



California State University, San Bernardino  
**CSUSB ScholarWorks**

---

Electronic Theses, Projects, and Dissertations

Office of Graduate Studies

---

6-2014

# INCARCERATED FATHERS AND THEIR CHILDREN: EFFECTS OF A RECIPROCALLY CONNECTED RELATIONSHIP

Amber Jay-Marie Houghton

*California State University - San Bernardino*, [houghtoa@coyote.csusb.edu](mailto:houghtoa@coyote.csusb.edu)

Abigail Navarro

*California State University - San Bernardino*, [navaa334@coyote.csusb.edu](mailto:navaa334@coyote.csusb.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd>

---

## Recommended Citation

Houghton, Amber Jay-Marie and Navarro, Abigail, "INCARCERATED FATHERS AND THEIR CHILDREN: EFFECTS OF A RECIPROCALLY CONNECTED RELATIONSHIP" (2014). *Electronic Theses, Projects, and Dissertations*. Paper 25.

This Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Office of Graduate Studies at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses, Projects, and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@csusb.edu](mailto:scholarworks@csusb.edu).

INCARCERATED FATHERS AND THEIR CHILDREN: EFFECTS  
OF A RECIPROCALLY CONNECTED RELATIONSHIP

---

A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

---

by  
Amber Jay-Marie Houghton  
Abigail Navarro  
June 2014

INCARCERATED FATHERS AND THEIR CHILDREN: EFFECTS  
OF A RECIPROCALLY CONNECTED RELATIONSHIP

---

A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

---

by  
Amber Jay-Marie Houghton

Abigail Navarro

June 2014

Approved by:

Dr. Ray E. Liles, Faculty Supervisor, Social Work

Dr. Carolyn Eggleston, Director, Cal State  
San Bernardino Reentry Initiative

Dr. Rosemary McCaslin, M.S.W. Research Coordinator

© 2014 Amber Jay-Marie Houghton and Abigail Navarro

## ABSTRACT

The present study was aimed at exploring the issues faced by previously incarcerated fathers and their children. A qualitative design utilizing face to face interviews was used to answer the question: according to previously incarcerated fathers, what are the differences between the reciprocal connectedness of fathers and their children prior to, during, and following incarceration? Interviews were conducted with 10 previously incarcerated fathers.

Researchers found that all participants had positive relationships with their children at some point prior to incarceration. Furthermore, during incarceration the reciprocal connectedness of these relationships severely decreased due to limited or no contact. Following incarceration, fathers continued to have difficulty rebuilding the connection they once had with their children due to continued limited or nonexistent contact and mistrust by their children.

Incarcerated fathers and their children are an underserved population in need of additional resources. The findings of the study add to the literature about the relationship between previously incarcerated fathers and their children, in hopes that further research and services will be developed.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would first like to acknowledge our advisor Dr. Ray Liles for his guidance and support throughout this research project. Also, we would like to acknowledge Dr. Carolyn Eggleston for allowing us to utilize Cal State San Bernardino Reentry Initiative's facilities and students. Lastly, we would like to thank our families for their love and support throughout our graduate program.

## DEDICATION

The researchers would like to dedicate this study to the Cal State San Bernardino Reentry Initiative (CSRI) and it's students. For without their openness this research project would not have been successful. The study is also dedicated to all incarcerated fathers and their children. The researchers hope that awareness and services for this population grows.

Lastly, we would also like to dedicate this research project to Genna West, MSW. Thank you so much for all of your help and mentorship. This study would not have been possible without you.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iv
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	
Problem Statement .....	1
Purpose of the Study .....	6
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	
Introduction .....	8
General Overview .....	8
Effects of Parental Incarceration on Children .....	10
Maternal Incarceration .....	16
Paternal Incarceration.....	21
Summary .....	24
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS	
Introduction .....	25
Study Design .....	25
Sampling.....	26
Data Collection and Instruments.....	27
Procedures .....	27
Protection of Human Subjects .....	27
Data Analysis.....	28
Summary .....	28
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS	
Introduction.....	29



Demographics .....	29
Father-Child Relationship before Incarceration .....	30
Father-Child Relationship during Incarceration.....	31
Father’s Relationship with Child’s Caregiver .....	33
Father-Child Relationship after Incarceration .....	35
Absence of The Father’s Parents .....	36
Additional Themes .....	37
Recidivism.....	37
Memory Issues.....	37
Desire for Relationship.....	37
Perception of Effects.....	38
Summary .....	39
 CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION	
Introduction.....	40
Discussion .....	40
Parent-Child Relationship .....	40
Recidivism.....	41
Paternal Absence.....	42
Parent-Caregiver Relationship .....	42
Attachment and Reciprocal Connectedness Theories .....	43
Attachment Theory.....	43
Reciprocal Connectedness Theory .....	44
Limitations .....	45
Sample Size and Method .....	45

Generalizabilty .....	46
Incentives.....	46
Memories .....	47
Perspectives .....	47
Topic Sensitivity .....	47
Recommendations.....	48
Social Work Practice.....	48
Policy .....	49
Research.....	50
Conclusions .....	51
APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE .....	54
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT .....	59
APPENDIX C: DEBRIEFING STATEMENT .....	62
REFERENCES.....	64
ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE .....	67

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the significance of parental incarceration and its effects on children. Disparities in the body of literature on the topic are also introduced. Reasons why the proposed study is necessary and its significance for the field of social work are also discussed.

#### Problem Statement

Criminality brings forth an array of issues for society. Currently, the United States has the highest rate of imprisonment in the world (Tasi & Scommegna, 2012). Although the United States only accounts for five percent of the world population, it houses 25% of the world's prisoners. Imprisonment in the United States has continued to rise over time, from 1980 to 2008 the incarcerated population quadrupled to roughly 2.3 million individuals ("Criminal Justice", 2012-2013).

The incarcerated population is composed of predominantly men, however rates of incarcerated women have increased more rapidly than men; between 1980 and 2010, the rates of incarceration for women increased by 646 percent ("Incarcerated Women", 2012). Interestingly, women in prison also had a higher rate of mental health problems in comparison to men; 73 percent of women suffered from mental health issues, compared to 55 percent of men. In addition, women in prison are more likely to have children under the

age of eighteen (62% women, 51% men). Compared to imprisoned fathers, mothers served as the primary caregiver for their children prior to incarceration (“Incarcerated Women”, 2012). Overall the rates of imprisonment differ significantly for men and women in the United States.

The large increase in incarceration over the years can be attributed to multiple factors. An increase in drug related arrests could account for some of this increase. Mandatory sentencing minimums and tougher sentencing can also account for the rise in imprisonment (“Criminal Justice”, 2012-2013). Imprisonment has many implications for the individual and families it affects. The historical rises in imprisonment rates are important for understanding the many problems that accompany incarceration. As incarceration rates increase more and more children and families are affected.

Glaze and Marusechak estimate nearly 1.7 million children are affected by parental incarceration and approximately one fourth are under four years old (as cited in Makariev & Shaver, 2010, p. 311). However, data about children of incarcerated parents are lacking because the criminal system does not regularly collect in-depth data regarding prisoners and their children. Accurate statistics regarding children of incarcerated parents are vital to understanding the impacts of parental incarceration on children and more concise data are needed. Children of incarcerated parents can feel abandoned and suffer with issues of separation. Research indicates mothers are typically the caregivers for their children before incarceration and due to

maternal incarceration the parent-child relationship is highly disrupted (“Incarcerated Women”, 2012). Issues children face after parental incarceration range but can include anger, depression, acting out, shame and lack of stability (Makariev & Shaver, 2010),

In order to negate some of the negative effects parental incarceration has on children, policies and programs have been implemented. In 1997, former president Bill Clinton signed into law the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997 with the hopes of creating permanency, through adoption for children in foster care (Camp, 1997). ASFA requires the termination of parental rights of a child living in foster care for 15 out of the most recent 22 months (Camp, 1997). The implementation of ASFA lead to parental rights being terminated for individuals capable of parenting upon their release from prison. In order to reduce the rate of unnecessary termination of parental rights states began amending ASFA. California’s amendment requires that reasonable reunification services be offered to incarcerated parents, such as: phone calls between child and parent, transportation for visitation at the prison, and additional resources to the child’s current caregiver (Wallace, 2012). While California’s amendment helped to lessen the rate of termination of parental rights, issues have remained in reunifying.

One main barrier in reunifying children with their incarcerated parent was maintaining the relationship. Therefore, visitation programs have been created to help make visits possible between incarcerated parents and their

children. One such visitation program is Girl Scouts Beyond Bars (GSBB) (Block & Potthast, 1998). GSBB provides transportation for the daughters of incarcerated mothers to Girl Scout meetings and activities at the prison (Block & Potthast, 1998).

Other programs that may help mitigate the negative effects of parental incarceration are parental education and mentorship programs. Research shows that education programs focusing on the incarcerated parent's parenting skills and the child's well-being help to reduce negative effects of incarceration on both parent and child once reunified (Makariev & Shaver, 2010). Mentorship programs utilize one-on-one contact between the child of an incarcerated parent and a non-related adult to foster relationship building, respect, and loyalty which will help the child overcome adversity (Shlafer, Poehlmann, Coffino, & Hanneman, 2009). These programs have shown to help alleviate some of the negative effects experienced by children of incarcerated parents (Shlafer, Poehlmann, Coffino, & Hanneman, 2009).

As the rate of incarceration increases the number of children of incarcerated parents involved with child welfare also increases. While children of incarcerated parents experience risks similar to other children involved in child welfare such as poverty, domestic violence, and substance abuse, they also experience their own risks (Seymour, 1998). Often these unique risks are not known and are left unaddressed (Seymour, 1998). In order to fully support

children of incarcerated parents it is imperative that their needs be addressed by social workers.

Often, research looking at the relationship between incarcerated parent and child focuses on attachment. In Bowlby's (1969, 1973, 1980) theory of attachment he states that securely attached children learn to interact with the world from a secure base and feel comfortable and confident while exploring. Attachment for children of incarcerated parents tends to be insecure, making interacting with and exploring the world more difficult (Murray & Murray, 2010). However, the term attachment often refers to a unidirectional relationship between child and caregiver, where the child bonds with the caregiver but the caregiver does not attach to the child (Arredondo & Leonard, 2000).

When working with incarcerated parents it is often more useful to look at the degree of closeness and warmth between the child and parent than to look at attachment. This bidirectional relationship, focused on the quality of the connection is referred to as reciprocal connectedness (Arredondo & Leonard, 2000). While the degree of reciprocal connectedness seems to be useful in determining the quality of the relationship between incarcerated parents and their children there is a large gap in the research.

The current body of research concerning parental incarceration is primarily focused on the impact of maternal incarceration. Although mothers have been shown to fulfill the caregiving role more often, as culture shifts more fathers are taking on the caregiving role. The paternal relationship is also

important for children and a father's absence has the potential to impact the child. Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklaid, and Bermberg (2008) report father involvement reduces the amount of behavioral problems in boys and psychological problems in girls. Delinquency and economic disadvantage is also positively affected by father involvement (Sarkadi et al., 2008). The degree of closeness and quality of relationship between father and child is impacted when the father is imprisoned. Therefore, a need for additional paternal incarceration research exists.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study is to look at the reciprocal connectedness of previously incarcerated fathers with their children. As previously stated, research has shown that fathers' involvement and connectedness with their children has positive effects on children. Therefore, if reciprocal connectedness remains high between incarcerated fathers and their children it may help buffer the negative effects incarceration has on children. This study will utilize an exploratory qualitative design with extensive interviews of previously incarcerated fathers regarding their connection with their children. Due to the existing gap in literature regarding paternal incarceration, the proposed qualitative design hopes to add to its understanding.

The present study could aid in filling the gap in knowledge regarding incarcerated fathers and their children. As more knowledge is gained about



the effects of paternal incarceration social workers can become better educated about the population. An increase in awareness of the impact on and needs of children of incarcerated parents can lead to better services provided by the social work field. Better understanding of paternal incarceration may lead to program development, which could reduce negative effects and foster the father-child relationship.

The generalist model is a method used by social workers to aid clients. It includes engagement, assessment, planning, implementation, evaluation, and termination. The proposed study would address the assessment portion of the generalist model. The information gained through the study would provide additional information regarding paternal incarceration and could lead into the planning phase of developing additional resources for the population of incarcerated fathers.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

The current chapter aims to provide an overview of the existing literature regarding parental incarceration and its significance for children. The chapter will discuss the various ways children are impacted by the incarceration of a parent, such as behavioral, emotional or attachment-related effects. Furthermore, literature addressing specifically incarcerated mothers or fathers and the impact on their children will be addressed. Lastly, the need for research with a reciprocal-connectedness approach to the relationship between incarcerated fathers and their children is addressed.

#### General Overview

According to Cunningham (2001) the purpose of imprisonment is to punish individuals engaging in criminal activity but it also punishes the children of these individuals. Parents are ripped away from their children, leaving the children with many unanswered questions and often in a new home. The rate of incarceration amongst both males and females is increasing, with the rate of female incarceration increasing more rapidly (Cunningham, 2001). Also, nearly two-thirds of all inmates are parents (Cunningham, 2001, p. 36). This means that more children are being affected by parental incarceration than ever before.

Regardless of whether these children are residing with their non-incarcerated parent, in a relative's home, or in foster care, they are likely to experience negative effects due to their parent's incarceration. Children are often lied to about their parent's whereabouts (Cunningham, 2001). This creates mistrust and confusion for the children (Cunningham, 2001). The relationship between the children and their incarcerated parent is often difficult to maintain, due to: being unable to visit the incarcerated parent because of distance, travel expenses, or inconvenience; being unable to speak with the parent on the phone because of the expense of long distance or collect calls; or being placed with a caregiver unwilling or unable to assist in maintaining contact between the child and the parent (Cunningham, 2001). When obstacles are overcome and children are able to visit their incarcerated parent the visitation may be uncomfortable due to prison regulations. In order to improve visitation and facilitate the parent-child relationship, programs should be implemented that create a more inviting and comfortable atmosphere for visitors (Cunningham, 2001). These programs would create visitation centers that provide a non-threatening environment, quiet areas for talking, and age appropriate toys for children ultimately encouraging engagement with parents (Cunningham, 2001).

While analyzing parental incarceration trends spanning 11 years Johnson and Waldfogel (2002) found that the rate of parental incarceration had tripled. Over the period of the 11 years, fewer incarcerated parents had

custody of their children before being imprisoned due to repeated periods of incarceration (Johnson & Waldfogel, 2002). Parents also reported greater risk factors (histories of physical and sexual abuse, prior incarceration, incarceration of their own parents, and substance abuse) prior to incarceration than reported in previous years (Johnson & Waldfogel, 2002). While it is known that contact between individuals is important for maintaining relations, over the course of Johnson and Waldfogel's (2002) study, they discovered that rates of communication between incarcerated parents and their children had declined. These findings suggest that the issue of parental incarceration is only amplifying as time progresses and it is imperative that more knowledge regarding this population and ways to address their struggles be identified.

#### Effects of Parental Incarceration on Children

Makariev and Shaver (2010) take a closer look at parental incarceration and attachment by summarizing relevant research and interventions.

Research has found that parental incarceration increases the likelihood of antisocial behavior, delinquent behavior, mental health issues, and substance abuse for children. Due to the number of children being impacted and many in the critical ages for attachment formation, it is important to understand how to assist children of incarcerated parents.

Makariev and Shaver (2010) present information related to the topic through a chart that depicts the factors, which impact children's outcomes. According to Makariev and Shaver (2010) children's outcomes are impacted

by intergenerational transmissions of attachment, their incarcerated parent's problems, the quality of their relationship with the parent before incarceration, directly by the incarceration and the substitute care they receive while their parent is incarcerated. Intergenerational transmissions of attachment refer to the attachment styles and quality of relationships the family has experienced generation to generation; those styles are carried down and impact children. Additionally, the problems the parent may experience such as poverty, mental illness, or poor parenting skills also impact children's attachment.

Relationships between parents and children are strained by the actual incarceration because of separation. This separation is a traumatic experience for the child. Lastly the substitute care children receive also impacts their outcomes (Makariev & Shaver, 2010). Therefore, the quality of care, closeness, and stability of substitute care is important (Makariev & Shaver, 2010).

The outcomes of children with incarcerated parents are impacted by many factors, but Makariev and Shaver (2010) propose that attachment based interventions can help buffer against negative impacts. Specifically, parenting classes within the prison system can be helpful to parents (Makariev & Shaver, 2010). Parents can be taught about attachment and the emotional needs of their children (Makariev & Shaver, 2010). Helping incarcerated parents with their issues, providing education about children's attachment related needs, and other parenting interventions can improve the quality of the

relationship between children and parents (Makariev & Shaver, 2010). Multiple studies of parenting interventions have found positive effects including reduced recidivism rates for parents and fewer negative effects on children (Makariev & Shaver, 2010).

Children of incarcerated parents have an increased potential for psychopathology. Murray and Murray (2010) investigate child psychopathology and its connection to attachment. Through a review of literature, Murray and Murray (2010) agree that parental incarceration is a predictor of future psychopathology in children. Furthermore, the degree of separation due to incarceration is said to inhibit attachment, possibly leading to the development of an insecure attachment between the child and caregiver. Interestingly, maternal incarceration is found to have more risk factors for children than paternal incarceration. Because mothers are typically the primary caregivers, children may experience more turbulence when the mother is imprisoned (Murray & Murray, 2010). However Murray and Murray (2010) also note that risk factors present prior to parental incarceration are important when considering child psychopathology, therefore longitudinal studies are suggested for future research. In addition cross-national studies should be developed to research the effects of policies on incarcerated parents and their children (Murray & Murray, 2010).

Shlafer and Poehlmann (2010) conducted a longitudinal study, which sought to assess the relationships between the child and current caregiver,

child and incarcerated parent and the behavioral issues of the child. The study was conducted using both quantitative and qualitative designs with 57 families in a mentorship program. Children who participated in the program ranged from age four to age 15, with the majority of the participants being daughters of incarcerated fathers (Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010).

The participants were given a survey upon intake and at the six-month mark, but were also interviewed each month (Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010). When asked about their incarcerated parent 39% of the children refused to respond. Of those who responded 41% reported positive perceptions and 31% reported negative perceptions of their incarcerated parent (Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010). Behavioral issues noted by the caregivers (predominately mothers) were peer rejection, externalizing behaviors, and lack of self-confidence. Results found by Shlafer and Poehlmann (2010) coincide with the current research on parental incarceration, but the researchers suggest a further analysis of the difference between the effects of an incarcerated father versus an incarcerated mother.

Fritsch and Burkhead (1981) conducted a study to assess the behavior of children of incarcerated parents. Inmates at a minimum-security prison were surveyed as participants; in all, responses from 91 prisoners were used (38 males, 53 females). Researchers sought to investigate the effects of parental absence, differences in behavior based on which parent was incarcerated, whether new behavioral issues were caused or existing issues were

exacerbated, and lastly, whether the child's knowledge of the incarceration was significant (Fritsch & Burkhead, 1981). The findings of the study revealed that in fact children are affected by the separation from their parent. Also the sex of the parent was significantly related to the types of behavior the child exhibited; children of incarcerated mothers tended to exhibit internalizing behaviors such as withdrawal, excessive crying, nightmares and fear of school, while children of incarcerated fathers exhibited externalizing behaviors such as aggressiveness, running away, and discipline problems (Fritsch & Burkhead, 1981).

Additionally, it was noted that not only were previous behavioral issues intensified with parental incarceration, but new issues also presented (Fritsch & Burkhead, 1981). Lastly, children who knew of the parent's incarceration were also faced with the negative stigma of having an incarcerated parent. Overall, many behavioral implications were noted for children of incarcerated parents (Fritsch & Burkhead, 1981). Although the findings of the study present important implications of incarceration, it is important to understand that limitations exist due to the reliance solely on self-report from the incarcerated parent.

Interestingly, Johnson and Easterling (2012) question the impacts which previous research has noted in regards to parental incarceration. Johnson and Easterling (2012) propose that negative outcomes may not be caused by parental incarceration but instead by other factors which impact the



children of incarcerated parents. For example, parental mental health, poverty, parental education level, or substance use are named as some of the issues, which can contribute to negative outcomes for children. Johnson and Easterling (2012) claim these factors cannot be disentangled in research and effects found in parental incarceration research may be confounded by multiple factors. In reviewing studies, which used single and multiple comparison groups, Johnson and Easterling (2012) still found confounding issues. Johnson and Easterling (2012) suggest future studies be driven by conceptual models and use matched sampling in addition to longitudinal designs.

Johnson and Easterling (2012) bring forth potential issues that may impact research on parental incarceration. It is vital that studies pay close attention to confounding variables in order to provide the most accurate and reliable data as possible. The results of data are taken into consideration when developing services for populations. Therefore, data must be credible and accurate. Johnson and Easterling (2012) present the effects of parental incarceration in a different context; although it may be troubling to question much of the research that has been conducted on the topic, the points brought forth are important and need to be carefully analyzed. The different perspective provided by Johnson and Easterling (2012) is useful in designing new studies to explore parental incarceration; it raises important issues and can help bring confounds to the attention of future research.

Wildeman, Wakefield, and Turney (2012) argue against the remarks of Johnson and Easterling (2012). According to Wildeman et al. (2012) the claims which Johnson and Easterling (2012) present are inaccurate representations of parental incarceration literature. Wildeman et al. (2012) presents twelve additional studies, which use more rigor and elaborate on the information presented by Johnson and Easterling (2012). The inclusions of the twelve studies show that in fact more rigorous and revealing studies have been conducted on the topic of parental incarceration. Wildeman et al. (2012) argue that if these studies had been included in Johnson and Easterling (2012), the conclusions (lack of rigor, lack of impact due to incarceration) made would be discounted.

The commentary provided by Wildeman et al. (2012) is very useful by clarify some of the conclusions presented by Johnson and Easterling (2012). The commentary demands more literature to be considered. While taking a much larger base of studies into consideration, the claims previously made can be more closely analyzed. Although Johnson and Easterling (2012) provides important suggestions for future research (basis on conceptual models) and bring important methodological issues to light, it is important not to discount the impact of parental incarceration on children.

### Maternal Incarceration

Children of incarcerated mothers face many challenges and risk factors both while their mothers are incarcerated and prior to the incarceration. Myers,

Smarsh, Amlund-Hagen, and Kennon (1999) discuss many of these risk factors in their article. Prior to incarceration, these families were often living in poverty, single-parent households, possessed low education, and had substance abuse problems (Myers et al., 1999). Incarcerated mothers often had difficult childhoods, experienced physical and/or sexual abuse, were raised in single-parent households, and had immediate family members previously incarcerated (Myers et al., 1999). Myers et al. (1999) estimates that nearly 20% of children witness the arrest of their mother, with the majority of these children being under the age of seven.

Witnessing the arrest of the mother can lead to crisis for a child that is often untreated and the child's questions remain unanswered (Myers et al., 1999). Following parental incarceration it is necessary for the child's adjustment that the child remain in contact with the incarcerated parent (Myers et al., 1999). However, due to many factors it is unlikely that children will visit their incarcerated parent and must rely on other forms of contact (letters and phone calls) to maintain the relationship (Myers et al., 1999).

Myers et al. (1999) determined that the age of the child at the time of parental incarceration plays into the child's likely outcomes. Preschool aged children are believed to be the most impacted by the incarceration since they were most likely present at time of parent's arrest, rely most heavily on parent, and are developing attachment (Myers et al., 1999). These children tend to revert back to more immature behaviors (Myers et al., 1999). School-aged

children often either become fearful, anxious, and sad (internalizing the current loss of their incarcerated parent) or they become aggressive, angry, and disruptive (externalizing their feelings) (Myers et al., 1999). Adolescents of incarcerated parents tend to be expelled more frequently, fail more classes, and partake in more criminal activity than their peers (Myers et al., 1999). Lastly, Myers et al. (1999) noted that children of incarcerated parents are often silent about their parent's incarceration, because of fear of being judged and stigmatized, or due to family encouragement to keep the information a secret. This causes the child to feel isolated and not seek out support during this stressful time.

Dalliaire (2007a) reviews literature regarding incarcerated mothers and their children. As mothers are typically the primary caregivers, it is important to understand the effects of maternal incarceration on children at different developmental stages (Dalliaire, 2007a). Because young children are developing their attachment styles, it is especially detrimental to be separated from their mothers. Infants and young children separated from their mothers risk developing disorganized attachment styles (Dalliaire, 2007a). Children with disorganized attachment are at more risk for developmental and emotional issues (Dalliaire, 2007a).

For school-aged children, the incarceration of their mothers complicates their success in class. Children can be moved from school, experience shame, and emotional issues related to their mothers incarceration (Dalliaire, 2007a).

Lastly, Adolescents also suffer from the effects of parental incarceration. Teens with incarcerated mothers are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior and dropout of high school (Dalliaire, 2007a). Dalliaire (2007a) suggests additional research be conducted with a developmental basis, to further understand the implications parental incarceration has for children.

Poehlmann (2005) conducted a study, which investigated attachment of children of incarcerated mothers. Participants of the study included 54 children ranging from two and a half to seven and a half years old, their incarcerated mothers, and the their caregivers. Inclusion for the study required the mother to be the primary caregiver before incarceration, have no child abuse or neglect charges, maternal incarceration of at least two months, and placement of the child with a relative. Data was collected through interviews, questionnaires, videotapes and standardized measures (Poehlmann, 2005) Results indicated that 63% of children in the study had insecure attachment styles. However, children with stable placements were more likely to be securely attached to the caregiver. Some noted reactions to separation were loneliness, developmental regression, and sleep issues (Poehlmann, 2005). Finally, Poehlmann (2005) emphasized a need for longitudinal research and additional services for this population.

Block and Potthast (1998) examine a visitation program called Girl Scouts Beyond Bars (GSSB) for incarcerated mothers and their daughters (as cited in, Montes De Oca, & Houghton, 2013). The researchers explain the lack

of consistency that often characterizes visitations due to inconvenient visitation hours or distance from the facility. The GSSB program was set to diminish these issues, improve the relationships between mothers and daughters, and improve reunification. The program is characterized by transportation to visits, meetings and Girl Scout activities with the mother and daughters.

Interviews were conducted in relation to the program (mothers and daughters interviewed) and revealed interesting results; overall, the program proved positive (Block & Potthast, 1998). Improvements in negative effects (anger, behavioral issues) of mother's incarceration were noted for many of the daughters who participated in GSSB. 92% of the girls reported positive peer relationships with other girls who were participating in the program. Overall positive effects were noted for those involved in the GSSB program (Block & Potthast, 1998). The GSSB program demonstrates an attempt to address some of the issues caused by incarceration and offers valuable information, but more research is necessary about effects on children to better tailor interventions (as cited in, Montes De Oca, & Houghton, 2013).

Dallaire (2007b) conducted a comparative study, which analyzed similarities and differences among incarcerated mothers, fathers and their children. The researchers sought to investigate whether familial incarceration rates, adult children incarceration and living situations differed for children. Researchers used data from a survey administered to inmate participants of state and federal facilities. After incomplete surveys and outliers were dropped

the researchers were left with a sample size of 6,146 participants (1,014 female, 5,132 males) (Dalliaire, 2007b). Interestingly, adult children of incarcerated mothers were 2.5 times more likely to be incarcerated than those of incarcerated fathers (Dalliaire, 2007b). The risk of adult child incarceration was increased if the mother was involved in regular drug use (Dalliaire, 2007b). In addition, mothers reported more instances of familial incarceration than fathers. Lastly, children of incarcerated mothers were more likely to be in non-familial care arrangements (Dalliaire, 2007b). Dalliaire (2007b) attributes the increase in risk for children of incarcerated mothers to disruptions in the mother-child attachment and emphasizes the importance of a secure attachment as a protective factor. Overall, Dalliaire (2007b) highlighted difference in risks for children of incarcerated mothers and fathers; however, increased risk for children of incarcerated mothers was noted.

#### Paternal Incarceration

Much of the research regarding parental incarceration focuses specifically on maternal incarceration, due to the belief that maternal incarceration negatively impacts the child more so than paternal incarceration. However, recently studies have begun to show the importance of fathers in the lives of their children. Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklaid, and Bremberg (2008) reviewed longitudinal studies to find the effects of paternal involvement on children's development. They found that father engagement or direct contact with child, positively affected children's outcomes in social, behavioral,

psychological, and cognitive realms (Sarkadi et al., 2008). Cohabiting fathers, and father figures, were found to have children with less adverse behaviors, when compared to children living with a single mother (Sarkadi et al., 2008). Involved fathers also helped decrease delinquent behaviors and improve economic standing of children (Sarkadi et al., 2008). These findings suggest that fathers play a larger role in their children's lives than previously believed and therefore the separation experienced during paternal incarceration may have a serious negative impact on the children.

Attachment is an integral part of learning to become an independent individual; it can teach us how to interact with one another, give us confidence to experience new things, and guide us throughout life. Therefore, it is important to understand how attachment correlates to incarcerated individuals, especially parents. Fairchild (2009) studied the attachment styles of 38 incarcerated fathers and how their attachment impacted their family. The majority of participants were classified as unresolved-disorganized-disoriented in terms of attachment (Fairchild, 2009). This classification is defined as having experienced a great deal of unresolved loss, trauma, and abuse (Fairchild, 2009). This group also demonstrated less emotional warmth toward their children compared to other incarcerated fathers (Fairchild, 2009). These results suggest that incarcerated fathers may have difficulty attaching to their children in a warm manner, which can negatively impact the father-child relationship.



Just as attachment plays a role in a child's development so does parental warmth, or openness and sensitivity to the child. Webster, Low, Siller, and Hackett (2013) studied the impact of father's warmth the child's social skills. It is believed that while mothers provide security and nurturance for children, fathers provide a secure base where children are free to explore the environment (Webster et al., 2013). This implies that fathers' aid equally in the development of healthy attachment. This belief also implies that involved fathers have enabled children with confidently exploring and interacting in their environment and developing their social skills (Webster et al., 2013). Furthermore, warm fathers should have children more socially competent than uninvolved fathers. Findings show that more involved, warm fathers had children that were more cooperative, responsible, and confident (Webster et al., 2013). Also, Webster et al. (2013) found that warmer father-daughter relationships led to better social skills in daughters later in life. These findings continue to address the importance of fathers in their children's lives.

While studies have been conducted looking at the implications of paternal incarceration on children it has focused on attachment. According to Arredondo and Leonard (2000) the term attachment does not truly encompass the relationship between child and parent. Attachment implies a unidirectional relationship, where the adult does not bond with the child; attachment also implies the child bonds solely to one adult and that the bond between adult and child never changes (Arredondo & Leonard, 2000). Instead, Arredondo

and Leonard (2000) suggest the term reciprocal connectedness, which requires a bidirectional relationship where the child impacts the adult and the adult impacts the child (Arredondo & Leonard, 2000). Reciprocal connectedness allows for fluctuations in the relationship such that the relationship and connection between the two parties can grow and change over time (Arredondo & Leonard, 2000). Therefore, it is crucial to focus research on the reciprocal connectedness of incarcerated fathers and their children, as it applies to the child's well-being.

### Summary

Existing literature has shown the detrimental effects of parental incarceration on children. Children of incarcerated parents can exhibit external and internal behaviors. Furthermore, differences also exist in the effects of maternal versus paternal incarceration on children. Extensive research has been conducted on the negative impacts of maternal incarceration, making it appear more impactful than paternal incarceration. However this can be due to the difference in existing literature between maternal and paternal incarceration. Research has shown that greater reciprocal connectedness of fathers and their children may help to mitigate risks to children. This implies that children of incarcerated fathers who are reciprocally connected to their fathers may experience fewer negative effects than children who are not reciprocally connected to their fathers.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

Chapter three gives an overview of the methods used in this study. The chapter discusses the basic design of the study, as well as the sampling method implemented. Next, this section explains, in detail, the measures used and what procedures were utilized for data collection. Additionally, the chapter touches on how human subjects were protected from harm. Lastly, there is an explanation as to how the collected data will be analyzed.

#### Study Design

The purpose of this study was to look at the relationship between incarcerated fathers and their children. Specifically, researchers were interested in answering the question: according to previously incarcerated fathers, what are the differences between the reciprocal connectedness of them and their children prior to, during, and following incarceration? Due to the fact that there is such limited literature on incarcerated fathers and their children the study utilized an exploratory, qualitative design. Researchers employed open-ended questions in order to interview participants.

The study had several limitations. By interviewing previously incarcerated fathers as opposed to currently incarcerated fathers, participants were forced to recall memories that may have been skewed over time. Also,

the use of self-reports may have biased the findings due to fathers being overly optimistic or pessimistic regarding the relationship with their children. Lastly, the non-random sample may have resulted in a bias between those who seek programs such as California State University of San Bernardino Re-entry Initiative (CSRI) and those individuals who do not seek such programs.

### Sampling

The sample for this study consisted exclusively of previously incarcerated individuals participating in the services offered by CSRI. At CSRI these individuals are referred to as students. The participants must be male and fathers prior to their incarceration. The study utilized ten participants. This sample was chosen due to the difficulty in accessing currently incarcerated fathers. CSRI works with previously incarcerated individuals, many of whom are fathers, and the agency allowed researchers to access CSRI's clientele for the purpose of gathering data.

The sample provided qualitative data gathered through participants' responses to questions regarding the relationship between themselves and their children. Participants were recruited with the help of CSRI staff. Staff spoke with students in person or on the phone and requested their participation in the study. Students were informed of a five-dollar gift card incentive that would be provided. Interested students were told a time to come into the CSRI office for an individual interview with researchers.

## Data Collection and Instruments

Data about the reciprocal connectedness of previously incarcerated fathers and their children was collected using exploratory qualitative methods. Researchers conducted one-on-one interviews with previously incarcerated fathers and asked a series of questions regarding their children (Appendix A). The purpose of the qualitative interviews was to uncover potential themes in relationships between previously incarcerated fathers and their children.

## Procedures

Interviews were conducted at the CSRI in San Bernardino, California or associated facilities. Researchers conducted individual interviews with students of CSRI on a voluntary participation basis. During the interviews students were asked questions developed specifically for this study (Appendix A). Following the interview participants were provided with a debriefing form and a five-dollar gift card incentive for participation. Ten CSRI students participated in the study.

## Protection of Human Subjects

Prior to beginning the interview, participants were provided with an informed consent form (Appendix B) and informed of their ability to decline participation at any point during the study. Upon completing the interview process, participants were provided with a debriefing statement (Appendix C) and the researcher answered questions. In order to maintain participants' confidentiality identifying information was not recorded. Confidentiality was

further protected through the protection of data. Data remained under lock and key and access to data was limited to the researchers and their faculty advisor.

### Data Analysis

The study utilized a qualitative design for exploratory purposes. Participant responses were coded for common themes relating to the reciprocal connectedness with their children. The relationship prior to incarceration, after incarceration and changes to the relationship were explored.

### Summary

This chapter addressed the research methods utilized in conducting this study about the relationship between previously incarcerated fathers and their children. The study's design, sampling methods, and procedures were explained. Also, the ways in which human subjects and their confidentiality were protected was discussed. Finally, this section clarified how data was analyzed.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

This chapter includes the collected data, participant demographics, and a short summary of the findings. Results are presented in the form of categories, which were discussed in the interview process. Categories include: father-child relationship before incarceration, father-child relationship during incarceration, father's relationship with child's caregiver, father-child relationship after incarceration, absence of the father's parents, and additional themes. Each category contains the reoccurring themes noted in that section.

#### Demographics

A total of 10 previously incarcerated fathers were interviewed for this study. The participants' ages ranged from 37-64 years with an average age of 50.7 years. Of the participants, four were currently married, three were divorced and three had never been married. The highest reported education level achieved was an associate's degree (one participant), one participant completed one or more years of college with no degree, two participants had some college education but less than a full year, three participants possessed a high school diploma or equivalent, and the remaining three participants stopped their education between ninth and eleventh grade.

Of those who participated in the study two were employed for wages, one was self-employed, four were out of work and looking, one was a student, one was retired, and two were unable to work. In this section participants were instructed to check all that apply. The participant who was a student was also looking for work. Household income ranges for participants were as follows: six participants lived in a household earning less than \$10,000 annually, two participant households' earned \$10,001-\$20,000, one participant household earned \$20,001-\$30,000, and one participant household earned \$80,0001-\$90,000. Participants' were also asked about their current living arrangements. Two participants reported living in rented homes, two rented apartments, four were renting rooms, and one participant reported being homeless.

In addition, participants were asked to report their race and ethnicity. Seven participants identified as being White, and three identified as African American. When asked about their ethnicity, four participants reported being Hispanic or Latino, while six participants were not Hispanic or Latino.

#### Father-Child Relationship before Incarceration

Of the ten fathers who participated in the study six were living with their children before they were incarcerated. One of those fathers reported being incarcerated until his child was 18 months old, however he did live with the child upon release and before re-entering incarceration. Three fathers reported not living with their children before incarceration. One participant reported he



was living with his pregnant girlfriend; however he became incarcerated when she was six months pregnant and did not live with his child thereafter. Another participant had not lived with his children for two years prior to his incarceration due to a separation but prior to that had a positive relationship with his children. The remaining participant reported his children were living with their mothers or in the child welfare system. In addition two participants reported having children from previous relationships who did not live in the home with the remainder of their children.

One participant who was living with his child before being incarcerated reported having no one-on-one time with his children because of his drug use. However the remaining participants who lived with their children reported having one-on-one time every day with their children. Activities the father's engaged in with the children included reading, park visits, playing games, cooking, and age appropriate conversations.

#### Father-Child Relationship during Incarceration

Participants were asked if they had any form of contact with their children while incarcerated. This contact could be in the form of face-to-face visits, phone calls, and letters (either to or from the participant). Six participants reported having no contact with their children while incarcerated. Of these six, two reported they did have contact with their children's caregivers regarding the children. One wrote letters to his significant other asking about

the children while the other spoke on the phone once to his child's mother shortly before she was due with the child.

Three participants reported having phone calls with their children at least once during their incarceration. One participant had frequent phone contact with his children, stating:

Any chance that I got the time to get on the phone to talk. It was like mostly every other day, like every other day considering so many peoples in the dorm. (Participant 4, personal communication, February 19, 2014)

The other two participants only had sporadic phone calls with their children. For one, this was due to his child's caregiver's financial restraints. The other participant reported the limited phone calls were due to relationship constraints between himself and his child's caregivers. Regardless of the amount of calls participants had with their children, all reported that conversations consisted of asking how the children were doing in school, if they were missing their mothers, and what kinds of activities the children enjoy doing in their free time.

Of the ten participants only one had face-to-face visits with their children, while incarcerated. These visits occurred behind a glass window on a telephone. The participant was only given thirty minutes to speak with his children. They would usually tell him what they were learning in school and sing him songs such as Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star. Also, these visits only occurred until he was transferred to a prison too far for his children to come

visit. Once face-to-face visits were terminated, this participant wrote to his children.

Some participants reported more than one form of contact with their children. The two participants who had limited phone calls with their children also reported having contact with their children through mail. One stated he would send letters to his child but his child's caregivers would refuse to give the letters to the child. The other participant stated that he would send his child drawings.

#### Father's Relationship with Child's Caregiver

Nine participants reported their children lived with the children's mothers during their incarceration. Of these participants, two had experienced removal and reunification with the child welfare system. One participant reported he also had a child who was adopted after child welfare removal. Two participants reported their children lived with the child's grandparents during the father's incarceration. One participant reported his child was with a stepmother. One participant also reported his child was with the child's aunts. Lastly, one participant reported his children were living on their own. Because some participants exited and re-entered incarceration, their children may have had multiple caregivers over time. The occurrence of paternal recidivism accounts for the disproportionality in caregiver to participant ratio. In addition, some children lived with multiple caregivers at the same time.

When asked about their relationships with their children's caregivers the participants' experiences varied. Four participants reported having good relationships with the caregivers of their children. The quality of this relationship was defined through their contact. These participants reported having regular contact with the caregivers about their children's well-being and progress.

One participant reported having a complicated relationship with his child's caregiver, he stated,

It's a little rough, but still you know, we talk and we make it happen, you know what I'm saying, it's not too much friendly but we try. (Participant 5, personal communication, February 26, 2014)

Although this relationship is reportedly strained, communication about the child is maintained.

The remaining five participants had more difficult relationships with the caregivers. Three participants had no contact with the caregivers during and after their incarceration. One participant has contact with the child's mother weekly however had a very strained relationship has with the child's grandparents. He stated,

They don't care for me much...they don't want me having anything to do with my son. (Participant 9, personal communication, February 26, 2014)

This participant's child lives with the mother, and grandparents. However the relationship with two of the caregivers is very strained.

The remaining participant also had and has limited communication with the caregivers of his child. His child has lived with many different family members and he is now cut off from the child's life, per the caregiver's decision.

#### Father-Child Relationship after Incarceration

Since their release, three participants reported having no contact whatsoever with their children. These participants have not been able to locate their children and do not currently have relationships with their children.

Two participants report having rekindled the relationships with their children. These participants report spending time with their children and their families on a regular basis.

The remaining five participants have had limited contact with their children after being incarcerated. One participant has contact with a son but not his other children. Another participant has tried to contact his children; however they are not receptive to the relationship. Three participants have had limited phone communication with their children. The remaining participant has seen his child at family gatherings and spoken to her then, however the caregivers do not allow regular contact.

## Absence of The Father's Parents

Participants were asked if there was ever a time during their childhoods where their parents were absent. Four participants did not experience the absence of either parent during their childhood. However, one of the four participants experienced the death of his mother during early adulthood, just two years before his first incarceration, and the death of his father a few years following. Another participant also shared that both his parents were deceased and had died following his childhood, but he did not specify when during his adulthood they died.

Of the ten participants over half had come from either a single-parent household or experienced the divorce of their parents. One participant stated that both his parents were never absent during his childhood but they were separated. One participant was raised by his grandmother, due to the absence of both his parents. The remaining four participants experienced the absence of their fathers during their childhood. One participant did not know who his father was, one participant's father left following his parent's divorce, and two participants' fathers were absent due to their own incarceration. When asked how the absence of his father affected him, one participant stated:

Well, maybe if my parents were still together, you know, maybe my mom would have been able to be home a little bit more and watch after us. And maybe we wouldn't have gotten in so much trouble. (Participant 9, Personal communication, February 26, 2014)

## Additional Themes

### Recidivism

Eight of the ten participants were incarcerated more than once. One was incarcerated twice. The other seven participants were incarcerated between four and ten plus times, with most of them not remembering exactly how many separate incarcerations they experienced.

### Memory Issues

All participants had difficulty recalling at least some specific facts. Participants had difficulty remembering how many times they had been incarcerated, how long they had been incarcerated, and in what years they had been incarcerated. All participants struggled to provide researchers with the age of their children currently or at the time of the incarceration. Also, one participant struggled to tell researchers who the children were living with at the time of the incarceration. This participant mixed up events throughout his interview and struggled to provide an accurate timeline of his life.

### Desire for Relationship

Currently, seven of the participants either have limited or no contact with their children and all expressed a desire to rebuild the father-child relationship. Two participants, who have irregular phone calls with their children, hope that one day they will be able to see their children again and build a real relationship with them. Another participant only has sporadic visits with his child during family gathers and expressed a desire to have his child

come live with him once the child turns eighteen years old. Four participants have, are, or hope to one day look for their estranged children and be able to rebuild the relationship. One participant, who hoped to one day find his child, stated:

I miss her; like I haven't had no contact...I'm the one that messed up. I got locked up. ...I don't know if she's ever tried to contact me, I just let things go and I know she's always my daughter and who knows, maybe she'll look for me or I'll go look for her. But I just wanted her to live her life...You know, even if I come in, I wanna do things for her, but with finances and...Like I said, once I get more established and all that...I just feel, I'm not ready for it yet, and I just want to make sure I'm fully ready. (Participant 1, personal communication, February 17, 2014)

#### Perception of Effects

Half of the participants stated that they believed their incarceration had some sort of negative effect on their relationship with their children. Four participants shared that they felt their incarceration ruined their relationship with their children and that they felt guilty for missing part of their children's lives. One participant felt that the incarceration ruined the relationship and that he abandoned his children because of the incarceration. One father stated that the worst effect of the incarceration was "when your kids just don't trust you around them no more and stuff, that's a very hurtful feeling" (Participant 6, personal communication, February 17, 2014).



## Summary

The current study was conducted using a sample of ten previously incarcerated fathers who had completed parole. Four of the participants were Hispanic, three were African American or black, and three identified as White. Researchers conducted individual face-to-face interviews with the participants. The nature of the study was an exploratory qualitative design. Major themes about the father-child relationship before, during, and after incarceration were reported in this chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

This chapter is an analysis of the qualitative data of the study. The conclusions are then related back to the guiding theories of attachment and reciprocal connectedness. In addition, limitations of this study and recommendations to further the knowledge of and assist the population of incarcerated fathers are presented.

#### Discussion

##### Parent-Child Relationship

The results presented in chapter four demonstrate the vast impact paternal incarceration has on the relationship between a father and child. Incarceration drastically changed the nature of the father-child relationship. Fathers who are incarcerated are unable to be physically present in their child's lives. Results also demonstrated that parenting their children proved difficult for fathers while incarcerated. For many fathers incarceration completely severed the relationship with their child/children, during and after the incarceration.

Those few who had contact with their children during the incarceration reported difficult experiences. One Participant stated he talked to his children about obeying their mother and the children's daily activities regularly but it was difficult to be a father without actually being with his family (Participant 4,

personal communication, February 19, 2014). Another participant reported not knowing what to say to his child when they spoke since it had been eleven years since he had seen his child (Participant 9, personal communication, February 26, 2014).

The majority of fathers' relationships with their children have remained strained even after their release. For some the whereabouts of their children are unknown, or they are not allowed contact, others have limited contact via phone calls. Two participants reported seeing their children often but it took time for this to occur. Their children had to learn to trust their fathers again and the relationship took time to heal.

Overall the study demonstrated the difficulties incarceration imposes on a father-child relationship. Some fathers lose contact with their children, and those who remain in contact often struggle with rebuilding the relationship.

### Recidivism

Eight out of ten participants in the sample had been incarcerated more than one time. Entering and re-entering incarceration caused these fathers to come in and out of their children's lives, adding instability to their relationships. By entering and re-entering the system fathers' ability to rebuild and maintain relationships was affected negatively. The sporadic nature of entering and exiting incarceration is another factor that should be considered when analyzing the impacts of incarceration on the father-child relationship.

### Paternal Absence

Another major theme demonstrated by the sample was the cyclical nature of paternal absence. Many of the participants had absent fathers and they themselves became absent from their children's lives through incarceration. Interestingly, history appears to be repeating itself with the children of the incarcerated fathers. One participant reports his children are,

Now older adults and they're smoking weed, they got [sic] red eyes on the dog gone, you know and doing all this, and the ones on his website, get all white boy wasted and all kinds of stuff, so I don't know where all the good is in all that [laughing] if they're just doing all that kinda [sic] stuff. (Participant 2, personal communication, February 19, 2014)

The children of this father appear to be repeating the patterns of illegal behaviors. Another father reported his daughters are now married to men that are in and out of prison too (Participant 8, personal communication, February 26, 2014).

Fathers play an important role in their children's lives and their absence is impactful. Paternal absence in this sample has been repeated through family history or is being repeated currently.

### Parent-Caregiver Relationship

Results also demonstrated the quality of the father-child relationship was affected by the child's caregiver. Fathers' could be cut-off from communication with their children by the caregivers. Some caregivers

relocated and did not update the fathers with their new location. Other caregivers did not see the fathers fit and cut off communication between the father and child.

The caregiver's perceptions of fathers are vital to the fostering or severing of the relationship between fathers and children. Because fathers are incarcerated and uneducated about their rights, caregivers hold the power to interfere with father-child relationships.

### Attachment and Reciprocal Connectedness Theories

#### Attachment Theory

As stated previously, there is a correlation between the incarceration of fathers, their personal experiences of loss and trauma, and a limited ability to attach with their children (Fairchild, 2009). Many of the participants in this study reported having experienced the loss of a parent, which appeared to have been a traumatic event for them. By being incarcerated the fathers created a loss for their children, repeating this detrimental cycle. Also, some had difficulty attaching to their children, especially if contact was infrequent or strained before the incarceration.

Furthermore, previous studies have suggested that children of incarcerated fathers tend to develop more insecure and disorganized attachment styles (Murray & Murray, 2010; Dalliaire, 2007a). While the attachment styles developed by the children of the study's participants are not

definitively known, given that the children were not included as participants, it appears the children experienced these styles. Based on characteristics of the children, according to fathers, children experienced severe emotional distress throughout life, issues of mistrust, and an inability to express themselves, all typical of individuals with insecure and disorganized attachment.

### Reciprocal Connectedness Theory

Reciprocal connectedness looks at a bidirectional relationship characterized by a degree of closeness and a level of warmth on the part of both the parent and child (Arrendondo & Leonard, 2000). In order to determine the reciprocal connectedness of the father-child relationship researchers asked participants about the frequency of contact with their children, the types of things they would do with said children, and their feelings about the father-child relationship. The reciprocal connectedness fluctuated and appeared to be impacted by paternal incarceration.

Prior to incarceration most participants expressed a highly connected relationship with their children. The participants had daily contact with their children, would spend time together playing and enjoying each other's company, and would have meaningful, age-appropriate conversations together. However, during their incarceration all participants had either limited or no contact with their children. Participants shared that instead of having the close relationship they once enjoyed with their children they either had no relationship or an uncomfortable one. The awkwardness of these relationships

can be seen in the fathers' difficulties communicating with their children. Participants were not sure what to say to their children any longer and conversations became shallow, with participants asking their children about school and telling their children to listen to their caregivers.

Not only was the reciprocal connectedness impacted during the incarceration but the incarceration also affected the relationship following fathers' release. Many fathers continued to have no or limited contact with their children. This has either completely eliminated all reciprocal connectedness, ending the relationship, or, has continued a relationship that is shallow and awkward for both the fathers and their children. The fathers who were able to rebuild their relationship and improve their reciprocal connectedness expressed that it took much time and effort and some are still not to level they once were. Participants felt the incarceration made it difficult for their children to trust them, continued to make it difficult to have regular contact with their children, and made their children feel as if they were no longer loved by their fathers.

## Limitations

### Sample Size and Method

There are several limitations in this study. One limitation was the small sample size. By utilizing a sample size of only ten participants it is difficult to conclude that this group is representative of the population in general. In addition, the use of non-random sampling was a limitation of the study. By

using non-random sampling it is difficult to assume results would be representative of this population as a whole.

### Generalizability

Other limitations of this study which make it difficult to generalize the findings to this entire population is the use of participants who are off parole and utilizing services offered at CSRI. As this study has shown recidivism rates are high for this population. Therefore, one can assume that many individuals do not successfully exit parole and instead are re-incarcerated. By using participants who were able to successfully exit the parole system the participants may be representative of a more motivated group than the general population of incarcerated fathers.

Also, all participants were associated with CSRI. CSRI provides programs, services, and resources to paroles in the hopes of reducing recidivism and bettering the lives of paroles. However, it is up to the paroles to come to the center and participate. Since all previously incarcerated fathers will not seek the help of centers like CSRI the results may not be generalizable to the population at large.

### Incentives

Participants received a \$5.00 gift card for participating and were informed of the incentive beforehand in hopes they would be more willing to participate. By offering incentives participants may have felt more inclined to



participate and obligated to share personal information. This may have in some way skewed the findings.

### Memories

Participants recalled events that occurred up to forty years ago in order to answer researchers' questions. Memories can often be skewed and biased. For this reason it is difficult to ensure that all information given by participants is completely factual.

### Perspectives

Furthermore, the use of only father's perspectives is a limitation of this study. By utilizing the perspectives of both the affected children and their respective caregivers, researchers would be able to gather a more accurate picture of the events and how fathers' incarcerations impact the father-child relationship. By using only fathers researchers may have received only a partial picture of how the incarceration impacted the relationship.

### Topic Sensitivity

Interview topics and the interview process can be a sensitive and intimidating experience to some. Participants were asked to share intimate details regarding their children and it may have been difficult for them to share. This may have led to answers that were not as honest as they might have been. Also, the interviewing process utilized for this study may have been intimidating to participants due to its perceived intrusive nature. These

individuals have been through interrogations and intrusive interviewing before and may have found it difficult to be open and honest with researchers.

## Recommendations

### Social Work Practice

The population of incarcerated fathers is underserved and has limited resources both in and out of prison. As a profession, social work needs to raise awareness about the issues and needs of incarcerated fathers and their children. Such awareness can come from associations such as the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and the California Social Work Education Center (CALSWEC) through special presentations and guest speakers at events. By spreading knowledge about the needs of this population, more workers will be equipped to help the specific difficulties caused by paternal incarceration.

For example, social workers are key players that can advocate for and facilitate visitations between fathers and their children. Many of the participants of this study did not have contact with their children while they were incarcerated and it is possible that visitation could have buffered some of the relational issues caused by their absence.

Social workers can also help incarcerated fathers understand their parental rights. Many of the participants expressed they had no control over the child's caregivers' relocation and the caregiver had the power to keep their children away. By educating fathers of their parental rights, they can be

empowered to seek information about their children and maintain a relationship.

### Policy

Incarcerated fathers and their children could benefit from many policy changes. Losing touch with, and knowledge of, the whereabouts of their children was a major issue in the study's sample. Policies which might address this issue could include the development of a database to house this information. This could be an internal database through a partnership with the prison system and the child welfare system. Having this information available for fathers could be helpful in re-establishing a relationship with their children.

The visitation policies within the criminal justice system could also be altered to better suit fathers and children. Working to educate the system about paternal incarceration can aid in the revamping of visitation policies, hopefully aiding in the reciprocal connectedness of the child and father. Speaking to a child through a glass wall is not conducive to fostering a positive relationship. Changes to the settings for visiting with children could be better tailored to the father-child relationship. Development of a visitation program similar to the GSSB program analyzed by Block and Potthast (1998) could serve as a starting point for these visitation changes.

Although contact and visitation are important, it is also important that fathers receive specialized parenting classes to be better equipped to address the challenges their incarceration creates in the relationship. Makariev and

Shaver (2010) have expressed the need for parenting classes with attention to attachment and emotional needs in a previous study. Based on the results of the present study, researchers agree these parenting programs would be beneficial. Introducing specialized parenting classes for incarcerated fathers is strongly recommended.

Policies to protect fathers' rights could also be beneficial. Participants reported some mothers cut them off from contact completely. Developing policies that required a process for mothers to take such action could help protect the father-child relationship. Although this may be a timely feat, it is important to start developing policies that are in the best interest of fathers and their children. The father-child relationship is important. The sample of this study demonstrates that paternal absence is repeating itself within families. It may be possible to buffer some of the negative effects of paternal incarceration through the development of policies directed to this special population.

### Research

In order to develop effective policies and programs for incarcerated fathers and their children more research needs to be conducted on the population. Further research should be conducted with the children of incarcerated fathers and their caregivers. It is also important that research with currently incarcerated fathers and their families be conducted to better understand the issues as they are occurring. Understanding the perspectives

of all that are involved in this complex issue will help shed light on areas that need attention.

Future research branching from the conducted study could involve the children of incarcerated fathers. An exploratory qualitative study where the children are interviewed about the relationship with their fathers could prove extremely informative. Gaining the perspectives of the children and shedding light on the challenges they experience can be used to further develop resources for this population.

In addition, further studies need to be completed to determine the buffering abilities of reciprocally connected father-child relationships. While research has suggested that a highly connected father-child relationship can improve the outcomes for children of incarcerated fathers it has not been researched fully. In order to determine the effectiveness of reciprocal connectedness as a buffer it would be important to gather the perspectives of the children of incarcerated fathers.

### Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to answer the question: according to previously incarcerated fathers, what are the differences between the reciprocal connectedness of fathers and their children prior, during, and following incarceration? In order to answer this question researchers individually interviewed ten previously incarcerated fathers and asked them

questions in regards to their relationship with their children prior to, during, and following their incarcerations.

The study found that the incarceration negatively impacted the father-child relationship for every participant, but some to a lesser degree than others. All fathers reported a positive relationship with their children prior to incarceration, except two whose children were not yet born. Only one father had face-to-face visits with his children, but they only occurred the first few months of his incarceration. All participants expressed either limited contact or no contact with their children during incarceration, which reduced the level of connectedness between themselves and their children. Currently, three participants continue to have no contact with their children and do not know where the children are located. Five participants have limited contact in the form of sporadic phone calls or short visits at family gatherings. Only two participants have been able to rekindle the father-child relationship.

These findings suggest that further research and work should be done for this population. Incarcerated individuals in general are an underserved population. Moreover, the population of incarcerated fathers is not only a gravely underserved population but it is also a growing population. Therefore, they require services and resources that support father-child relationships and make it easier for them to transition back into society and their families smoothly. It may be that strengthening family bonds in vulnerable families, like

those affected by incarceration, may ultimately reduce the rate of incarceration as children grow up in their families.

APPENDIX A  
QUESTIONNAIRE



## Demographics Questionnaire

### 1. Age

How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Marital Status

What is your marital status? (Please check one)

- Now married
- Widowed
- Divorced
- Separated
- Never married

### 3. Education

What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, mark the previous grade or highest degree received. (Please check one)

- No schooling completed
- Nursery school to 8th grade
- 9th, 10th or 11th grade
- 12th grade, no diploma
- High school graduate - high school diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED)
- Some college credit, but less than 1 year
- 1 or more years of college, no degree
- Associate degree (for example: AA, AS)
- Bachelor's degree (for example: BA, AB, BS)
- Master's degree (for example: MA, MS, MEng, MEd, MSW, MBA)
- Professional degree (for example: MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD)
- Doctorate degree (for example: PhD, EdD)

**4. Employment Status**

*Are you currently...? (Check all that apply)*

- Employed for wages
- Self-employed
- Out of work and looking for work
- Out of work but not currently looking for work
- A homemaker
- A student
- Retired
- Unable to work

**5. Housing**

- Own house
- Rent house
- Condo or townhome
- Apartment
- Renting room
- Homeless

**6. Income**

*Please specify you household's annual income*

- Less than \$10,000
- \$10,001 - \$20,000
- \$20,001 - \$30,000
- \$30,001 - \$40,000
- \$40,001 - \$50,000
- \$50,001 - \$60,000
- \$60,001 - \$70,000
- \$70,001 - \$80,000
- \$80,001 - \$90,000
- \$90,001 - \$100,000
- \$100,001 or more

**7. Ethnicity**

*Please specify your ethnicity. (Please check one)*

- Hispanic or Latino
- Not Hispanic or Latino

**8. Race**

*Please specify your race. (Check all that apply)*

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Interview Questions

1. Was your child/ren living with you prior to your incarceration?
2. How often did you have one on one time with your child/ren before being incarcerated?
3. What kinds of things did you and your child/ren do? What kinds of things did you talk about?
4. How old was the child/ren at the time of your incarceration?
5. How often did you have contact with your child/ren during your incarceration?
6. What was the form of that contact and what was it like? (Letters, phone calls, visits)
7. How many times during your incarceration did your child/ren visit?
8. What types of things did you and your child/ren talk about?
9. Who cared for your child/ren while you were incarcerated?
10. Can you tell me about your relationship to this caregiver? How well do you get along with the caregiver? How is your communication with that person?
11. How many times have you been incarcerated in your child's/ children's lifetime? For how long?
12. Was there ever a time when your parents were absent during your childhood? Can you tell me about that?
13. Do you think your incarceration changed your relationship with your child/ren and how?
14. Where is the child currently residing?
15. Did you attend any classes or programs while incarcerated?

APPENDIX B  
INFORMED CONSENT

## **Informed Consent**

The study you are being asked to participate in is designed to gather data on previously incarcerated fathers and their children. This study is being conducted by Abigail Navarro and Amber Houghton under the supervision of Ray E. Liles, D.S.W., California State University, San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the School of Social Work Sub-Committee of the Institutional Review Board, California State University, San Bernardino.

**Purpose:** To gather data on previously incarcerated fathers and their children.

**Description:** One-on-One interview with researcher.

**Participation:** Participation in this study is voluntary; refusal to participate will not affect the services you receive at CSRI in any way. Also, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

**Confidentiality:** In order to maintain confidentiality identifying information will be held confidential. Data will be stored under lock and key.

**Duration:** The interview will take approximately one hour to complete.

**Risks:** There are no foreseeable risks from participating in this interview. Raw Data will only be accessed by researchers and supervisor.

**Benefits:** Data collected from this study could expand knowledge on this population and be used to develop programs benefiting previously incarcerated fathers and their children.

**Contact:** If you have any questions or would like additional information please contact Ray E. Liles, D.S.W. by email: reliles@csusb.edu, or phone: (909)537-5557

**Results:** Results of this study will be available in the PFAU library at California State University of San Bernardino in September 2014.

**PLEASE DO NOT PROVIDE NAME OR IDENTIFYING INFORMATION ON CONSENT FORMS.**

**Please place a check mark indicating you are over the age of 18 and you have read and understand the information above. Through the placement of a check mark you are consenting to voluntarily participate in this study.**

Place Check Mark Here \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## AUDIO USE INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR NON-MEDICAL HUMAN SUBJECTS

As part of this research project, we will be making an audiotape recording of you during your participation in the experiment. Please indicate what uses of this audiotape you are willing to consent to by initialing below. You are free to initial any number of spaces from zero to all of the spaces, and your response will in no way affect your credit for participating. We will only use the audiotape in ways that you agree to. In any use of this audiotape, your name would *not* be identified. If you do not initial any of the spaces below, the audiotape will be destroyed.

Please indicate the type of informed consent

Audiotape

- **The audiotape can be studied by the research team for use in the research project.**

Please initial: \_\_\_\_\_

- **The audiotape can be played to subjects in other experiments.**

Please initial: \_\_\_\_\_

- **The audiotape can be used for scientific publications.**

Please initial: \_\_\_\_\_

- **The audiotape can be played at meetings of scientists.**

Please initial: \_\_\_\_\_

**I have read the above description and give my consent for the use of the audiotape as indicated above.**

**The extra copy of this consent form is for your records.**

**SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_**

APPENDIX C  
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT



## **Debriefing Statement**

Thank you for your participation. This study was designed to explore the impact parental incarceration has on the relationship between father and children. Your participation was essential to researchers gathering more information on this topic. Through the gathered interview, researchers hope to explore the importance of fathers in their children's lives and how difficult this relationship is to maintain during incarceration. For the sake of the study we ask that you do not share any questions or information regarding the study with other students.

Thank you again for your participation in this study. If you have any questions regarding, or would like to obtain a copy of, the study's findings please contact Dr. Ray E. Liles at California State University San Bernardino by phone: (909) 537-3337, or email: [reliles@csusb.edu](mailto:reliles@csusb.edu).

## REFERENCES

- Arredondo, D. E. & Leonard, H. (2000). Attachment, bonding, and reciprocal connectedness. *Journal of the Center for Families, Children, & the Courts*, 2, 109-127.
- Block, K. J., & Potthast, M. J. (1998). Girl scouts beyond bars: Facilitating parent-child contact in correctional settings. *Child Welfare*, 77(5), 561-578.
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss, Vol. I: Attachment*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1973). *Attachment and loss, Vol. II: Separation, anxiety and anger*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1980). *Attachment and loss, Vol. III: Loss, sadness and depression*. New York: Basic Books.
- Camp, D. (1997). *Adoptions and safe families act of 1997*. Retrieved from <http://www.socialworkers.org/archives/advocacy/updates/1997/safeadop.htm>
- Cunningham, A. (2001). Forgotten families – the impacts of imprisonment. *Family Matters*, 59, 35-38.
- Dalliaire, H. D. (2007a). Children with incarcerated mothers: developmental outcomes, special challenges and recommendations. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 28, 15-24.
- Dalliaire, H. D. (2007b). Incarcerated mothers and fathers: a comparison of risks for children and families. *Family Relations*, 56, 440-453.
- Fairchild, S. R. (2009). Attachment representations and parental memories of incarcerated fathers. *Child Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 26, 361-377.
- Fritsch, A. T., & Burkhead, D. J. (1981). Behavioral reactions of children to parental absence due to imprisonment. *Family Relations*, 30, 83-88.
- Johnson, E. I., & Easterling, B. (2012). Understanding unique effects of parental incarceration on children: Challenges, progress, and recommendations. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 74, 342-356.

- Johnson, E. L. & Waldfogel, J. (2002). Parental incarceration: Recent trends and implications for child welfare. *Social Services Review, 76*(3), 460-479.
- Makariev, W. D. & Shaver, R. P. (2010). Attachment, parental incarceration and possibilities for intervention: An overview. *Attachment and Human Development, 12*(4), 311-331.
- Montes De Oca, A., & Houghton, A. J, (2013). *SW612 Final Assignment*. Research proposal. 1-12
- Murray, J. & Murray, L. (2010). Parental incarceration, attachment, and child psychopathology. *Attachment and Human Development, 12*, 289-309.
- Myers, B. J., Smarsh, T. M., Amlund-Hagen, K., & Kennon, S. (1999). Children of incarcerated mothers. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 8*(1), 11-25.
- National Organization for the Advancement of Colored People. (2012-2013). *Criminal justice fact sheet*. Retrieved from <http://www.naacp.org/pages/criminal-justice-fact-sheet>
- Poehlmann, J. (2005). Representations of attachment relationships in children of incarcerated mothers. *Child Development, 76*, 679-696.
- Sarkadi, A., Kristiansson, R., Oberklaid, F., & Bremberg, S. (2008). Fathers' involvement and children's developmental outcomes: A systematic review of longitudinal studies. *Acta Paediatrica, 92*(2), 153-158.
- Seymour, C. (1998). Children with parents in prison: Child welfare policy, program, and practice issues. *Child Welfare, 77*(5), 469-493.
- Shlafer, J. R., & Poehlmann, J. (2010). Attachment and Caregiving Relationships in Families Affected by Parental Incarceration. *Attachment and Human Development, 12*, 395-415.
- Shlafer, R. J., Poehlmann, J., Coffino, B., & Hanneman, A. (2009). Mentoring children with incarcerated parents: Implications for research, practice, and policy. *Family Relations, 58*, 507-519.
- The Sentencing Project. (2012). *Incarcerated Women*. Retrieved from [http://www.sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/cc\\_Incarcerated\\_Women\\_Factsheet\\_Sep24sp.pdf](http://www.sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/cc_Incarcerated_Women_Factsheet_Sep24sp.pdf)

- Tsai, T., & Scommegna, P. (2012). U.S. has highest incarceration rate. *Population Reference Bureau*. Retrieved from <http://www.prb.org/Publications/Articles/2012/us-incarceration.aspx>
- Wallace, K. S. (2012). *Information packet: The adoptions and safe families act: Barriers to reunification between children & incarcerated mothers*. Retrieved from [http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/information\\_packets/TheAdoptions&SafeFamiliesActBarrierToReunificationBetweenChildren&IncarceratedMothers.pdf](http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/information_packets/TheAdoptions&SafeFamiliesActBarrierToReunificationBetweenChildren&IncarceratedMothers.pdf)
- Webster, L., Low, J., Siller, C., & Hackett, R. K. (2013). Understanding the contribution of a father's warmth on his child's social skills. *Fathering, 11*(1), 90-113.
- Wildeman, C., Wakefield, S., & Turney, K. (2012). Misidentifying the Effects of Parental Incarceration? A Comment on Johnson and Easterling (2012). *Journal of Marriage and Family, 75*, 252-258.

## ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

This was a two-person project where authors collaborated throughout. However, for each phase of the project, certain authors took primary responsibility. These responsibilities were assigned in the manner listed below.

1. Data Collection:  
Team Effort: Amber Houghton & Abigail Navarro
2. Data Entry and Analysis:  
Team Effort: Amber Houghton & Abigail Navarro
3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:
  - a. Introduction and Literature  
Team Effort: Amber Houghton & Abigail Navarro
  - b. Methods  
Team Effort: Amber Houghton & Abigail Navarro
  - c. Results  
Team Effort: Amber Houghton & Abigail Navarro
  - d. Discussion  
Team Effort: Amber Houghton & Abigail Navarro