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Abstract

Incarceration and recidivism negatively affect offenders, their children, families, and communities. Fit 2-B FATHERS, a social and parenting skills program for males in the corrections system, has been found to improve participants attitudes about themselves, their role as fathers, and their understanding of positive parenting practices. This program can help participants become less of a security risk during the remainder of their sentence and have reduced rates of recidivism following their release. When participants positively engage in the lives of their children, their children may be less likely to engage in at-risk behaviors that could lead to imprisonment.

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Introduction

The number of adults in the correctional population has been growing. Recently, the Department of Justice reported that 6.9 million adults were either incarcerated, or on probation or parole in the United States at yearend 2003--about 3.2% of the U.S. adult population, or one in every 32 adults (Glaze & Palla, 2004). This translates to roughly 4.8 million males and 885,000 females within the adult correctional population (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1997). Not only is the number of incarcerated adults overwhelming, but so is the rate of recidivism, or criminal acts that result in the re-arrest, reconviction, or return to prison with or without a new sentence during a 3-year period following the prisoner's release. A 15-state study found that over two-thirds of released prisoners were rearrested within 3 years (Langan & Levin, 2002).

This epidemic of arrest and recidivism causes negative consequences to those directly involved but also to their children, families, and communities. Nearly 56% of all incarcerated men have at least one child under the age of 18; 76% have two or more minor children (Mumola, 2000). The majority (58%) of these children are less than 10 years old, and about 43% of the fathers lived with their children prior to imprisonment (Mumola, 2000). Consequently, these children are emotionally, economically, and socially scarred because of their parent's incarceration, and without intervention these youth are five times more likely than other children to become incarcerated themselves (Mazza, 2002).

In general, fathers in prison do care about their children and about how their children perceive them as fathers. Most fathers express concern for their children, worry about them, and worry about being replaced in their children's lives by someone else. Many readily acknowledge they are not currently doing, or may not have done, the things a good father does. (See Hairston [1998] for a complete review of the major issues and challenges facing incarcerated fathers.)

Prisoners often do not exhibit internal locus of control and the ability to empathize with others (Winters, 2000), both key factors influencing positive social and parenting behaviors. The correctional education literature suggests that social and parenting skills education for the corrections population can improve social behaviors (e.g., Schippers, Maerker, & DeFuentes-Merillas, 2001). In fact, prisoners who gain personal, family-life, and social skills are empowered to make a positive reentry into the community following release (Reinhart, 1991; Williams, 1996), are less likely to recidivate (Carlson, 1995; Jancic, 1998), and potentially are more likely to be the good fathers they desire to be (Hairston, 1998).

Unfortunately fathers in prison frequently are overlooked or excluded from parenting programs (Hairston, 1998). Although scant, the research on the effectiveness of parenting programming on fathers suggests that such programs can improve fathers'

- Knowledge and attitudes regarding positive parenting practices (Bushfield, 2004);
- Acceptance and perceptions of their children as well as their stress associated with fathering (Landreth & Lobaugh, 1998); and
- Parental locus of control and satisfaction with parenting (Wilczak & Markstrom, 1999).

Overall, this is an appropriate population that could benefit from Extension, particularly Family and Consumer Sciences, programming. Although Extension has been offering programming to this audience (e.g., Gao, Dupree, & McKee, 1995; Kazura, Temke, Toth, & Hunter, 2002; Maiorano, 2001), research on the effectiveness of such programming is limited (e.g., Debord, Head, & Sherrill, 2004).

The Program: Fit 2-B FATHERS

Fit 2-B FATHERS (F2BF) is an educational curriculum in which research-based information about inmate education and parenting education have been combined with the author's professional experiences to create a social and fathering skills program. The goal of the program is to help males involved in the corrections system (e.g., incarcerated, sentenced to an alternative to incarceration, or participating in other forms of community-transition programming) to become better men and fathers.

The short-term goal of this program is for participants to improve their knowledge, confidence, and skills as these pertain to social and family relations. The intermediate goal is for participants to exhibit better social and fathering behaviors (e.g., healthy relations with their children and positive interactions with others, including family, friends and co-workers). As a result, participants may become less of a security risk during the remainder of their sentence, and less at-risk for recidivism when compared to non-participants (Brenner, 1998).

In regards to the long-term impacts of the program on their children, research shows that children with involved, loving fathers are significantly more likely to do well in school, have healthy self-esteem, exhibit empathy and pro-social behavior, and avoid high-risk behaviors such as drug use, truancy, and criminal activity compared to children who have uninvolved fathers (Horn & Sylvester, 2002).

Overall, F2BF promotes physical, practical, and social fitness:

- **Physical fitness.** A physically fit father has the strength to perform the duties of fatherhood and to keep up with his children. To promote physical fitness, each session begins with 5 minutes of stretching and light calisthenics.
- **Practical fitness.** A father with practical knowledge about parenting and social interactions is equipped with the tools to effectively perform his paternal and social responsibilities. This 50-minute portion of each session utilizes individual self-disclosure, group discussion, direct teaching, and role-play situations to present social and parenting skills.
- **Social fitness.** A socially fit father is one who can relate to children and other adults as thinkers, doers, and communicators worthy of respect. He is also able to have healthy relationships with his peers and colleagues.

The development of F2BF was guided by The National Extension Parent Education Model (NEPEM) (Smith, Cudaback, Goddard, & Myers-Walls, 1994). Over time, the program has evolved from nine sessions (see Maiorano, 2001) focused primarily on parenting (e.g., child development, importance of play, communication, guidance and discipline, promoting literacy and school success) to 17 sessions that now incorporate more general life skills training as well (e.g., job planning, money management, balancing work and family, healthy lifestyles). Those who complete at least 80% of the sessions receive a certificate of completion during a graduation celebration where they have the opportunity to invite family members to share in their accomplishment. For more information about the individual sessions of Fit 2-B FATHERS and the program visit <<http://jefferson.osu.edu/fcs/fathers.htm>>.

Current Study

The following provides a general description of those who have participated in F2BF during the past 5 years and assesses the effectiveness of F2BF in achieving its short-term goals. In other

words, did participants' attitudes about themselves, their role as fathers, and positive parenting practices improve? Parent education programming often assumes that changes in attitudes and knowledge are precursors to changes in parenting behaviors (Wilczak & Markstrom, 1999). Although we could not assess the impact of the program on positively influencing their social and familial behaviors following release, we did examine their rate of recidivism: were participants less likely to recidivate as a result of participation in the program?

Who Participated in F2BF?

The program was conducted at a community-based correctional facility that serves six mostly-rural Appalachian counties in East Central Ohio. Inmates are low-level felons who serve, on average, a 180-day (6- month) sentence.

- Between September 1999 and August 2004, F2BF was delivered to 227 inmates across 15 program series.
- As summarized in Table 1, most participants were Caucasian (81%), between 20-39 years old (79%), not married (76%), and fathers (74%).
- Based on data collected from those participating in the more recent 10-, 12- and 17-session groups (not shown), most participants tend to be high school graduates (74%), employed prior to being incarcerated (54%), and earning less than \$20,000/year (58%).

Table 1.
Demographic Characteristics of Fit-2B-Father Participants

	Overall (N=227)	9-Session (n=64)	10- Session (n=41)	12- Session (n=96)	17- Session (n=26)
Race (%)					
Caucasian	81.0	87.5	95.1	75.8	61.5
African American	12.4	10.9	4.9	11.6	30.8
Other	6.6	1.6	0.0	12.7	7.6
Age (years, %)					
Less than 20	10.1	6.3	17.1	10.4	7.7
20-29	50.2	37.5	53.7	56.3	53.8
30-39	27.8	39.1	19.5	21.9	34.6
40 or older	11.9	17.2	9.8	11.5	3.8
Marital Status (%)					
Single	42.7	40.0	36.6	48.4	38.5
Cohabiting	16.4	13.3	24.4	14.0	19.2
Married/Remarried	24.1	23.3	31.7	23.7	15.3
Separated/Divorced	16.8	23.3	7.3	14.0	26.9
Have Children (% Yes)	86.3	85.9	75.6	88.5	96.2
Number of Children					
No Children	13.7	14.1	24.4	11.5	3.8
One Child	40.3	40.0	41.9	44.7	24.0
Two to Three Children	41.9	43.7	38.8	44.7	32.0
Four or More Children	17.8	16.4	19.4	10.7	44.0

What Are the Level of Participation in and Graduation from F2BF?

- F2BF has grown over time to be integral to the correctional facility's rehabilitation efforts. As such, inmates who are mandated to attend a parent education program are given the option to attend F2BF in order to fulfill this requirement (Table 2).
- Overall, most (77%) participants attended at least 50% of the classes offered and 60% graduated from the program (i.e., attended at least 80% of the sessions).

Table 2.

	Overall N=227	9-Session (n=64)	10- Session (n=41)	12- Session (n=96)	17- Session (n=26)
Voluntary (vs. Mandated) Participation (% Yes)	54.2	100.0	68.3	29.2	11.5
Percent of Sessions Attended					
24% or less	12.9	23.5	7.3	6.3	19.2
25 – 49%	10.5	12.5	9.7	11.6	3.8
50 – 74%	18.8	7.8	43.9	15.9	19.1
75 – 100%	57.7	56.3	39.0	66.3	57.7
Graduated Program (%Yes)	59.9	56.3	58.5	64.6	53.8

Graduation rates were affected by whether the inmates started the program late, were "unsuccessfully released" (e.g., broke the rules and were taken to prison), or were successfully released prior to completing a series. To determine whether other factors (i.e., demographic characteristics) may be associated with graduation rates, analyses (ANOVAs and Chi-square tests) were performed.

- There were no statistically significant differences between those who graduated and those who did not in age, race, marital status, level of education, prior employment status, or whether their participation in the program was voluntary or mandated.
- Of those inmates who reported being fathers (n=183), 65.0% graduated from the program compared to only 30% of all non-fathers (n=30). The difference was statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 13.2, p < .001$.

Program Impact

Pre-and post-tests were administered during the first and last session of the program to assess changes in participants' attitudes about being fathers, their self-esteem, and knowledge of appropriate parenting skills. Earlier in the program, a True/False survey was used, and scores across 10-items (1=correct response) were summed, with higher scores reflective of more positive attitudes. In order to observe variability in the participants' attitudes and level of knowledge, the survey was revised in 2001 to 9-items with a 6-point Likert scale (1=Disagree; 6 = Agree). Mean scores were computed, and again, higher scores reflected more positive attitudes about themselves, fathering, and parenting practices.

Who Completed Both Pre- and Post-Test Evaluations?

- Overall, 74 of the 227 participants (33%) provided complete data on both the pre- and post-test evaluation survey.
- No statistically significant differences were found on pre-test scores between those who only completed the pre-test (n=71) and those who completed both tests (n=74).
- Not surprisingly, those participants who completed both tests were more likely to attend a greater percentage of the sessions ($M = 93.8\%$) than those who did not complete both tests ($M = 57.9\%$), $F(1, 224) = 115.6, p < .001$.
- Mandated participants were more likely to complete both surveys (47.1%) compared to participants who enrolled in the class voluntarily (23.6%), $\chi^2(1) = 16.1, p < .001$.
- Those who graduated from the program were more likely to complete both surveys than those who did not (54.4% vs. 0%), $\chi^2(1) = 73.5, p < .001$.
- Although the majority of program participants were Caucasian (n=184; 81.1%), only 29.3% completed both surveys compared to 46.5% of all non-Caucasian participants, $\chi^2(1) = 4.7, p = .03$.
- Fathers were more likely to complete both surveys compared to non-fathers (35.2% vs. 16.1%), $\chi^2(1) = 4.4, p = .04$.
- Overall, 93.2% of the pre- and post-test surveys were completed by fathers. Thus, the findings are primarily reflective of the program's impact on fathers.

What Impact Did the Program Have on Participants' Attitudes?

- Overall, the findings demonstrate a statistically significant (yet modest) program impact on improving attitudes (Table 3). In fact, most ($n=47$; 63.5%) participants demonstrated higher scores on their post-test compared to their pre-test scores.

Table 3.
Program Impact on Participants' Attitudes: Overall Assessment

	True-False Sample ($n = 13$)	Likert Scale Sample ($n = 61$)
Pre-test score: Mean (SD)	8.85 (1.14)	5.01 (0.55)
Post-test score: Mean (SD)	9.69 (0.48)	5.31 (0.68)
Mean score change (SD)	.85 (1.14)	.30 (0.75)
T-test (p-value)	2.67 (.02)	3.11 (.003)
Program impact: N (%)		
Attitudes worsened (scores decreased)	1 (7.7)	16 (27.1)
Attitudes remained the same	5 (38.5)	3 (5.1)
Attitudes improved (scores increased)	7 (53.8)	40 (67.8)

- Examination of the responses to the individual items (for those who completed the Likert scale only, $n=61$) revealed that participants felt better about themselves, felt in control of their lives, better understood effective discipline practices, and were more likely to recognize play as an important way of learning for children and the importance of giving children choices (Table 4).

Table 4.
Program Impact on Participants' Attitudes: Per Item Assessment ($n = 61$)

	Pre-Test Means	Post-Test Means	T-Value
Being a father is an important activity for me	5.8	5.7	-0.7
Children need a father who is present in their lives.	5.9	5.8	-0.6
I feel good about myself.	4.3	5.2	3.6**
I have control over future consequences	4.7	5.2	1.7*
Children learn best when they are punished for misbehavior (reversed responses)	3.4	4.0	2.2**
Parents do not lose power if they give children choices	4.9	5.1	0.8
Play is an important way for children to learn about the world	5.2	5.6	2.4**
Children who are given choices are better at making decisions on their own	5.1	5.5	1.8*
Reading to children will improve their success in school.	5.8	5.7	-0.9
* $p < .10$; ** $p < .05$.			

What Impact Did the Program Have on Recidivism?

Data to assess program impact on recidivism rates was available for 201 of the program participants. Table 5 summarizes the number of participants who recidivated following release.

- As of August 2004, 136 of the 201 participants (67.7%) who have been released have not been charged with another crime.
- According to a report provided by the Eastern Ohio Correction Center (EOCC; Martha Ghenne, personal communication), of the 183 inmates successfully released in 2000, a total of 58 (31.6%) were re-incarcerated by 2003. A similar trend was found for F2BF participants who also were released that same year.
- Among the 120 Fit 2-B FATHERS participants who were released on or before August 2001, 59.2% were *not* charged with a new crime within 3 years. Analyses show that there is no statistically significant difference between those who did and did not recidivate on the percent of sessions attended, graduation status, paternal status, or change in attitudes scores.

Table 5.
Recidivism Rate for Program Participants by Year of Release

Year Released	Number Released	No New Charge	Recidivated		
			Within 1 Year	Within 2 Years	Within 3 Years
1999	15	8 (53.3%)	4 (26.7%)	3 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)
2000	66	46 (69.7%)	11 (16.7%)	4 (6.1%)	5 (7.6%)
2001	39	17 (43.6%)	8 (20.5%)	9 (23.1%)	5 (12.8%)
2002	42	33 (78.6%)	8 (19.0%)	1 (2.4%)	--
2003	39	32 (82.1%)	7 (17.9%)	--	--

Discussion

Evaluation of F2BF indicated that the social and parenting skills program had a positive impact on improving participants' attitudes about themselves, their role as fathers, and their understanding of positive parenting practices. Although the current measures are yielding statistically significant results, the practical significance of these findings is modest. As such, retrospective/post-then-pre evaluation tools have been designed and are now being implemented that may yield more variance between pre- and post-test scores than are currently revealed using traditional pre- and post-tests (e.g., Ralid et al., 2004; Rockwell & Kohn, 1989).

Also, per-session evaluation tools are now being administered to assess changes in participants' knowledge, confidence, and skills as they relate to each session's topic. Furthermore, whether these fathers take the knowledge and skills that they have learned and actually apply them is uncertain; further research is needed to examine participants' parenting behavior after release in order to determine if the program achieves its intermediate goals.

Findings also showed that recidivism rates for F2BF participants are very similar when compared to the recidivism rates of the general population of the EOCC. However, there are differences between the definitions each uses for "recidivism."

For example, the EOCC definition of recidivism accounts only for released inmates who have committed a more *serious* crime (e.g., non-misdemeanor) than the one for which they have previously served time. However, when compiling the recidivism data for this article, all criminal charges were counted as recidivism. The F2BF recidivism rate, by definition, could therefore, be more accurately compared with the national recidivism rates; yet because the EOCC serves a different population (first-time, low level felons compared to state and federal inmates who are higher-classified and possibly repeat offenders), even this is not a valid comparison.

After F2BF is offered in other types of correctional settings and recidivism data is collected on a variety of participants, there may be more accurate findings on which to report. But until then, the data still indicates a slight reduction in the recidivism rate of participants.

Overall, F2BF shows promise for providing Family and Consumer Sciences Extension programming with a particular focus on social and fathering skills education to males in the correction system. Although the program has yet to be used in institutions that house higher-classified felons serving longer sentences, it is believed that this curriculum will work as well with that population as it has with the current one. Also, offering F2BF as a community-based post release program could increase the likelihood of successful reintegration and decrease the recidivism rate of ex-prisoners (La Vigne, Thomson, Vischer, Travis, & Kacknowski, 2003).

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