR AN EFFECTIVE INCARCERATED MOTHER-CHILD VISITATION PROGRAM 12

 Mother-Child Separation Should be Minimized..... 12

 Program Staff Must be Supportive of Intervention Programs..... 13

 Program Facilitators need to be Qualified and Dedicated..... 13

 Visitations Must be Encouraged and Facilitated..... 13

 Visitation Program Must Fit the Needs of Mothers and Children..... 14

CHAPTER 4 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 15

 Summary 15

 Conclusions 18

Recommendations 18

REFERENCES 19

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

Students in the field of Early Childhood Education know the importance of attachment between mother and child. The name most commonly associated with attachment is John Bowlby. Bowlby developed the modern attachment theory, but it was Freud who introduced the topic. Freud compared the infant-mother relationship with the closeness of an adult-adult relationship (Waters, 1997). He hypothesized that early relationships influence qualities of later relationships. Bowlby's modern attachment theory focused on complexity over time, contexts, and apparent purposefulness of infants' behavior with their primary caregivers (Waters, 1997). Bowlby teamed with Mary Ainsworth to develop a phenomenon called secure base attachment, which describes close coordination and complex monitoring of contextual cues. When a relationship is working well, secure base theorists believe it is more complex than simply lacking conflict and communication problems. Both partners are actively involved in a secure base relationship. Waters (1997) summarized Ainsworth's descriptions of the caregiver's responsibilities, the key components of sensitivity, and the secure base seeker's responsibilities.

A responsible caregiver is sensitive to signals, is physically and psychologically available, and accepts the infant's needs. A sensitive caregiver detects the infant's signals, correctly interprets signals, and responds appropriately and in a timely manner. The secure base seeker displays the following behaviors: clearly signals distress, maintains the signal until the caregiver can respond, interacts or maintains proximity, and finds contact and interaction with the caregiver for comfort.

Farkas quoted Renee Spitz's observations about felon mothers. The lack of a secure base, or attachment, is vital as Spitz found when he studied infants born to felon mothers in 1946-1948.

At the time it was believed if they removed an infant from a felon mother and placed the child in a foundling home which would give the infant the best of professional care the infant would thrive. Whereas if they left the infant with the felon mother, it was believed that the infant would not flourish as well and would learn to become a felon itself. But instead by one year of age 25% of the infants in the foundling home died, compared to zero infants that remained with their mothers. At two years of age an astounding 37% of the infants in the foundling home died, compared to zero infants that remained with their mothers! (Farkas, 2001)

Effects of IQ and development were also learned from this study. Infants in the foundling home at age one had an average IQ of 72 versus an IQ of 105 for those who remained with their mothers. By age two, all the infants who remained with their mothers ran, played, and fed themselves with a spoon. Of the 21 children in the foundling home, only one child spoke 12 words, five of 21 walked unassisted, nine of 21 ate with a spoon, and three of 21 were of normal weight (Farkas, 2001). Infants, who had established a good relationship with their mother and were separated before age two, died 50 percent of the time despite the best of medical care (McKenzie, 1998). In this study infants who were cared for by their mothers thrived.

Infants who had no significant caregiver failed to thrive; this was evidenced by another experience Spitz had when he was called to an orphanage in France. Being a doctor of Immunology and Bacteriology, Spitz was asked to diagnose what bacteria, or virus, was causing the children to get sick. He took tests, but couldn't isolate the cause. What he did observe, however, was that the babies were being fed, but not touched or handled. Spitz suggested that babies should be held for a few minutes during feeding, before being put back into their cribs. The effect of being touched and handled by the caregivers was that the babies stopped becoming sick and dying. Spitz concluded that human touch is vital for survival; he found that in addition

to touch, the presence of a loving adult is crucial to a child's development. Adults interpret a child's communication of needs. Without an interpreter, new experiences have no meaning and the brain has difficulty making connections (Spitz, 1947). A more modern way of seeing the effect of the caregiver on the child is to monitor the child's cortisol level. Our body produces a stress hormone called cortisol, which affects heart rate, digestion, and the ability to think. The amount of cortisol present in a baby's system drops when a trusted adult is present, but what happens when children do not have a trusting adult present to give the nurturing necessary for optimal development? Furthermore, what if a mother and child created a secure base attachment and the mother is no longer able to be present because she has been incarcerated?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of a mother's incarceration on her children and to determine whether the retention of an incarcerated mother's parental role is favorable or harmful. To accomplish this purpose, this paper will address the following questions:

1. What is characteristic of the nation's female prison population and why is the population increasing?
2. What are children's reactions to parental incarceration?
3. What support is available for children of incarcerated parents?
4. What alternatives are there to incarceration?
5. What guidelines are needed for an effective program for mothers in an incarcerated setting?

Need for the Study

Children of prison inmates are the hidden victims of their parents' crimes (Moses, 1995).

Studies have shown that the lack of a stable home life and parental separation have caused children of incarcerated parents to experience the following results: anxiety, depression, aggression, decline in school performance, attention disorders, truancy, teen pregnancy, and symptoms of post-traumatic stress. Beyond these problems, evidence indicates that many of these children follow their parents into the criminal justice system. Moses (1995) cited Maryland's Deputy Commissioner of Corrections, Melanie Pereira:

I've been in corrections for 18 years and I've seen three generations of people in facilities—grandmother, mother, and daughter at the same time. I've seen where the mother was here, gave birth to a child, and the child is now here. (pp.4-5)

Pereira's comment is not surprising, given the statistics. One related fact is that six percent of women entering prison are pregnant (Wright & Seymour, 2000). In addition, one study estimated that children with imprisoned parents may be almost six times more likely than their counterparts to become incarcerated (Moses, 1995). Currently there are an estimated 1.9 million children in this country who have a parent in prison (Wright & Seymour, 2000). In Iowa, there are 673 women in prison (Iowa Department of Corrections, 2002). Approximately 75 percent of incarcerated women have children under the age of 18 (Enos, 2001). In Iowa, this would mean approximately 505 incarcerated mothers are separated from their children. A program is needed to respond to children whose mothers are incarcerated because in many cases, children do not have the opportunity to visit their parents in prison. The program needs to provide door-to-door transportation. It will fill the need for positive communication during mother-child separation. Unlike regular visits at a prison, where children sit across the table from their mothers, children need to be able to interact and exchange affection. This type of

visiting program will provide a comforting constant for children who live in unstable environments. It is designed to maintain the bond between incarcerated mothers and their children and to reduce the chances of them becoming offenders. Before incarceration, most inmate mothers were their children's primary caretakers. Although some of the mothers have not been ideal parents, most will resume their parental role when released (Moses, 1995).

Limitations

While incarceration affects mother and child, the majority of the research focused on incarcerated parents. It is beneficial to understand the background of incarcerated parents, but it would be helpful to have more information on the effects of the incarceration on the children. Primary sources of information were limited. In addition, many studies that have been done generated information through the use of questionnaires. Current information is needed by gathering information through other means, such as standardized instruments.

Definitions

In the literature reviewed for this study, experts defined terms based on scientific knowledge and their respective theories. For the purposes of clarity and understanding, the following terms will be defined:

Attachment: Bowlby considers attachment as a homeostatic control system operating within the context of other behavioral control systems (Bowlby, 1988).

Attachment Figure: Ainsworth contributed the concept of the attachment figure as a secure base from which an infant can explore the world (Bretherton, 1992).

Secure Base Attachment: In a secure attachment, the child is confident that his/her mother figure will be responsive and available if he/she encounters a frightening situation. This

type of attachment is healthy in the developing child and is fostered by a mother figure that is sensitive to signals from the child, accessible to the child, and lovingly responsive to the child. These children are able to freely explore their surroundings (Bowlby, 1988b).

Cortisol: Cortisol is a steroid hormone made in the adrenal glands. It has an important role in the regulation of blood pressure and cardiovascular function. It regulates the body's use of proteins, carbohydrates, and fats. Cortisol secretion increases in response to any stress in the body, whether physical (such as illness, trauma, surgery, or temperature extremes) or psychological (Stoppler, 2001).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Nation's Female Prison Population

Incarcerated women are apt to be poor; to be undereducated and underemployed; to be unmarried; to have family histories marked by substance abuse; to have experienced physical and sexual abuse; to have incarcerated family members; to be substance involved themselves; and to have prior offenses and recidivism. In addition, they often have physical or emotional problems (Wright & Seymour, 2000).

There is a 98 percent increase over the past eight years in the number of minors with a mother in prison (Cable News Network, 2000). During the same period, children with an imprisoned father increased 58 percent. Half of the parents are African American, one quarter are white, and about one-fifth are Hispanic (Wright & Seymour, 2000).

“The nation’s prison population has increased by 62 percent from 1991 through 1999 to 1,284,894 prisoners”(Cable News Network, 2000, p.1). The increase rate for men was primarily because of violent offenses. The growth of the female prison population was caused by drug offenses. The popularity of crack cocaine, mandatory sentencing, and tough drug laws added to the increase. “Two-thirds of the women in prison are there for drug-related offenses,” stated Randy Credico, of the William Moses Kunstler Fund for Racial Justice (Goldsmith, 2000, p. 2). He contended that New York has some of the harshest drug laws in the United States. “Albion is the largest women’s prison in the state with 1500 inmates” (Goldsmith, 2000, p. 2). The majority of inmates are mothers from New York City. Goldsmith compared the Albion women’s prison population to the incarcerated female population of the United Kingdom.

Eighteen million people live in the state of New York. This state incarcerates as many women as the whole of the United Kingdom with its population of 56 million. New York's 3,500 imprisoned women leave 10,000 children behind them either in foster care, or as in most prisoners' cases, to be brought up by relatives. (Goldsmith, 2000, p. 2)

Children's Reactions to Parental Incarceration

The research on children of incarcerated parents indicates that the loss of a parental figure, especially the mother, has profound effects on children and adolescents. Children retain bonds and love for parents regardless of the label attached to those parents by society. Wright and Seymour (2000) explained that for adolescents, parental incarceration has been associated with poor academic achievement, involvement in substance abuse, delinquency and gang-related activities, violence, and eventually adult criminal behavior.

Developing children, who are not experiencing trauma or separation by incarceration, are expected to be: forming attachments, developing trust, developing autonomy, learning to work productively, and achieving identity (Wright & Seymour, 2000). Developing children who are experiencing trauma may begin to show developmental delays, because too much of their emotional energy is focused on coping and survival. The separation may lead to an inability to form attachments later in life (Wright & Seymour, 2000). Disorganized feelings and behaviors in early childhood may lead to maladaptive behaviors in later childhood. Children who are separated from their parents by incarceration exhibit anger, isolation/sadness, fear/anxiety, and guilt. These emotions and the youths' reactions to them can lead to problems of violence, erosion of self-esteem, and dysfunctional behaviors (Wright & Seymour, 2000). Many of these children see no chance of having their lives follow paths that are different than those of their parents. In Kampfner's study (1995), half of the juveniles who are incarcerated had a parent who has been incarcerated and seventy percent of the children had psychological or emotional

problems. Kampfner contended, “If these children don’t deal with the problems, they’ll repeat the problem” (p. 91).

Available Support for Children of Incarcerated Parents

Since the late 1980s, the number of programs encouraging children to bond with their mothers has risen dramatically in local jails and state prisons (Wright & Seymour, 2000). Institutions know children and their parents need parental contact if there’s hope of salvaging good out of the separation. Kampfner (1995), referred to Marlene Sines, public information officer for the Ohio Reformatory for Women, who reported, “One goal is to break the cycle of incarceration by maintaining the bond by mother and child” (p. 94). The Ohio Reformatory for Women has instituted six mother-and-child programs since 1988. Some of the programs include parenting education, camp activities, three-day visits, and tape recording books to send to their children (Kampfner, 1995). The intent is to strengthen the family and help the children. In collaboration with the Syracuse City School District, the Center for Community Alternatives and Violence is Not the Answer groups have worked together to form support groups for children of incarcerated parents (Children of Incarcerated Parents, 2001). The support groups meet once each week in groups of five to ten youth to cover issues of isolation, self-esteem and shame, making positive choices, goal setting, self-reliance, developing support systems, substance abuse, the corrections system and legal issues. Through these programs, the support group youth have opportunities to participate in community service, job training and employment, peer education, and mentoring, as well as expanded positive activities, trips, and an annual awards banquet. The primary goals are to develop more specific information about the needs for services for children of incarcerated parents and to serve as a model of service delivery. The Children of Incarcerated Parents, ChIPs, program has eight specific program outcome goals and

specific program evaluation plans (Children of Incarcerated Parents, 2001). The most recent initiative to support children of prisoners has been introduced by President Bush. As a part of his Armies of Compassion Agenda, Bush has signed a \$25 million bill (Office of the Press Secretary, 2002). This bill supports the new Mentoring of Children of Prisoners initiative. This initiative is an extension of Bush's Promoting Safe and Stable Families program, which was introduced during his campaign, and submitted to Congress in 2001. The goals of this program are to prevent child abuse and neglect, to avoid the removal of children from their homes, and to support reunification if possible. If reunification is not possible, the alternative plan of his proposal is to promote and support adoptions. The motivation for this program is Bush's belief that every child in our country deserves to live in a safe, permanent, and loving family. The Mentoring Children of Prisoners program will provide mentoring through networks of community and religious organizations. The organizations will provide academic and emotional support and guidance. A final goal of this plan is to provide positive adult role models for children of prisoners.

Alternatives to Incarceration

The examples from Ohio and New York illustrate potential plans to attempt to break the generational cycle of incarceration. The Mothers in Prison, Children in Crisis Campaign advocated alternatives to incarceration as the sentencing standard for mothers. Alternatives have been legislatively endorsed for more than twenty years. In spite of evidence that alternatives are cost-effective, they are underfunded (Justice Works Community, 2001). Even though alternatives are enforceable and significantly affect recidivism, they are underutilized. The Mothers in Prison, Children in Crisis Campaign advocated alternatives because their guiding principle is that prisons should be the last resort, used only for the most violent and dangerous

citizens in our society (Justice Works Community, 2001). They believe that alternatives provide creative responses that serve the real needs of the individual and the community. Alternatives to incarceration include community service work, restitution, employment/job training assistance, alcohol and substance abuse treatment, probation, deferred sentencing, suspended sentence, conditional or supervised release, dispute resolution, fines, house arrest, residential care, and counseling. Imprisonment is the most expensive of all the legal sanctions, ranging from \$25,000 to \$60,000 annually per prisoner (Justice Works Community, 2001). For women with children, the cost is even higher if the children are placed in foster care. Foster care costs an additional \$20,000 per child annually. The average mother in prison has two or more children (Justice Works Community, 2001).

Active alternatives to incarceration, such as community service work, employment, and substance abuse treatment, make the best solutions because drug abuse and lack of a structured life is what has led these incarcerated mothers to prison. Their children would be better served if these mothers were able to take a more active parenting role and model responsible lifestyles to their children. The cost of mandatory substance abuse counseling or treatment would be less of a burden to taxpayers, than the cost of incarceration and foster care, not to mention all of the special needs assistance within the school systems for children who are adversely affected by their mothers' incarceration.

CHAPTER 3

GUIDELINES FOR AN EFFECTIVE INCARCERATED MOTHER-CHILD VISITATION PROGRAM

Unfortunately, the status quo is that mothers who are non-violent drug offenders are sent to prison, regardless of the tens of thousands of dollars per mother it is costing taxpayers. Given the current predicament, this situation has to be dealt with as well as it can be. If alternatives to incarceration are not an option, an effective mother-child visitation program must be put into effect. Incarcerated mothers and their children must be allowed to maintain contact to avoid children forming maladaptive behaviors and to secure the possibility of reunification.

1. Mother-child separation should be minimized.

Creasia Finney Hairston (1990) studied incarcerated mothers in a large metropolitan area of the Midwest. The purpose of her study was to examine parenting roles and responsibilities, plans for family reunification, and visiting concerns among incarcerated mothers. Hairston found that 56 of the 80 women studied identified parent-child separation as the most negative consequence of incarceration. After incarceration, many mothers have difficulty finding employment, which leads to homelessness and a return to substance abuse. To address these problems and break the cycle of crime-related behaviors, intervention needs to address the root of the problems. Systematic intervention for substance-dependent mothers would reduce the likelihood of repeated offenses (Gabel & Johnston, 1995). The time that a woman spends in prison is optimal for drug intervention because that is the time when she is sober, lonely, and thus motivated to make the changes that can lead her back to her children. To be successful, however, incarcerated mothers need the support of a professional-led program.

2. Prison staff must be supportive of intervention programs.

Prison staff must be committed to seeing that substance-dependent mothers get the assistance they need to remain sober. In addition to substance intervention, mothers and children need a program to facilitate visitation. A program that facilitates visitation makes the reunification process easier. To improve her chances of staying out of prison, a mother needs to be strong enough to stay away from the addictive substances, or other problems that led to her incarceration, and maintain a strong bond with her children. This is why prison staff need to be supportive of such programs.

3. Program facilitators need to be qualified and dedicated.

The women with substance abuse problems need substance abuse counselors to lead their programs. Programs are needed not only for the women themselves, but family counseling is needed, as well as drug education programs for the children of incarcerated mothers. The cycle should be stopped before it continues with the next generation. Licensed social workers need to lead educational and recreational programs. Without dedication to establishing and maintaining support programs, intergenerational incarceration will not be solved.

4. Visitation must be encouraged and facilitated.

The lack of visitation can have a permanent and harmful effect. In most cases children of incarcerated mothers reside with kinship families. An estimated 10 percent of the 1.9 million children are in foster care during their mother's incarceration (Wright & Seymour, 2000). If consistent contact between a mother and her children in foster care is not maintained, family reunification may not be possible. Child welfare laws provide for termination of parental rights

after 12-18 months if an incarcerated mother fails to sustain an adequate relationship with her children in foster care (Bloom, 1995).

The main reason children visit their incarcerated mothers infrequently, or not at all, is because of the distance between the correctional facility and the children's residence (Bloom, 1995). There are fewer women's prisons than men's prisons, so often the incarcerated mother is serving time a great distance away from her family. Another barrier to mother-child visitation is reluctance by the caregiver because of the caregiver's anger caused by the incarceration (Johnston, 1995). Finally, some mothers are too ashamed for their children to visit them in prison.

5. Visitation program must fit the needs of mothers and children.

The majority, 75 percent, of female inmates are also mothers of children under the age of 18 (Enos, 2001). Interactive program sessions need to address topics such as the following issues: self-esteem, drug abuse, relationships, coping with family crises, anatomy and physiology of the reproductive system (age appropriate), importance of touch, teenage pregnancy prevention (age appropriate), and optimum child rearing techniques. In addition to educational topics, recreational topics are also recommended, such as: games, sports, music, and arts and crafts. Activities need to be informative as well as encourage bonding between mother and children.

CHAPTER 4

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of a mother's incarceration on her children and to determine whether the retention of an incarcerated mother's role is favorable or harmful. The paper addressed five questions to accomplish this purpose:

1. What is characteristic of the nation's female prison population and why is the population increasing?

A common set of characteristics was identified to represent the nation's female prison population. Incarcerated women are usually poor, undereducated and underemployed. Most are unmarried and have a family history of substance abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse. Many incarcerated women have a family member who also has been incarcerated, and have prior offenses and recidivism themselves. They often have physical or emotional problems and are substance involved. The growth of the female prison population primarily involves drug offenses.

2. What are children's reactions to parental incarceration?

The profound effects on children of incarcerated parents have been affirmed by research. Although children retain bonds and love for parents, adolescents have a range of problems including: poor academic achievement, substance involvement, delinquency and gang membership, violent behaviors and eventual involvement in adult criminal behavior (Wright & Seymour, 2000). Children who are separated from their parents by incarceration exhibit: anger, isolation/sadness, fear/anxiety and guilt. These emotions and the youths' reactions to them can lead to problems of violence, erosion of self-esteem and dysfunctional behaviors (Wright &

Seymour, 2000). Kampfner (1995) studied juveniles who are incarcerated. She found that half of the juveniles have a parent who has been incarcerated and seventy percent of the children had psychological or emotional problems.

3. What support is available for children of incarcerated parents?

The support available for children of incarcerated parents is evidenced by the surge of programs. Since the late 1980s, local jails and state prisons have developed programs encouraging children to bond with their mothers. One goal of mother-and-child programs is to break the cycle of incarceration by maintaining the mother and child bond. The intent is to strengthen the family and help the children. The Children of Incarcerated Parents' program goals are to develop more specific information about the needs for services for children of incarcerated parents and develop a model of service delivery. The Mentoring Children of Prisoners initiative makes it possible for children who cannot participate in a mother-child visitation program to have the opportunity to have a strong, positive adult role model.

4. What alternatives are there to incarceration?

In spite of evidence that alternatives to incarceration are enforceable, significantly reduce recidivism and are cost-effective, they are underutilized and underfunded. There are many alternatives to incarceration including: community service work, restitution, employment/job training assistance, alcohol and substance abuse treatment, probation, deferred sentencing, suspended sentence, conditional or supervised release, dispute resolution, fines, house arrest, residential care and counseling. Imprisonment is the most expensive of all legal sanctions ranging from \$25,000 to \$60,000 annually per prisoner (Justice Works Community, 2001). The average mother in prison has two or more children, making the cost even higher. Foster care costs an additional \$20,000 per child annually (Justice Works Community, 2001).

5. What guidelines are needed for an effective program for mothers in an incarcerated setting?

This study determined that a set of guidelines is needed to maintain a mother-child bond during a mother's incarceration. The first step is to minimize mother-child separation. In a study by Hairston (1990), 56 of 80 women studied identified parent-child separation as the most negative consequence of incarceration. In addition, the prison staff must be supportive of intervention programs, and the mothers need a substance intervention program and a program to facilitate visitation. This will make reunification easier, improve her chances of staying out of prison and help her maintain a strong bond with her children. Next, to make the program a success, program facilitators need to be qualified and dedicated. Substance abuse counselors need to encourage women with substance abuse problems to attend programs for dealing with their problems. The program needs to involve incarcerated mothers' families and teach drug education to their children. The goal is to stop intergenerational substance abuse and subsequent incarceration. Another vital element of the program is the encouragement and facilitation of visitation. Reunification may not be possible if consistent contact is not maintained between a mother and her children. Termination of parental rights could occur if an incarcerated mother fails to sustain an adequate relationship after 12-18 months (Bloom, 1995). Finally, the visitation program must fit the needs of mothers and children. The majority of female inmates, 75 percent, are also mothers of children under the age of 18 (Enos, 2001). Interactive program sessions addressing educational and recreational topics are recommended to encourage bonding between mothers and children.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn from this study:

1. Early infant-mother relationships influence the quality of later relationships.
2. A secure base attachment, which occurs if a child is confident that his/her mother figure will be responsive and available if he/she encounters a frightening situation, is vital to the healthy development of a child.
3. Infants cared for by their mothers are more likely to thrive and to have a higher IQ.
4. Human touch is vital for an infant's survival.
5. Children need a stable home life and parental involvement to prevent psychological, social, and academic problems.

Recommendations

Based on a review of the literature, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Children need to maintain bonds with incarcerated parents by participating in a visitation program.
2. The visitation program must meet the needs of the parents and children to strengthen the family and help the children.
3. A visitation program is needed to prevent intergenerational incarceration.
4. A visitation program is needed to facilitate family reunification.
5. Alternatives to incarceration of mothers should be utilized to affect recidivism.
6. Further research is needed on the effects of a mother's incarceration on her children.

References

- Bloom, B. (1995). Imprisoned mothers. In K. Gabel & D. Johnston (Eds.), Children of incarcerated parents (pp. 21-30). New York: Lexington Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1988a). A secure base: Clinical applications of attachment theory. London: Routledge.
- Bowlby, J. (1988b). Developmental psychiatry comes of age. The American Journal of Psychiatry, 145,1-10.
- Bretherton, I. (1992). The origins of attachment theory: John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth. Developmental Psychology, 28, 759-775.
- Cable News Network. (2000). Almost 1.5 million U.S. children have a parent in prison, study shows. [On-line], <http://www.cnn.com/2000/US/08/30/prisoners.children/>
- Children of Incarcerated Parents. (2001). [On-line], <http://www.dreamscape.com/ccacny/chips.htm>
- Enos, S. (2001). Mothering from the inside. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Farkas, L. (2001). Fifty years of research and the big controversy. [On-line], <http://www.syix.com/adsg/fiftyyears.htm>
- Gabel, K., & Johnston, D. (1995). Children of incarcerated parents. New York: Lexington Books.
- Goldsmith, R. (2000). New York's imprisoned mothers. [On-line], http://news.bbco.uk/hi/english/audiovideo/programmes/crossing_continents/newsid_8710
- Hairston, C. F. (1990). Imprisoned mothers and their children. Affilia, 6 (2).
- Iowa Department of Corrections. (2002). Daily statistics – 6/14/2002. [On-line], <http://www.doc.state.ia.us/statistics.asp?Sec=Statistics>
- Justice Works Community. (2001). Mothers in prison, children in crisis campaign. [On-line], <http://www.justiceworks.org/html/mothers/html-ssi>
- Kampfner, C. (1995). Post-traumatic stress reactions in children of imprisoned mothers. In K. Gabel & D. Johnston (Eds.), Children of incarcerated parents (pp.89-100). New York: Lexington Books.
- McCafferty, D. (1999, June 4-6). No bars to a mother's love. USA Weekend.
- McKenzie, C. D. (1998). Delayed posttraumatic stress disorder mechanism and the unification model for mental illness. [On-line], <http://www.amer-mentalhealthassoc.com/part06.html>

- Moses, M. (1995). Keeping incarcerated mothers and their daughters together: Girl scouts beyond bars. National Institute of Justice, 1-22.
- Office of the Press Secretary. (2002). Fact sheet: Promoting strong families, safe children. [On-line], <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020117-3.html>
- Spitz, R. (1947). Ten things every child needs. [On-line], http://broadcast.webpoint.com/wpix/startsmart/startsmart_3stable.htm
- Stoppler, M. C. (2001). Cortisol: The stress hormone. [On-line], <http://stress.about.com/library/weekly/aa012901a.htm>
- Waters, E. (1997). The secure base concept in Bowlby-Ainsworth attachment theory and current research. [On-line], <http://www.psy.sunysb.edu/ewaters/EW-DC97.htm>
- Wright, L. (2000). Working with children and families separated by incarceration. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America.