CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS: AN APPLICATION

OF THE STRESS PROCESS MODEL

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The purpose of this qualitative interview study is to examine the lives and experiences children of incarcerated parents from a theoretical perspective through an application of the social stress process. Previous research on children of incarcerated parents has neglected to add a theoretical component to their research, which is the intention of this research. The results will be organized around the theoretical domains of the stress process applied to findings from the analysis of eleven qualitative interviews of mothers and/or caregivers of youth(s) of an incarcerated parent. Guided by analytic induction, the themes that emerged from the transcripts were applied to the theoretical propositions of the social stress process: stressors, mediators, and manifestations. Stressors experienced by children of incarcerated parents include: the incarceration of a parent, financial difficulties, and residential instability. Stress mediators include: coping mechanisms and the importance of maintaining familial ties during parental incarceration. The manifestations or outcomes include: internalizing and externalizing behaviors.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Across the United States, at least two million children currently have an

incarcerated parent, and many more have and will experience parental incarceration at

some point in their lives (Seymour, 2001). There are approximately ten million children

who have a parent who is in prison, jail, on parole, or on probation (Arditti, 2005). Since

1991, the number of children with an imprisoned parent has increased over 50 %, and

with the incarceration rate growing at a rate of almost 6 % annually, the number of minor

children affected by parental incarceration will continue to increase (Mumola, 2000).

Previous studies on children of incarcerated parents have reached similar

conclusions. They report that children of incarcerated parents frequently experience

internalizing problems such as anxiety, depression, sadness, and loneliness (Gabel, 1992;

Reed & Reed, 1997; Hairston, 1998; Mazza, 2002). It has also been reported this

population may also exhibit externalizing behaviors such as anger, a disregard for

authority, and acting-out behaviors (Gabel, 1992; Reed & Reed, 1997; Hairston, 1998;

Mazza, 2002). These findings suggest that parental incarceration is a risk factor for

mental health problems among children.

Previous studies have been useful in adding to the body of knowledge on this

unique population, however, most of the literature pertaining to children of incarcerated

parents emphasizes the direct effects of involuntary parental absence due to

imprisonment on the children. As a result, they tend to ignore other elements that occur as a result of the imprisonment such as financial difficulties and residential instability which may also impede and further complicate the lives of children of incarcerated parents. More importantly, previous research on children of incarcerated parents has been void of a theoretical explanation. A theoretical explanation is important because it allows researchers to organize what is known about a specific population in order to explain and predict the outcomes of their experiences.

The purpose of this research is to explore the impact of parental incarceration on children's well-being and mental health and provide better picture of what is going on the lives of this invisible population in the United States. Therefore, the intention of this research is to focus on the lives of the children of prisoners and changes experienced or displayed as a result of parental absence due to incarceration and to apply a theoretical model to explain the experiences of the lives of children of incarcerated parents. I will attempt to identify social, economic and emotional outcomes children are likely to experience as a result of having a parent incarcerated. The experiences of children of an incarcerated parent will be explored through the perceptions of their mothers/caregivers through a structured qualitative interview approach. Additionally, a theoretical model, Social stress process, will be applied to the findings from the interview data in order to offer an explanation of emergent outcomes of children of an incarcerated parent.

Analytic induction, a specific form of inductive analysis, will be employed in this qualitative research. According to Patton, analytic induction "begins with an analysts' deduced propositions or theory derived hypothesis and is a procedure for verifying theories and propositions based on qualitative data" (p. 454). The social stress process,

through analytic induction, guided the analysis of the interview data. Briefly, the social stress process is a theoretical model that seeks to establish the "unities between social structure and the inner functioning of individuals" (Pearlin, 1989, p.241). The social stress process is guided by three domains or propositions: stressors, mediators, and manifestations (Pearlin et al., 1981; Pearlin, 1989). Stressors are the experiences that cause stress, mediators are behaviors and perceptions that potentially can alter the negative experiences of stressors and thus effect the outcomes, and manifestations of stress are the outcomes of the stressors (Pearlin et al., 1981; Pearlin, 1989). Therefore, the three components of the stress process model will be applied to children of incarcerated parents.

The proposed research is significant and important. First, "the minor children of parents under some form of criminal justice system control are among the most at-risk, yet least visible, populations of children" (Reed & Reed, 1997, p.154). Moreover, very little is known about this highly vulnerable population (Reed & Reed, 1997; Arditti, 2005). The failure to recognize the needs of these children in the United States is a travesty for the country. These children are defenseless and become the unintended victims of the criminal justice system.

Furthermore, the impact of incarceration tends to be multifaceted and often affects every aspect of the children's world (Johnston, 1995a; Mazza, 2002). The intent of this research is to examine the broad scope of the impact that parental incarceration has on children of prisoners and to identify outcomes due to the impact of the incarceration and other difficulties these children experience in their lives. Another goal of this research is

to successfully apply a theoretical model to interpret the experiences of children of incarcerated parents.

This research will add to the literature on children of incarcerated parents in three specific ways. First, it will employ a theoretical model to explain and predict the effects that parental incarceration has on children. Second, this research will focus on gender differences and similarities in the reactions to parental incarceration. Lastly, it focuses on secondary stressors children of incarcerated parents experience. The problems faced by this population tend to go beyond the actual incarceration of a parent. As a result, it is important to acknowledge and examine the totality of these children's experiences.

The research will provide an overview of literature on the effects of parental incarceration on children of offenders (chapter 2). Chapter 3 will describe and explain the social stress process model which is the theoretical model that guided the interview data analysis. The research methodology and procedures used to obtain and analyze the data as well as the sample description will be presented in chapter 4. Chapter 5 provides the findings from the interviews and chapter 6 offers a discussion and conclusion to the research as well as suggestions for future research on children of incarcerated parents.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Millions of children are affected by the mass incarceration occurring in contemporary American society, yet little is known about this invisible population. The actual number of minor children affected by parental incarceration is not known because correctional facilities do not have standardized methods of collecting data on prisoners' families (Miller, 2006). Furthermore, the effects from parental incarceration on children are multidimensional and often the absence of a parent due to incarceration is only one issue faced by this population. The following chapter will review the limited amount of research on children of incarcerated parents. Topics that will be examined include the effects of paternal incarceration on children, the effects of parental incarceration on children, and lastly, communication and relationship barriers children and incarcerated parents experience as a result of imprisonment.

Children of Incarcerated Fathers

One of the first studies to examine the effects of parental incarceration on children was conducted in England by P. Morris in 1965. Morris interviewed male inmates and their wives several times over an eighteen-month period. He concluded that 20 % of the children whose parents were interviewed displayed problematic behavior after the fathers' incarceration (Morris, 1965).

During the same year, Friedman and Esselstyn (1965) conducted a similar study in the state of California, but instead of interviewing the families of incarcerated males, they focused on teachers' ratings of the children's behavior. Friedman and Esselstyn found that the children of incarcerated fathers performed below average on a variety of "psychological and sociological tests" when compared to a group of children who did not have an incarcerated father. This study had important limitations. First, the psychological and sociological tests used in the study were not described. Furthermore, there was no description of the sampling method utilized. Finally, 60 % of the sample was Mexican American, but no other information or demographic characteristics of the children were available in the study (Friedman & Esselstyn, 1965).

Sack (1977) studied a small, clinical sample of eight young sons of incarcerated males between the ages of six and thirteen. The boys had been referred to psychiatric care as a result of displaying aggressive behaviors shortly following their fathers' incarceration (Sack, 1977). The study found a disproportionate amount of boys seeking treatment in mental health facilities, and boys were more likely than girls to demonstrate aggressive and externalizing behaviors (Sack, 1977). Sack's conclusion may be true, but the small, clinical sample severely limits the generalizability of the study. Another limitation of his research is that his conclusion compares boys and girls of incarcerated fathers, yet there is no proof that he ever analyzed the behaviors of girls. However, Gabel and Schindledecker (1995) used a similar clinical setting to examine sons of incarcerated fathers and came to the same conclusion as Sack—boys are more aggressive than girls and boys tend to be overrepresented in mental health facilities.

Fritsch and Burkhead (1981) interviewed both male and female inmates about their perceptions of their children's behavioral reaction to their incarceration. Two-thirds of the inmates felt their children developed behavioral problems after their incarceration. However, the majority of males reported their children developed discipline problems associated with school truancy and juvenile delinquency whereas, the majority of females reported their children experienced feelings of abandonment, fear, and lower school performance (Fritsch & Burkhead, 1981). That is, children of incarcerated males tend to exhibit externalizing behaviors and children that experience maternal incarceration tend to exhibit internalizing behaviors, regardless of the gender of the child. Again, the children were not directly examined and the behavioral changes reported were from the non-caregivers' perception which limits the usefulness of the study. Also, the parents, who were inmates, answered questions about their children's behavioral changes since their incarceration yet they were not with the full time caregiver of the children. The participants did not directly observe the behavioral changes firsthand.

Lowenstein (1986) examined the effects of children living in "temporary single parent families" (p. 79), specifically she wanted to identify problem areas in children's adjustment to paternal loss due to imprisonment. Lowenstein interviewed 118 wives of first time inmates in Israel. The Israeli mothers reported their children experienced emotional, interactional, and behavioral problems due to the loss of their fathers to incarceration. The most common problems reported were emotional problems in general, declining health, decline in performance at school, and deterioration in children's interaction with mother and peers (Lowenstein, 1986). These findings imply that children are negatively affected by paternal absence due to incarceration.

The majority of the literature on children of incarcerated parents is limited because research that directly examines children is almost non-existent. In one of the rare studies that focuses on the views and feelings of the children, Boswell (2002) interviewed 25 children between the ages of 3-19; the majority of the younger children were interviewed in the presence of their full time caregiver or participated in a partial interview. The study focused on the feelings children expressed about maintaining communication and contact with their fathers during incarceration. Boswell found all children reported positive feelings about visiting their incarcerated fathers, they also reported having mixed emotions about the visiting arrangements in the criminal justice facility. Furthermore, most children expressed the importance of having written and oral communication with their fathers, as well as face-to face contact, through the duration of the incarceration. The essence of the findings from Boswell's study is that all of the children interviewed were affected in some way by the loss of their fathers to incarceration.

Overall it appears that paternal incarceration tends to have a negative impact on children. Specifically, previous research reports that boys are at risk for exhibiting externalizing or acting-out behaviors and girls are at-risk for internalizing behaviors. Interestingly, Fritsch and Burkhead (1981) found that children of incarcerated fathers tend to act out whereas children of incarcerated mothers tend to internalize their reactions to imprisonment. Gender differences in reaction to parental incarceration will be explored in the results section.

Children of Incarcerated Parents

Dr. Denise Johnston, director of the Center for Children of Incarcerated Parents in Pasadena, California, studied the impact of parental crime, arrest, and incarceration on the child's development (1992). Johnston investigated the children directly through interviews, classroom observations, and school records. The study focused on children of inmates whose school and behavioral problems appeared to be leading them towards delinquency (Johnston, 1992). The study identified three influential factors that were consistently present in the majority of the children studied: parent-child separation, ongoing traumatic stress, and an inadequate quality of care (Johnston, 1992). According to Johnston, the aforementioned factors can affect each stage of development in a child's life due to the loss of parent to incarceration. The children were directly examined in the research; however, there were two problems with the research. First, the children examined were already having difficult in their lives due to the separation caused by the incarceration. The study automatically excludes children who do not exhibit problems at school. Also, the study fails to stratify the results by gender or race and ethnicity. Overall, this study added to the body of knowledge of children of prisoners, but there is much more to be learned.

More recently, Cunningham (2001) conducted a study of the needs of children and families of prisoners in Victoria (Australia). She interviewed 191 inmates (101 males and 10 females) and conducted a focus group of 30 prisoners, a total of 221 prisoners; they each had on average 1.7 children (Cunningham, 2001). The purpose of the study was to gain a better understanding of how to maintain close familial ties between children and their incarcerated parent. Cunningham found that being honest with children about the

reason a parent is absent was the best predictor of maintaining a positive parent-child relationship while a parent is incarcerated. She also suggested that parenting programs were helpful in maintaining positive family relationships.

In 2002, at a conference entitled From Prison to Home, funded by the US Department of Health and Human Services, two papers were presented that focused on the effects of parental incarceration on children. One paper focused on the effects young children experience and the second paper focused on the antisocial behavior of the adolescents of imprisoned parents. The former paper, as previously stated, focused on the effects young children experience due to parental incarceration (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2002). The paper was not an empirically based study, it was a description of the children, their needs, and the problems they were likely to experience. To briefly summarize, Parke and Clarke-Stewart suggest there are short-term effects and long-term effects when young children lose a parent to incarceration (2002).

They discussed two possible short-term effects. For young children who were present at the time of parental arrest, research has shown that these children often suffer from flashbacks and nightmares of the arrest incident (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2002). Whether or not the children receive an honest explanation about their parents' absence may also have a profound effect on how young children deal with the incarceration. Research suggests that providing children with reliable, dependable information allows them to make sense of the situation, and deal with the new circumstances in their lives (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2002). The possibility of insecure attachment to a parent is a long-term effect young children may experience due to parental incarceration that can lead to anxiety, withdrawal, shame, guilt, and, more likely anger, aggression, and

hostility—both externalizing and internalizing behaviors (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2002). Also, as children of incarcerated parents enter school they are likely to exhibit problems with peers and teachers. Lastly, they examine gender differences in children who have an imprisoned parent; Parke- and Clarke-Stewart conclude that boys and girls are both adversely affected by parental incarceration (2002). The paper is informative, but does not add new empirical knowledge to children of incarcerated parents. There is a small discussion of gender differences but no discussion of racial or ethnic distinctions.

The second paper from the conference discusses the antisocial behavior of the adolescents of incarcerated parents. The paper is not a qualitative or quantitative study; it is an overview of the relationship between parental incarceration, adolescent antisocial behavior, and inept parenting (Eddy & Reid, 2002). They did not find a clear link in the literature between incarcerated parents and antisocial adolescents (Eddy & Reid, 2002). The most notable relationship they identified is that most families of incarcerated parents experience poverty, frequent moves, and school changes. These factors together may have a more causal role in adolescent antisocial behavior than having a parent incarcerated. Ultimately, the study emphasized the need for longitudinal data that examines antisocial behavior in children who experienced parental incarceration. Three years later Murray and Farrington (2005) published a longitudinal study that examined the effects of parental incarceration on adolescent antisocial behavior though the life course. They hypothesized that parent-child separation caused by parental incarceration is more harmful for children than separation because of other reasons and intend to investigate the long term effects of the separation (Murray & Farrington, 2005). The quantitative study was conducted in London using data from the Cambridge Study in

Delinquent Development (CSDD) which includes information on 411 males and their

parents (Murray & Farrington, 2005). Data collection for the study began in 1961(Murray

& Farrington, 2005). The researchers compared five "mutually exclusive" (p.1271)

groups of boys that were divided according to experience: boys who experienced parental

incarceration in the first 10 years of their life, boys whose father was incarcerated prior to

birth but not again at least before their eighteenth birthday, boys who did not experience

parental separation for any reason in the first ten years of life, and two groups of boys

who experienced parental separation for other reasons in the first ten years of their lives

(Murray & Farrington, 2005). The study found that separation due to parental

incarceration to be a "strong predictor of all antisocial and delinquent outcomes in the

study up to age 40," specifically antisocial behaviors at 14, 18, and 32 years of age were

"strongly predicted by the experience of parental imprisonment during childhood after

controlling for other risk factor" (Murray & Farrington, 2005, p.1276). A major weakness

in the study was the lack of data collection information provided by the authors. The

study did not discuss how the data was gathered nor did it disclose how often the

participants were surveyed. Furthermore, the sample over-represents white males which

are not representative of the prison population in London (Murray & Farrington, 2005).

The major limitation in studying children of incarcerated parents is the limited

amount of information known and/or available about this population. Most correctional

facilities do not inquire about inmates' families or children. The information that is

known about this invisible population, the children of incarcerated parents, is typically

obtained from the incarcerated mothers and fathers, and tends to be objective information

(Reed & Reed, 1997). Longitudinal data that follows these families over a period of time

or even at any two points is necessary in better understanding this special population. The lack of longitudinal data makes it impossible to conclude that behavioral changes are related to incarceration itself, reactions to legal procedures, release and re-entry of the imprisoned parent into the family, all or none of the above (Gabel, 1992).

The research previously reviewed is a mere beginning in studying the effects children experience when a parent is incarcerated. The majority of academic and scholarly literature available is descriptive and anecdotal; there is a need for more empirical studies. Furthermore, all the literature reviewed on children of incarcerated parents was atheoretical; therefore there is a need for theoretical frameworks to be analyzed and applied to gain a full understanding and to assist families and children who experience parental incarceration.

The basic overall findings from previous research of children of incarcerated parents do not distinguish the differences between races or genders. The few studies that distinguish gender differences suggest that boys are likely to externalize their behaviors and girls are likely to internalize their behaviors (Gabel, 1992). Externalizing behaviors can include delinquency, aggression, poor school performance, and truancy (Sack, 1977) and in social research are typically associated with male behaviors. Whereas, internalizing behaviors can include depression, anorexia, bulimia, 'cutting,' and low self-esteem (Gabel, 1992) and are typically associated with female behaviors. Needless to say, the literature on children of incarcerated parents needs further elaboration and consideration to ensure a bright and positive future for this invisible and often forgotten population. These children deserve a chance. These children need a voice.

Maintaining Family Ties While Incarcerated

Research on children of prisoners suggests there are barriers that incarcerated

mothers and fathers typically endure while trying to maintain family bonds and parental

ties with their children from behind bars: (1) restrictions from the correctional facility (2)

barriers of proximity (3) barriers from the relationship with the mother or caregiver of

their child/children (4) communication barriers (5) psychological barriers (Johnston &

Gabel, 1995; Johnston, 1995b; Hairston, 1996, 1998; Bloom & Steinhart, 1993;

Bauhofer, 1987; Mazza, 2002). Each of these obstacles that incarcerated parents and their

children tend to encounter will be addressed in the following discussion.

Many incarcerated parents and their children experience restrictions from the

correctional facilities regulations during times of visitation. Children are not always

permitted to visit their incarcerated parents. Many correctional facilities have rules and

regulations that do not allow children on the premises. When children are allowed into

the facility, access and interaction are limited by the frequency, duration, and time of

visits (Hairston, 1998). Many institutions do not have adequate facilities to allow for the

imprisoned parents, especially fathers, to properly interact with their children (Hairston,

1998). Furthermore, inmates are typically prohibited from having physical contact with

family members or their children; the children are often not allowed to receive hugs or sit

on their fathers' laps (Johnston, 1995c; Reed & Reed, 1997; Hairston, 1998). In many

instances correctional facilities only permit communication between the inmates and

visitors through a thick piece of plate glass and visits may be cut short if the children are

unruly or noncompliant (Brooks-Gordon, 2003). Visitors and especially children are not

treated as welcomed guests when visiting incarcerated loved-ones; the aforementioned

regulations from the correctional facilities often deter the visitation.

Another restriction from correctional facilities that many incarcerated fathers face

is that some institutions require the biological mother escort the children to visit the

father or give them written permission to do so. Others require the incarcerated male

show proof that the children visiting are his biological children (Bauhofer, 1987). In

African American and other ethnic minority cultures, the extended family and kinship

networks play significant roles in child rearing and other forms of family support (Martin

& Martin, 1995). Within the African American community, it is equally likely for a male

partner to share a household or residence with a woman and assume paternal

responsibilities for children whom he is not legally or biologically responsible for (Stack,

1974). Given that caregivers are not necessarily biological parents or relatives, non-

biological kin and extended family members can be denied physical visitation from their

children unless accompanied by a parent or legal guardian. The children and incarcerated

fathers rely on caregivers to facilitate visitation; they also rely on the correction facility to

allow for the visitation to occur.

Proximity also acts as a barrier to incarcerated fathers (Johnston & Gabel, 1995;

McPeek & Tse, 1988). Incarceration itself hinders imprisoned fathers' ability to build or

maintain positive father-child relationships. Yet, 63 % of incarcerated fathers are housed

four hundred miles away from their families, which is approximately a two-day trip

(McPeek & Tse, 1988). Long distance visits create additional obstacles for prisoners'

families to overcome; such as financial costs of transportation, food, and housing (Mazza,

2002). As a result, families visit less than once a month, if at all. Also, over 60 % of state

prisons are located in rural areas, making them difficult to reach by public transportation systems; which limits alternatives for bringing children to visit their fathers in a correctional facility (McPeek & Tse, 1988). Essentially, these fathers experience further alienation and disenfranchisement from the lives of their community, family, and children as a result of the locations of the correctional facilities.

The relationship between the mother and the incarcerated father may also act as a barrier to involvement and/or communication with the children. Incarcerated fathers are more likely to be single or never married (Wright & Seymour, 2000). Separate rooms where married couples, much less romantic partners, can congregate are extremely rare; if they are available there is minimal privacy (Waller, 1996). The lack of emotional support and physical intimacy between the inmate and his partner may sever the relationship. Mothers may choose to leave their incarcerated partners and find a new mate or resent them because they now have to work overtime to make up for the loss of the economic support from their incarcerated counterparts; either way communication from the children greatly diminishes (Western & McLanahan, 2000). Incarceration seems to be a likely deterrent to sustaining healthy, positive, family relationships.

Incarcerated fathers and their children may experience two types of communication barriers while the father is in the correctional facility: telephone calls and writing letters. Telephone use is not the barrier; the barrier is from expensive collect phone calls. It is well known that most families of incarcerated individuals are poor (Arditti, 2005). Collect phone calls from jails and prisons cost the receiving household as much as three times more than a phone call from a pay phone on the street, and five to six times more than a call from a residential phone (Brooks-Gordon, 2003). In addition,

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inmates are restricted to a limited time frame of when they can make collect phone calls, they cannot receive incoming calls, nor can they leave a message on an answering machine when they make a call and miss their family member (Hairston, 1998). Children of incarcerated parents have the right to affordable and accessible telephone communication with their incarcerated parent; these children are the invisible victims in the American criminal justice system.

Incarcerated parents and their children also experience barriers while trying to communicate by mail. Incarcerated parents can write their children, however most facilities restrict the amount of incoming and outgoing mail for each inmate (Mazza, 2002). Incarcerated fathers can only write letters to their children if they have writing abilities or if they have confidence in their writing skills, (remember most incarcerated parents have low educational attainment). The inmates are also responsible for the postage, paper, and ink needed for writing a letter. Thus, with limited funds this also becomes a barrier for incarcerated fathers communicating with their children (Mazza, 20002; Hairston, 1998). Moreover, when children and family members receive letters from incarcerated loved-ones they are often marked with red postage ink identifying the letter is from a prison (Hairston, 1998). The red postage stamp and collect phone calls from correctional institutions connects families with prisoners and often increases the social stigmatization the children and families of prisoners' experience.

Lastly, incarcerated parents may experience personal psychological barriers that impede on the level of parental involvement with their children. Many imprisoned fathers express feelings of shame, alienation, isolation, anger, guilt, and depression over the fact that they can not be involved in the day to day interactions of their children's lives

(Hairston, 1998). As a result, these incarcerated fathers are likely to withdraw from their children entirely; paralleling the physical removal due to incarceration from their families (Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999).

Although these men and women are prisoners, they are also fathers and mothers. The hopes and dreams for their children's lives and futures are the same as those of "traditional" parents. Research has found that prisoners that maintain strong family ties during their incarceration have a greater chance of success upon release (Hairston, 1998). Correctional facilities, state agencies, federal agencies, and social service agencies need to take an active role in fostering these relationships and take an active role in creating and stabilizing the bonds between imprisoned parents and their children.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical perspective known as the stress process model, developed and

influenced by Leonard Pearlin and colleagues, consists of three major components: the

sources of stress (stressors), the mediators of stress, and the manifestations of stress

(Pearlin et al., 1981; Pearlin, 1989); and is the guiding force for this qualitative research.

Research in identifying sources of stress focuses on life events and chronic life strains;

research on the mediators of stress typically focuses on social supports and coping as well

as self esteem and mastery; and, lastly, research on the outcomes (manifestations) of

stress ranges from biological reactions to stress to overt emotional and behavioral

reactions to stress (Pearlin et al., 1981; Pearlin, 1989; Turner & Butler, 2003). The

propositions and components of the social stress process are the guiding force for the data

analysis and results of this qualitative interview study. The themes that emerged from the

interview transcripts will be applied to the theoretical concepts of the following

theoretical model.

The stress process model seeks to establish "the unities between social structure

and the inner functioning of individuals" (Pearlin, 1989, p.241). A defining characteristic

of this theoretical framework is that individuals are embedded in social structures that

heavily influence their lives. Pearlin states this best, "To a large extent these

arrangements (social structural arrangements, such as: economic class, age, race and

ethnicity) determine the stressors to which people are exposed, the mediators they are able to mobilize, and the manner in which they experience stress" (1989, p.241).

<div align="center">Social Stressors</div>

Stressors refer to the experiences that cause stress. The sources of social stress can be linked to structures and cultures in which individuals are embedded in society; such as age, race and ethnicity, gender and economic class (Pearlin, 1989). Sources of social stress can also be found in social institutions and their proscribed roles and statuses such as the relationships between a husband and wife or a parent and child (Pearlin, 1989). Ultimately, stress researchers postulate that stress is a result of two broad circumstances: "the occurrence of discrete events and the presence of relatively continuous problems" (Pearlin et al., 1981). The former receiving the most scholarly attention in the recent past, it shall be addressed first, followed by a discussion of the latter.

Life Events

The first major type of stressor involves changes in life events, also referred to as eventful stressors. Eventful stressors have a distinct point of origin; that is: "they are events having discrete temporal origins" (Pearlin, 1978). The distinguishing feature of eventful stressors or events that eventuate in to stress is they are "unscheduled" (Pearlin & Radabaugh, 1976) as compared to those events that are "scheduled" (Pearlin & Radabaugh, 1976) within the trajectory of the typical life cycle.

A key theoretical assumption that underlies life events research is that all change is presumably damaging to individuals because all change requires readjustment; thus

stress is a result of individuals' struggles to reestablish homeostasis or equilibrium in their lives (Pearlin et al., 1981; Pearlin, 1989). In the field of sociology, however, this is a false claim for two reasons. First, change is intrinsic and unavoidable in all living things; for example, aging. Second, not all change is bad or harmful; for example, a family moving into a new house is a change but it is not necessarily harmful.

Thus, it is not change per se that is stressful or harmful, but the quality of change that is potentially problematic to individuals (Pearlin, 1989). More precisely, changes that are "undesired, unscheduled, non-normative, and uncontrolled" (Pearlin, 1989) are the most hazardous to the mental well-being of individuals (Pearlin, 1989; Fairbank & Hough, 1979). For example, marriage is considered a scheduled event in the life course and is not typically perceived as a stressful event; however, divorce is an unscheduled event in the life course and often, but not always, eventuates in to stress.

It should also be noted that individuals do not always experience or view eventful stressors in the same manner, as illustrated in the previous example. A woman getting divorced may view the divorce as a blessing and an end to an unhappy or even dangerous situation. In contrast, another woman may be completely devastated that her marriage is ending. This example simplistically illustrates how the same event can yield different reactions depending on the contextual background of the specific situation.

In sum, eventful stressors are single incidents with a definitive beginning and are typically non-normative and unscheduled occurrences within the life course trajectory that have a negative effect on the mental well-being of the individuals involved.

Chronic Role Strains

The second type of stressor identified in stress research is chronic role strains, which involve persistent problems and threats individuals face in their daily lives; they tend to be embedded in social roles, interpersonal relationships, and social structures that are socially static, therefore, the stressors themselves may be as long lasting as the structures within which they reside (Pearlin et al., 1981; Pearlin, 1989). Chronic role strains in stress research are thoroughly discussed but the actual longevity of the strains are merely implied, never directly addressed, which causes social scientists to steer away from this research tool and cling to life events research.

Pearlin identifies several types of role strains that can chronically occur within individuals and yield negative mental health consequences. The most common type role strain is characterized as entailing interpersonal conflicts within role sets (Pearlin, 1989). This type of role strain occurs most often in complementary roles; for example, employer-employee, husband-wife and parent-child.

Role overload exists when demands on a person exceed their ability to fulfill the task (Pearlin, 1989); commonly occurring in occupational and household roles. An individual who is a single parent, the caregiver for an ailing parent, and a full-time employee outside of the home might feel overwhelmed with all the responsibilities and duties and experience role overload. Inter-role conflict is another type of role strain identified and should not be confused with the formerly discussed role overload. This type of strain occurs at the intersection of different roles, when it is impossible for the individual to carry out the demands of two or more roles (Pearlin, 1989). For example, an

individual who works two jobs might experience inter-role conflict because of scheduling overlap at both places of employment.

A different strain, role captivity, exists when an individual is an unwilling participant in the current role (Pearlin, 1989). For example, an employed woman who would rather be at home with her children but can not afford to be unemployed is an unwilling participant in her occupation and therefore she is experiencing role captivity. It is important to note that these roles may not be conflict- ridden or unpleasant to fill, individuals may desire to be elsewhere fulfilling a different role (Pearlin, 1989).

The final type of strain addressed is role restructuring. Pearlin contends that this type of role strain is inevitable, and often overlooked, because of the natural biological aging process and personal interaction (1989). For purposes of this research, this is an important and enduring role strain for the population being studied. An example of the negative implications role restructuring yields can be explored in the relationship between incarcerated parents and their children. Upon incarceration, children experience a power shift in the relationship with their incarcerated parent. The parent now relies on the child to visit, write letters, and accept telephone calls. The power imbalance and role restructuring which is experienced by both parties, can result in a sense of betrayal, guilt, confusion, and hopelessness all of which are negative mental health consequences.

Overall, persistent role strains can confront individuals with their own failures, lack of successes, and ultimately, suggest that they are not in control of the forces and circumstances that control their lives; thus eventuate in to stress. Under these conditions elements of the self-concept, self-esteem and mastery, can be negatively affected and lead to the stress process. However, for purposes of this research and according to Pearlin and

colleagues (1989), self-esteem and mastery will be treated as mediators of stress and will be discussed in detail later in the chapter.

Convergence of Life Events and Chronic Strains

The question remains, how do situations become stressors? The explanation for this phenomenon is that "eventful experiences and chronic strains converge in the production of stress" (Pearlin et al., 1981, p.343). In other words, stress is produced when an eventful experience occurs simultaneously with an enduring role strain.

How does the aforementioned convergence happen? Pearlin and colleagues claim this convergence can occur in one of two ways. The first possibility is that an eventful experience causes a seemingly trivial problem to become a larger problem; it gives a new meaning to an old problem (Brown, 1978). From this perspective, life events yield stress by negatively affecting the meaning of persistent life strains. The second way in which life events and life strains converge is that life events may create new strains or intensify preexisting strains, and it is these new strains that produce stress (Pearlin et al., 1981). For example, prior to incarceration a father was absent from the home because he was selling drugs. Post incarceration, however, a new strain is produced not only from the father being absent from the home but from the loss of income due to his incarceration. From this perspective, life events cause stress by producing new strains. Furthermore, role strains or problems reinforce the interconnectedness of social structure and the individual.

Overall, it is the convergence of events with other difficulties that cause situations to eventuate in stress. By recognizing eventful experiences combined with chronic strains

or difficulties causes stress is an important element in stress process research and in understanding the experiences of children of incarcerated parents. As previously stated, to understand the effects of parental incarceration on children one most look at the entirety of their familial, social, and cultural situations which will make this useful in understanding the aforementioned population. Instead of taking the traditional route of "either-or" thinking in the research process, Pearlin suggests utilizing both eventful experiences and chronic role strains to better understand the proliferation of the stress process (1989).

Primary and Secondary Stressors

An underlying theme throughout the conceptualization process of the nature of stressors is that "significant stressors rarely, if ever, occur singly" (Pearlin, 1989). In other words, a significant life event or role strain does not exist independently of other life incidents that eventuate in to stress. Social stress researchers claim that life events and chronic role strains are interrelated; that is, when people experience life events or chronic role strains they are often exposed to another event or strain that also prompts another event or strain (Pearlin et al., 1981; Pearlin, 1989). Assuming an event or role strain exists independently of other events or strains would cause the research to be incomplete and invalid because the role of stress research is to discover why people with similar social characteristics in similar situations react to stressful situations in different manners (Pearlin, 1989). Therefore, stress researchers make a distinction between primary and secondary stressors; in essence the stressors are placed in chronological order.

Primary stressors are the initial stressor in an individual's experience, and they may be the product of a persistent strain or an undesired life event (Pearlin, 1989). Secondary stressors are the consequence of primary stressors and are only secondary in terms of temporal ordering not necessarily in terms of intensity (Pearlin, 1989). Actually, secondary stressors have the potential to create more stress than primary stressors (Pearlin, 1989). For example, a child who experiences parental incarceration, a primary stressor, will also probably encounter loss of financial resources and have to relocate housing and schools as well as role restructuring with the incarcerated parent, secondary stressors. In other words, initially the child experiences parental absence due to incarceration and then the child is faced with other events and role strains that exacerbate and eventuate in to stress and affect the mental well-being of the child.

Stress Mediators

Pearlin contends that mediators are shown to influence the effects of stressful experiences and their manifestations. Stress mediators are regarded as being responsible for explaining the differences in outcome variables to the same stressor. Individuals, as a defense mechanism, in a stressful situation activate mediators. The mediators of stress include social supports, coping, self-esteem, and mastery; each representing a mechanism for dealing with life's difficulties. The aforementioned mediating resources may also act as moderating resources, which will be discussed in the concluding section of this chapter; however, application of the theoretical perspective to the interview results will focus on the dominant domains of the stress process: stressors, mediators, and manifestations.

Social Supports

Pearlin and colleagues define social supports as "the access to and use of individuals, groups, or organizations in dealing with life's vicissitudes" (1981, p.346). The aforementioned ambiguous definition has caused many researchers to neglect the issue of social supports in the stress process and focus more of their attention to other mediators of stress. Many researchers have tried to clarify the conceptualization of social supports yet the term continues to reflect inconsistencies and vagueness in its meanings and implications.

It should be noted that social supports are not the same as what is known as social networks in sociology. Social networks refer more directly to the "structure of people's social attachments" (Pearlin, 1989, p.251). Whereas, social supports represent the resources individuals utilize in dealing with life's difficulties (Pearlin et al., 1981; Pearlin, 1989). For example, if a woman perceives herself in a 'happy marriage' that would be considered a social support system. On the other hand, an abusive husband is not an effective social support system for a woman. An individual's social support system is not automatically one's family, co-workers, or friends. Pearlin and colleagues report that it is the degree to which people interact with their social networks and the quality of the relationships that act as mediators to stress (1981). Qualities that are critical in social support systems are reciprocated intimate dialogue and the presence of trust (Pearlin et. al, 1981; Pearlin, 1989). For example, for the population being studied, this type of support system can come from community programs or professional counseling.

Without clear conception of social supports, research findings on the mediating effects of social supports have been mixed (Lieberman & Mullan, 1978). Several studies

show social support does mediate the initial impact of a stressful situation (e.g. Eaton, 1978; Gore, 1978); however, there is not a clear understanding of the conditions in which social supports are an effective mediator to a stressful situation (Lieberman & Mullan, 1978). Most stress research focuses on perceived social support making it difficult to examine how and what types of support systems work and in what types of environments.

Coping

Coping, another type of stress mediator, refers to the response that people take on their own behalf as they attempt to avoid or soften the impact of life's problematic and stressful incidents (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978; Pearlin, 1989). Pearlin identified three functions of coping: to modify the situation that caused the stressor, to manage the meaning of the situation to reduce harm levels, and to manage the manifestations of stress (Pearlin et al., 1981; Pearlin, 1989). In other words, coping behaviors attempt to neutralize stressful events. For example, one may utilize comparative references to others who are in a worse situation to feel better about their own situation (Pearlin et al., 1981).

Self-Esteem and Mastery

Self-esteem and mastery are two dimensions of the self-concept that can also act as mediators when dealing with life's problems. As previously mentioned, at the conception of the stress process model these elements were treated as stressors but as stress research gained ground Pearlin and colleagues re-conceptualized them as mediators of stress (1989), especially in sociology.

Self-esteem refers to the judgments one makes about their own worth (Pearlin et al., 1981). Mastery refers to the extent to which people feel they are in control of the forces that influence their lives (Pearlin et al., 1981). These aspects of the self represent personal resources and can be potential barriers to stressors because those who lack these elements will be more vulnerable to outcomes of stressors.

Manifestations of Stress

Manifestations of stress refer to the outcomes of "organismic stress" (Pearlin, 1989, p.252). These manifestations can occur in a variety of ways and on different levels, for example: the immune system, the endocrine system, cardiovascular systems, anxiety, depression, and mental health (Pearlin, 1989). It is this ambiguity towards stress outcomes that becomes problematic when researching stress (Elliot & Eisdorfer, 1982). In other words, stress is an ambiguous concept that manifests itself in different ways in different individuals and at different levels causing some researchers to question the validity in examining such a concept. Pearlin emphasizes that the ambiguity of the concept of stress is an important and attractive quality for the field of sociology to embrace due to its ability to incorporate the idea of "inseparability between the circumstances of social life and individual functioning" (1989, p.254). Per sociologists, he emphasizes the importance of focusing on multiple outcomes of stressors, not just one.

Summary

In sum, Pearlin's social stress process provides an explanation of the interconnectedness of individual's experiences and the larger social structure. The

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theoretical model asserts that stressful experiences do not "spring out of a vacuum but typically can be traced back to surrounding social structures and people's locations within them" (Pearlin, 1981, p.242). It is centered on three domains or propositions: stressors, mediators, and manifestations. Stressors are the experiences that cause stress, mediators are behaviors and perceptions that potentially can alter the negative experiences of stressors and thus effect the outcomes, and manifestations of stress are the outcomes of the stressors (Pearlin et al., 1981; Pearlin, 1989). The three domains of the stress process model will be applied to children of incarcerated parents. Expected findings from this study include: possible gender differences in the behaviors exhibited by children of incarcerated parents as well as financial and residential instability for these children.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN

The following chapter reviews the research design and methodology employed in this qualitative interview study. It begins with a description of the IRB approval process. Next is a discussion of the recruitment process, the sampling method, and research instruments used during the research process; followed by an account of the method of data collection and a description of the participants involved in the interview process. Lastly, the chapter concludes with a description of the data analysis and specific limitations identified in the study.

IRB Approval

The initial step taken in this qualitative study was to seek approval from the IRB at UNT. In February 2005 I submitted an application to the IRB website that included a summary of the study, an informed consent form guaranteeing participant confidentiality, and a copy of the data collection materials that would be utilized in the study; specifically a demographic questionnaire intended for the participants and the interview questions (See Appendices A and B). After the IRB reviewed the initial application, I received an email requesting a few clarifications, which were submitted promptly. The IRB then requested a few more clarifications, which were also promptly edited and submitted. Lastly, in May 2005 final approval from the University's IRB was granted. (See Appendix C.)

Sampling and Recruitment

Interview participants were a selected through a non-random convenience sampling method due to the uniqueness of the population. Locating participants for this research was challenging because of the lack of social agencies that cater to the specific population. The only requirement for participants in the study was that at the time of the interview they needed to be a caregiver of at least one child who has an incarcerated parent. I found a non-profit organization in the Southwest region of the United States from which most of the interview participants were recruited. The remaining interview participants were recruited from a religious organization that helps offenders, ex-offenders, and their families; the organization was referred to me by one of the interview participants. Both organizations offer children of incarcerated parents a place to fellowship with peers who have similar familial, social, and emotional experiences, and they also teach the children how to deal with the emotions experienced due to parental incarceration. The non-profit organization also has a mentoring program in which the children are matched with an adult of the same sex, and they spend at least two hours a week together on an outing or doing an activity. It is important to add that the children who participate in the program are themselves recruited from neighborhood schools.

Initially, I contacted the non-profit organization via telephone and set up a face-to-face meeting with the head of the organization. During the meeting, I informed her about the IRB approval from the university, the intent of the study, the informed consent form for the participants, and that the participants were also going to be paid a $20 incentive for their participation in the study.[1] The head of the non-profit organization was

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[1] I received a $260 research grant from the Department of Sociology at the University of North Texas and as a result was able to pay the interview participants $20 for allowing me to hear their stories.

enthusiastic and excited about my research and was willing to give me access to the families involved in the organization.

The head of the organization invited me to go along on weekly visits to the residences of the families involved in the organization to meet the caregivers/mothers face-to-face, ask if they are willing and wanted to participate in the interview, and if they agreed, set up a time and place for the interview. It is important to note that no one I recruited for participation turned down the opportunity. If the caregivers were not home at the time of my initial visit, I requested a telephone number and set up a time for the interviews at the earliest convenience for the participants. Most of the interviews were conducted at the participants' residences; however, two were conducted at the headquarters of the non-profit organization.

As previously stated, over half of the interview participants were selected from the non-profit organization, but it was summertime and the number of families available for participation was limited because the children are recruited from the neighborhood public school and during school is not in session during the summer. The remaining interviews participants were recruited from the aforementioned religious organization in the Southwest region of the United States. The participants from the religious organization were recruited by telephone numbers given to me via the interview participant from the non-profit organization who was also employed by the religious organization. I called the potential participants and asked if they would be interested in participating in research I was conducting on children of incarcerated parents, and everyone I contacted was willing to participate. All but one of the interviews from the participants recruited from the religious organization was conducted at the participants'

residences; the remaining interview was conducted at the religious organization. Eleven interviews were conducted in all; eight from caregivers of children who participate in the non-profit organization and three interviews resulting from the religious organization.[2]

Interview participants were contacted in one of three ways: I went on a weekly visit to five households with the head of the non-profit organization and set up an interview for a later date, the remaining three interview participants affiliated with the non-profit organization were contacted solely by telephone and interviews were set for a later date, and the final way in which participants were selected is through a participant in the non-profit organization who was also a staff member of the aforementioned religious organization in which she gave me a list of six telephone numbers and the first three that returned the my initial telephone call were the final interview participants in the study.

Research Instruments

The data collection instruments used in this research were a brief open-ended demographic questionnaire and a structured interview guide. (See Appendices A and B) The demographic questionnaire addressed family characteristics such as the number and ages of the children being cared for, who was incarcerated, and the relation between the interview participant and the children. It was used to get a basic description of the family and family characteristics. The structured interview guide was based on the caregivers' perceptions of changes in the children under their care as a result of parental incarceration. Topics addressed in the interview included: whether the incarcerated parent was a topic of discussion with the child/children; behavioral changes at home or school in

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[2]I conducted a total of twelve interviews during the data collection phase of the project. However, I discarded one interview because the interview participant was not currently caring for a child/children with

the child/children; communication with the incarcerated parent; and family history of jail or imprisonment.

Data Collection

Eleven interviews were conducted in all. Eight of the interviews were conducted in the participants' homes, two were conducted at non-profit organization headquarters and one was conducted at the religious organization. The interviews lasted between seventeen and fifty-two minutes, on average the interviews lasted thirty-five minutes. It was my intent to audio tape all of the interviews. However, the participants were given a choice, and three of the participants opted out because they did not feel comfortable with the voices being recorded. A total of eight interviews were recorded and three relied on notes taken during the interview

Data collection began in June 2005 and was complete in September 2005. Upon entering the setting in which the interview was going to take place and getting my materials out; first, I asked for permission to audio tape the interview explaining that an audio recording of the interview will assist me in the research process. Of the eleven interviews conducted, three declined to have their voices recorded. Next, I read aloud the informed consent forms to the participants ensuring confidentiality and the participants were also informed verbally and in written form that they can refuse to answer any question or cease to participate in the interview entirely at any time; none of the participants refused to answer any questions and none of the interviews were terminated prematurely. Then I gave the consent forms to the participants to review, asked if there were any questions, and had each participant sign the forms; one for their personal

an incarcerated parent.

records and one for my records. Next, the participants were asked to fill out a brief

demographic survey inquiring about the caregiver, the incarcerated parent, and the

structure of the family both prior to and during incarceration. Lastly, in order to involve

the interview participants in the research process, I requested each participant to choose a

pseudonym which would be used in when reporting the research findings. Also, the

participants were assured again verbally that their children's real names will not be used

in the study and that no one will ever be able to trace this research to them personally or

their families.

Description of Sample

The participants in the qualitative interview study are mothers/caregivers of

children of an incarcerated parent. See Table 1 for a detailed list of the participants'

characteristics and description. The interview participants range in ages from twenty

eight to seventy seven years old and the children range from infants to twenty years old.

Eleven interviews were conducted for a total of seven mothers, three grandmothers, and

one aunt; four African Americans, four Latinas, and three White women. Of the eleven

interviews, there were nine incarcerated fathers and two incarcerated mothers. The

sample includes only women because they were the only caregivers that were available to

participate in the interviews. I was not made aware of any male caregivers from the

nonprofit or religious organizations. Therefore, the findings of this study may have a

gender bias. Previous research has reported that women tend to report internalizing

behaviors and men tend to report externalizing behaviors in their children's behavior

Table 1

Participant Self Reported Description and Characteristics

Pseudonym	Race/Ethnicity	Age	# of Children	Relationship	Incarcerated Parent
Candace	White	38	4	Mother	Father
Chloe	White	44	2	Mother	Father
Jane	African American	54	2	Maternal Grandmother	Mother
Jenny	African American	77	1	Paternal Grandmother	Mother
Lizzie	Hispanic	40	2	Mother	Father
Natalie	Hispanic	28	5	Mother	Father
Rhonda	African American	33	7	Mother	Father
Sally	African American	53	6	Paternal Grandmother	Father
Sandra	Hispanic	42	6	Mother	Father
Sara	Hispanic	37	1	Paternal Aunt	Father
Terry	White	41	4	Mother	Father

(Fritsch & Burkhead, 1981). I expect to find, then, an increased number of internalizing behaviors identified by the mothers/caregivers in this study.

Data Analysis

After the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed verbatim by hand. I logged over 87 hours of transcribing, which yielded 115 pages of transcripts. Then the transcripts were read thoroughly and in succession. This was done to immerse myself in the language and ideas of the individuals being studied. General themes were identified and logged. Next, the transcripts were read three more times to illicit additional meanings from the interview transcripts. Also, written notes taken during the interviews regarding nonverbal communication were integrated into the transcripts. Lastly, the transcripts were coded based on the context of Pearlin's theoretical propositions of the social stress process. Specifically, the themes that emerged were applied to the theoretical propositions of the social stress process: stressors, mediators, and manifestations.

Analytic induction, a specific form of inductive analysis, was employed in this qualitative interview study. According to Patton, analytic induction "begins with an analyst's deduced propositions or theory-derived hypotheses and is a procedure for verifying theories and propositions based on qualitative data (p.454)." Therefore the data analysis was driven and guided by the three domains of the social stress process. Analytic induction was chosen for this qualitative study because, as previously mentioned, prior research with this population has been atheoretical and this study is an attempt to apply a sociological theoretical perspective to gain a better understanding of the social and emotional experiences children of incarcerated parents endure.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

The purpose of this qualitative interview study is to examine the lives and

experiences children of incarcerated parents from a theoretical perspective through an

application of the social stress process. Previous research on children of incarcerated

parents has neglected to add a theoretical component to their research, which is the

intention of this research. The results will be organized around the theoretical domains of

the stress process applied to findings from the analysis of eleven qualitative interviews of

mothers and/or caregivers of youth(s) of an incarcerated parent. Guided by analytic

induction, the themes that emerged from the transcripts were applied to the theoretical

propositions of the social stress process: stressors, mediators, and manifestations

(Pearlin, 1989). However, due to the conceptualization of stress mediators and the

manner in which the structured interviews were initially constructed, the analysis of

stress mediators or potential mediators will be guided by inferences from the interview

responses from the participants and the literature on the stress process. That is, potential

mediators identified will be the result of theoretical associations and implications.

The following chapter is guided by the three domains or propositions of the social

stress process through inductive analysis. It begins by exploring social stressors. The

categories of themes that emerged from the analysis include: primary stressors, secondary

stressors, potential stress mediators, and lastly, the manifestations or outcomes of the

social stress process on children of incarcerated parents, as identified by the caregivers,

will be examined; specifically themes that emerged are internalizing and externalizing behaviors. It is important to note, due to the difficulty in identifying mediating behaviors because only one interview was conducted, the results will focus on secondary stressors and the specific manifestations of stress in children of incarcerated parents. Again, the intent of this study is to add a theoretical component to the body of research concerning children of incarcerated parents.

Primary Stressors

Primary stressors are the initial stressor in an individual's experience; which may be the product of a persistent strain or an undesired life event (Pearlin, 1989). On the other hand, secondary stressors are the consequence of primary stressors and are only considered secondary in terms of temporal order not intensity or importance (Pearlin, 1989). Therefore, for purposes of this research the primary stressor is the experience of children having a parent in jail or prison. The primary stressor was identified prior to entering the field for data collection because it is the only requirement to participate in the study. Therefore, the eventful experience (Pearlin, 1989) of having a parent incarcerated is the primary stressor in the lives of children of incarcerated parents.

Secondary Stressors

As previously stated, secondary stressors are conceptualized as a result of primary stressors and occur either simultaneously or after primary stressors (Pearlin, 1989). Actually, secondary stressors have the potential to create more stress than primary stressors (Pearlin, 1989). For example, children who cope with parental incarceration, a

primary stressor, also tend to encounter economic consequences as well as experience

residential relocation, secondary stressors (Johnston, 1995d; Barnhill, 1996; Hairston,

1998). In other words, initially a child experiences parental absence due to incarceration

and then the child is faced with other events and role strains that exacerbate the issues

and eventuate to stress and in turn affect the mental well-being of the child. Three

secondary stressors were identified from the interview transcripts: financial problems,

residential relocation, and inferred school changes. The secondary stressors tend to be

interconnected and occur either simultaneously or consecutively in the lives of the

families and, of particular interest here, the children of incarcerated parents.

Financial Difficulties

The majority of the mothers/caregivers expressed many of the same concerns

when asked if the family was impacted economically as a result of the parent's

incarceration. Natalie, a 28 year old Latina mother of five, said the following when asked

if the family was impacted economically when the children's father went to prison:

> Big time, a lot. I am having a hard time finding a job because *[a long pause, also
> the tone of her voice drops] back then too I did something—I got probation and
> everything for it but I did something and um, I am having a hard time now
> looking for a job, finding a job. So it has hurt me a lot that he is in there and I am
> out here and I am having a hard time supporting my kids.

Jane, an African American maternal grandmother caring for two grandchildren,

responded in a similar way when asked about the financial impact of her daughter's

imprisonment:

> …I sat them down and let them know that the money that I have I just can't
> waste it; I just can't always go and buy them what they want. Mostly they are
> really suffering as far as clothes because they don't get the other things that they

see other kids get. They do have clothes. I buy them every time I get a check ya know I buy them two or three outfits and a pair of shoes.

Sally, an African American paternal grandmother caring for six grandchildren, expressed the same concerns as Jane when asked if her grandchildren's lives have been impacted financially as a result of their father's incarceration. Sally said, "In a way because ya know day care and some things they don't get they want ya know. Some shoes that they have in style they can't get, DVD's and stuff like that you know. We just can't afford certain things ya know?"

Financial difficulties also interfere with maintaining contact with the incarcerated parents. Rhonda, for example, said that her automobile is not working, and she does not have enough money to have it fixed. She talked about a bus service that provides families of prisoners transportation to the correctional facility but expressed that it is "just too expensive." The bus service costs one hundred dollars per family, she said that she could spend that one hundred dollars "on a bill."

Another example of a mother/caregiver expressing concern that her children are 'doing without' as a result of a parent's imprisonment is from Sandra. Sandra, a Latina mother six, said that her family had been impacted economically as a result of the incarceration of her husband, the children's father. She said that she felt the family has been impacted financially. They have to budget what they get, and as a result of the incarceration, they have to get food stamps in order to have enough money for food. She also said the church she attends assists her financially when she can not make ends meet. She said it "hurts" because she can not get her kids the things they want and need; she used to be able to afford those things.

Terry, a White mother of four, when asked about the financial impact of the paternal incarceration said the family had "absolutely" experienced financial problems. When asked how, she explained:

> Um by the struggles, I mean they don't get to do things like they normally get to do. They know that it is only one income now. Like at the beginning we had our car repo-ed, um we didn't have a place to live so we had to, we had to move in with his (the incarcerated parent) mother for a short amount of time and then um I got my own apartment and so we have just been gradually building back up, which now we are doing okay.

Terry felt that the financial difficulties resulting from parental incarceration are the greatest strain in her children's life. When asked how she felt the incarceration of her husband affected their children the most she replied, "Just the financial stress I think of them not being able to do things…"

As previously illustrated, a recurring theme identified from the interviews is that families and children tend to suffer financially as a result of parental incarceration. Thus, children of incarcerated parents experience the primary stressor of parental incarceration and as a result of the involuntary absence the children and the entire family tend to suffer financially. Therefore, the financial problems experienced by these families are identified as secondary stressors in the lives of children of incarcerated parents.

Residential Relocation/Change Schools

The majority of the mothers/caregivers also expressed that the children had to move residences as a result of the parental incarceration. Therefore not only are children of incarcerated parents subjected to parental absence due to incarceration but often their lives are uprooted and disturbed even further because they have to relocate. Typically the children had to move for one of two reasons: the residence they were living in prior to

incarceration was too expensive (financial) or the children were cared for by an extended family member and had to move to the member's residence.

Many of the mothers/caregivers indicated that the children often had to not only move to a different residence but that many of the children also had to change schools, and often the change affected the children under their care. Candace, a White mother of four children, also experienced financial difficulties as a result of her children's father's incarceration. She was asked if she had noticed any changes in her children's performance or participation at school she replied:

> …he (referring to her eleven year old son) used to be very eager to go to school and wake up on his own and now he will sleep until afternoon. That has all changed since his dad got locked up. I mean he used to be very very responsible as young as he was… He used to do really do a real good job and I am working on getting him back to doing that but I mean it has been a real big job. Like I said ever since he has been locked up its been—of course he has to move a lot too because we lost our house, we had to be thrown here and there because he was the sole provider that right there, I think has a hundred—if we had stayed right there I don't think 90% of these problems, I think (inaudible). He has had to switch schools four times since his father was locked up, four schools in three years.

From Candace's perspective, her son became less responsible and less interested in school because he had to change schools four times. Later in the interview she expressed that her children have seen "all the rough stuff—I mean we had to live in shelters." Candace's family experienced being forced to move out of their home because it was no longer affordable and also had to experience living in shelters.

Natalie said that the children had to move as a result of their father's incarceration. When asked if she felt they were affected either positively or negatively from the move she replied:

> It hurt them because this was um this was um this was his um probably his fourth or fifth time away from us ya know. So when I told them of course they started crying—why, why, what did he do this time? And at that time I didn't know why

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he was locked up. I go I don't know, we are going to move back to (the city they live in now) and we are going to figure this all out.

Natalie's children experienced the incarceration of their father and were also forced to move to another city for implied financial reasons, a secondary stressor. Lizzie, a Latina mother of two also expressed that she and her children had to move as a result of the children's father's incarceration but for a different reason. During the interview Lizzie expressed that she feared for the physical safety of her children, especially her son. She said, as a result of the violent crime her children's father was convicted of, they had to move, change schools, and she even changed her son's name that he shared with his father. She expressed the following concerns about her son's safety and the reason the family had to relocate:

> …Even his friends don't want to play with him no more. So I changed, I changed the school, I changed everything, I moved. I can't take a chance in them [referring to her children's friends and the children at school which tend to be in the same neighborhoods] really hurting him now. God what about ten years from now they are really going to hurt him? They ask him now, they say what is your name and he will say Sam. He won't say his old name; he will not say his old name. And then he ask me why I changed it [inaudible], is it because of what dad did, [crime]. He said are they going to beat me up for it? I said yeah they are going to beat you up for it. He said okay. I mean it was hard for me to change his name because I knew he didn't want to change his name but it was hard because either I change his name so he can live a lot longer or not change his name and him get hurt.

Therefore, motivated by fear for her children's safety, Lizzie and her family relocated residential areas, which resulted in having to change schools, and she legally had her son's name changed to feel confident that her son can never be associated to his father.

In sum, the majority of the mothers/caregiver of the children of incarcerated parents interviewed reported suffering with financial difficulties when trying to provide

for their families, that the children under their care experienced residential relocation and as a result had to change schools. Therefore, the children experienced the primary stressor of having a parent incarcerated and were also likely to experience secondary stressors in the form of economic difficulties, residential relocation and new schools. It appears that the secondary stressors identified build on one another and tend to further exacerbate the problems children of incarcerated parents are forced to cope and deal with.

Thus, the previous illustrations of secondary stressors in the lives of children of incarcerated parents are a mere beginning in exploring this issue. The intention of these examples is to illustrate the interconnectedness of primary and secondary stressors and how they work together to eventuate in to stress. It is also evident that secondary stressors tend to build on one another and potentially produce more problems than the primary stressor. The stress process then pertains to children of incarcerated parents because they typically endure life events and chronic life strains simultaneously. More importantly, the changes experienced tend to be undesired and unexpected to the children. The outcomes or manifestations of these experiences or changes will be examined later in this chapter.

Potential Stress Mediators

To briefly review, stress mediators typically act as an individual's defense mechanism in times of stress to decrease a problem or lower a threat. Mediators are social supports, coping behaviors, self-esteem, and mastery. According to the stress process model, children of incarcerated parents can theoretically decrease the amount of stress or its manifestations, utilizing one, two, or a combination of these mediating

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behaviors. However, there was difficulty in examining the mediators of stress in children of incarcerated parents because most of the research relies on social policies and organizations to mediate the effects of stress on these children. An attempt will be made to apply the results of this qualitative research project to explore potential mediators of stress in the lives of children of incarcerated parents.

When a child is faced with the incarceration of a parent, research has shown that the maintenance of strong familial ties with the incarcerated parent as well as other family members decreases the stressfulness of the event (Johnston, 1995d; Hairston, 1998). Theoretically this is an example of a social support system in the stress process model, though it does not have a label in the reviewed literature on children of incarcerated parents. For example, Chloe, a White mother of two daughters of different fathers said, "…like his sister lives in (a city nearby) and she visits them every two or three months she goes over there…" This allows her daughter to have a relationship with her paternal extended family members and to stay connected with her father's side of the family during the incarceration.

Another example of how keeping strong familial ties can mediate stress in the lives of children of incarcerated parents is illustrated through the fact that five of the eleven interview participants are the caregivers for other family member's children, all but one are grandmothers. An extended member being the children's caregiver mediates stress because it allows the family to stay together and also tends to keep siblings together. Something often forgotten is that most incarcerated parents will get out of prison and it helps in their success too to keep the family members together.

An additional mediating behavior that children of prisoners can utilize to lessen the impact of the incarceration of a parent is through what Pearlin calls coping (1989). A coping behavior this population can employ is what is known in the stress process model as comparative reference coping. This entails the child justifying to him/her that the situation could be worse. For example, a child can be thankful that only one parent is incarcerated and rejoice in the fact that one parent is still around. This is a prime example of a coping behavior typified in the stress process model. In theory the aforementioned coping strategy, or those similar, may be utilized and yield positive results for the children of incarcerated parents. However, the data collected for this paper is restricted only to mothers'/caregivers' perceptions of the lives of children of incarcerated parents and the researcher was unable to provide applicable examples from the transcripts that illustrate clear coping mechanism the children themselves utilize in dealing with the stressful experience of having a parent in prison.

A final example of a mediating behavior that these children utilize to modify the manifestations of stress in the event of parental incarceration is also through a social support system. Most research on prisoners and their families' find that a proper support system combined with honesty about the parent's incarceration, can deflect the negative manifestations of stress in their lives (Wright and Seymour, 2000; Carlson, 1996; Hairston, 1998; Johnston, 1995; Johnston, 1992; Kampfner, 1995). Children being told the truth about the circumstances of the absent parent have been shown to directly modify the manifestations of stress. This finding correlates with Pearlin's theoretical stress process model.

The previous examples of mediating behaviors children of incarcerated parents employ as defense mechanisms have been found to effectively reduce stress in their lives. These are only a few examples from the transcripts that are applicable. However, it is of importance to point out one apparent difference between stress research and children of prisoners research. It is the conceptualization of self-esteem and mastery. In the former, self-esteem and mastery are hypothesized to be mediators and in the latter they are found to be manifestations or outcomes to stress. In sum, the stress process pertains to children of incarcerated parents because research has shown that mediating behaviors decrease the manifestations of stress in their lives. Possibly children's self-esteem is affected because they tend to internalize; this will be explored further in the next section.

Manifestations of Stress

The outcomes or manifestations of stress are the final step in the stress process model. As previously mentioned, it is a difficult step to conceptualize due to the ambiguity of the term "stress." After rigorous analysis and according to the literature on children of incarcerated parents, the manifestations of stress for children of incarcerated parents can be divided in two categories: internalizing behaviors and externalizing behaviors. Internalizing behaviors are a broad class of behaviors that involve inner conflict (Achenbach & McConaughy, 1997). Whereas externalizing behaviors are characterized by "conflicts with others and with social mores" (Achenbach & McConaughy, 1997, p.56). That is, internalizing behaviors occur inside the individual and externalizing behaviors manifest themselves outwardly. Moreover, these two types of

behaviors are not mutually exclusive, meaning an individual can exhibit both internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Achenbach & McConaughy, 1997*).*

Internalizing Behaviors

One way that stress manifests in children of incarcerated parents is through internalizing behaviors. Previous research on children of incarcerated parents claims these types of behaviors are generally demonstrated by girls and young children (Johnston, 1992). Internalizing behaviors include but are not limited to: embarrassment, fear, sadness, guilt, low self-esteem, depression, emotional withdrawal, separation anxiety, abandonment fears, eating disorders, and sleep disruptions (Wright & Seymour, 2000; Carlson, 1996; Hairston, 1998). It is important to mention that in this research it was found that mothers/caregivers reported both boys and girls exhibit internalizing behaviors whereas previous research claims girls tend to internalize.

For example when Jane was asked if she noticed any physical changes in her grandchildren since they have been in her care, she replied, "Rick has been complaining about a lot of headaches. The headaches be so severe sometimes that he just lay up in my arms and just cry because of the headaches. I think he thinking about her all the time." Later in the interview Jane also said the following about her granddaughter's internalizing behavior:

> I think it has done a lot of—it is like they stress. Tina, she can't sleep. She gets up and I will be laying in the bed and she'll say granny and she will just look down on me but won't say nothing. I tell her Tina go lay down and try to go to sleep. She might go lay down for an hour or two, she come back. I know it's something is bothering her but she won't even talk about it.

Natalie expressed concern for her son when she was asked about her children's

performance and participation at school since their father had been incarcerated, she said:

> My nine year old is having a hard time concentrating right now. He got retained a grade, he is still in the third grade again and it is really like—I guess it is because um their dad is incarcerated. That is why I feel that way that he is not trying his best, he is not doing his best because his father's not there; but I could be wrong. My nine year old is having a hard time in school.

Another example from the interview transcripts that supports the contention that

children of incarcerated parents exhibit internalizing behavior as a reaction to the distress

from parental incarceration came from Sandra who expressed worry for her daughter's

behavior:

> She said her oldest daughter Sybil (10 years old) is "always sick and sad." She said she got a call from the school and they wanted to know why Sybil is always sad. They asked Sandra if there were "problems at home?" Sybil stopped doing her schoolwork. Sandra said it was "definitely a change from the way before," especially when he first went away.

Jenny said that her grandson tells her that he thinks he is "bad" because his

mother "has hung him out to dry." Jenny means that her grandson feels like his mother

abandoned him when she went to prison. Lizzie also reported internalizing behaviors in

her son. She said:

> …but Sam is more of a keep to yourself. He won't tell me. Like I ask him, do you want to go see you dad? And he'll kind of get upset about that, so I try to just leave it alone. When they want to talk about it, they will talk about it, don't push them. Don't push them. I can tell when they talk about him, I can tell it gets him upset. He probably doesn't want to talk about it because he probably don't understand why his dad did what he did, how come he hasn't answered the letter, and I was like well I can't help that. I can't make it right.

Sara, a Latina and caregiver for her brother's teenage daughter, also recognized

internalizing behaviors in her niece when she first got custody of her. She said, "…She

was a bright little girl ya know and when they locked him up, she was upset, didn't want

to talk to nobody, sad, she was really quiet." She also reported that her niece was,

"…upset with him (her father) because she thought he was never going to come get her."

In other words, her niece was expressing fear of abandonment, which has been identified

as an internalizing behavior (Wright & Seymour, 2000; Carlson, 1996; Hairston, 1998).

Candace's perception of her son's behavior also implied that he was exhibiting

internalizing behaviors as a result of coping with the absence and incarceration of his

father. When asked is she perceived any behavioral differences between her sons' and

daughters' reaction to their father's incarceration, she replied:

> He cries about it. He says I have nobody…and just last week he cried and cried
> and cried until my ex (referring to her a former boyfriend) had to come get him
> because we have no family and my ex found it in his heart to come and get him
> because I would not ask my ex for anything but I called him and I begged him.

Candace's son is exhibiting internalizing behaviors by crying and expressing he feels as

though he does not have any family.

As previously stated, low self-esteem has been identified in research on children

of incarcerated parents as a manifestation of stress. Whereas in social stress research

self-esteem was originally identified as a stressor and as the theory developed Pearlin and

colleagues re-conceptualized this element as being a social stress mediator.

Externalizing Behaviors

Another way in which stress may manifest in children of incarcerated parents is

through externalizing behaviors. These types of behaviors are generally demonstrated by

school age boys (Hairston, 1998). Externalizing behaviors include: aggression, acting-

out, academic problems, classroom behavior difficulties, and (in older boys) truancy and

substance abuse (Wright & Seymour, 2000; Carlson, 1996; Hairston, 1998).

Sally, a paternal grandmother, was asked if she observed any changes in her

grandchildren's behavior at school as a result of their father's incarceration, she replied:

> My seven year old granddaughter has, she also got sent home for fighting you
> know. But my twelve year old is the one who I have seen the biggest change in
> his behavior…I notice a change in his behavior. Things he didn't do he start
> happening like fights. Because he used to be so good in his class and very
> cooperative, very mindable to his teachers and all of a sudden you know. I wasn't
> at school to witness this but he was saying so and so said this or they put—and
> that was something he didn't do. His grades began to drop, I seen a difference in
> his grades you know.

Sally's grandchildren exhibited classic externalizing behaviors. They both got in

trouble at school for fighting and she reported that her grandson's grades as well as

behavior at school declined since their father was incarcerated.

Candace expressed that she witnessed negative behavioral changes and outbursts

of anger in her son. She said, "We have a lot of behavioral problems with my one son, he

is the incarcerated parent's biological child." When probed about the kinds of changes

she observed, she replied:

> Um, a lot of outbursts, a lot of—they can be anywhere and that never used to
> happen. He's always been a very very well behaved child. If he wasn't at home,
> he was always outside. Now it doesn't seem to matter where he has outbursts. It
> can be in public…his behavior in school has gone haywire. Um ya know we are
> trying to control it but it went totally drastic from the time of him finding
> everything out. (She is referring to her son finding out about his father's
> incarceration and the crime he committed.)…but his behavior is definitely—I
> mean I have had to take him to the police department and have to have them take
> him in the interrogation room because I can't hold him down, I am not big enough
> to hold him down…He was just throwing a temper tantrum, cussing, hitting me.

Lizzie discussed her son's behavior and some of the trouble he got in to with his

friend. When Lizzie was asked about her son's behavior she immediately responded, "So

he got real rebellious, trust me, he really did. (The name of her son's friend), this little

boy he played with, they started a fire down at (the name of a gas station)." This is a

display of an externalizing behavior.

When Jane was asked is she witnessed any behavioral changes in the

grandchildren under her care since their mother was incarcerated. She replied:

> It's like, Rick, when he has a problem with authority, anybody with authority,
> telling him things to do he gets angry and upset about it. Then he start screaming
> and yelling at you and you can't—it's hard to get him to calm down some time…
> I can be telling Rick to do this and do that and I try to sit him down and tell him
> about his anger problem. I tell him that sometimes he need to sit down and count
> to ten before you think, before you answer. It's like he just screams and balls up
> his fist at me like he want to fight sometime.

For example, Rhonda said the following in response to a question about her

perception of her children's performance or participation at school since their father was

incarcerated, she said that she has not had any problems with their performance at school

but she does have problems with Carla and David's attitudes at school. She said that they

both talk back to the teachers and that they always have "something to say."

Chloe expressed concern for her teenage daughter's performance and

participation at school; she seemed especially concerned about her daughter's blatant

disregard for authority, especially the teachers at school. She said:

> …Dana, she is a little more rebellious. Uh ya know not really bad but she has
> been known to tell her teachers who send her to d-hall (detention) for being late or
> whatever, no. And the teacher called and said I sent Dana to d-hall and she
> refused to go. And I am like, how can a kid refuse to go? Send her to d-hall.

Later in the interview she also expressed concern for her teenage daughter's

'experimentation' with marijauana:

> …when I first think that something might have been going on, and I could tell
> immediately one time when she came home and she had been smoking weed.
> (Chloe's voice drops almost to a whisper when she talks about catching her
> daughter smoking marijuana.) And I said what is wrong with your, ya know? And
> I said you better tell me now because here is what is going to happen tomorrow. I

am going to buy a drug test and you are going to take it. So it is going to be better if you tell me now…And she is like I did, I tried it.

Jane said she noticed changes in her grandson's performance and behavior at school. She said, "When Rick (her ten year old grandson) first moved down here he got into a couple of fights and he got real upset with the teacher because she would not let him explain why he did what he did." Later in the interview she expressed further concern for her grandson's anger, "…it is like you tell him to do something and he won't do it. He wants to do it when he gets ready. Rick is just so angry, he is so angry with—it is like he is angry with everybody. Even the kids that he plays with, you just can't say anything to him."

When Jenny was asked about her grandson's performance and participation at school she reported he exhibited externalizing behaviors and got in to frequent trouble. She said:

> He was suspended three or four times this year for fighting. Luke (her grandson) is currently in summer school and got suspended for a few days for fighting. His dad encourages him to fight and that encouragement from his father is confusing to Luke. And last summer he got into a fight with five kids at day camp and came home with a black eye.

A final example of externalizing behavior came from Terry, a White mother of four who said about her children, "One has more of a behavioral one, I mean not anything bad—he does not lash out in school or anything like that but um he tends to fight with me more often ya know he is the older one so he tends to try to back talk and and get by with things."

The aforementioned manifestations of stress in children of incarcerated parents are in accordance with the theoretical framework. It must be noted that the previous examples from the transcripts are a proportion of the responses that reflect the internalizing and

externalizing outcomes of children of prisoners. These manifestations are also congruent

with the limited amount of previous research on the topic, with one exception

internalizing behaviors are not limited to girls and externalizing behaviors are not limited

to boys. However, internalizing and externalizing behaviors are expected and appropriate

manifestations of stress in the population being examined. It should be noted that

mothers'/caregivers' reported more externalizing than internalizing behaviors in the

children under their care. This could possibly be due to the actual difference in the

behaviors and that externalizing behaviors are more noticeable and overt than

internalizing behaviors. That is, internalizing behaviors may go unreported because the

caregivers do not see the exhibition of such behaviors because they typically occur inside

the child and manifest in different ways. Understanding there are multiple outcomes to

the same type of stressful experience for different individuals with different

circumstances supports the stress process model and adds to the body of literature on the

effects of parental incarceration on children.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research was to illuminate the experiences of children of incarcerated parents and to apply the reported experiences and manifestations to a sociological theoretical model, the social stress process. While the results were largely descriptive, through the convergence of mothers'/caregivers' perceptions of the lives of the children under their care and the theoretical propositions of the social stress process that guided the data analysis, they imply that children of incarcerated parents are an at-risk population. Other issues that emerged from the findings are that children of incarcerated parents are affected by more than involuntary parental absence due to incarceration; they are also largely affected by financial difficulties and residential relocation which consequentially causes children to also have to switch schools.

There are several significant and important findings. First, it is apparent from the data analysis that children of incarcerated parents are affected by more than the involuntary absence of a parent due to imprisonment. The children also tend to experience financial difficulties and consequences, regardless of the sex of the incarcerated parent, which typically caused families to have to move and as a result the children were forced to change schools. That is, the incarceration of a parent, the primary stressor is further exacerbated by secondary stressors such as financial difficulties and residential instability. It is also important to note that in general, women are less likely than men to be financially secure and since only women were interviewed, this may have

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had an effect on this finding. Overall, regardless if the children were cared for by their biological mothers or extended family members, most mothers/caregivers reported the children often were forced to deal and cope with more than the incarceration of a parent.

Second, in congruence with previous research on children of incarcerated parents, internalizing behaviors and externalizing behaviors were the mental health outcomes that emerged from the transcripts. As previously stated, internalizing behaviors are a broad class of behaviors that involve inner conflict, whereas externalizing behaviors are characterized by "conflicts with others and with social mores" (Achenbach & McConaughy, 1997, p.56). Previous research has identified the following internalizing behaviors in children of incarcerated parents: embarrassment, fear, sadness, guilt, low self-esteem, depression, emotional withdrawal, separation anxiety, abandonment fears, eating disorders, and sleep disruptions (Wright & Seymour, 2000; Carlson, 1996; Hairston, 1998). Externalizing behaviors previously identified in this population include: aggression, acting-out, academic problems, classroom behavior difficulties, and (in older boys) truancy and substance abuse (Wright & Seymour, 2000; Carlson, 1996; Hairston, 1998).

However, in contrast to previous studies that report internalizing behaviors are generally demonstrated by girls and young children (Johnston, 1992; Wright & Seymour, 2000; Carlson, 1996; Hairston, 1998). The present research indicated that mothers/caregivers reported that both boys and girls, regardless of age, exhibiting internalizing behaviors such as feelings of abandonment and sadness. Previous studied have reported that externalizing behaviors are generally demonstrated by school age boys

(Hairston, 1998). In the present research, though mothers/caregivers reported externalizing behaviors in both sexes.

Recognizing and identifying these differences are important. If it is assumed that girls will exhibit internalizing behaviors as a reaction to parental incarceration and its aftermath and that boys will exhibit externalizing behaviors as a result of the same situation, a big piece of the puzzle is potentially missing. That is, it is important to explore the behaviors of the children individually and not to assume that they will exhibit gender-specific behaviors.

There were no significant racial or ethnic differences in the stressors or outcomes. This may be more of a result of the small number of participants interviewed, rather than to the actual lack of racial/ethnic differences in the outcomes or stressors in children of incarcerated parents. However, eleven interviews were conducted, six participants were the biological mother of the children and five participants were extended family members. The five extended family members, four grandmothers and one aunt, were either Latina or African American. This supports previous research that claims racial and ethnic minority families have deep, strong, extended kinship ties (Prelow & Guarnaccia, 1997). Furthermore, it is supported in literature on children of prisoners that children who maintain contact with extended family members during parental incarceration fare better long term (Johnston, 1995a; Hairston, 1998; Reed & Reed, 1997).

The findings point to the importance of understanding the totality of the children's experiences. It could be that children are not affected emotionally by the absence of a parent due incarceration, but that the children are affected emotionally because they are forced to move residences, which typically means that the children will also have to

change schools. Therefore, the children's lives seem to be disenfranchised on multiple levels, they lose what they call 'home' as well as their friends.

The recurring theme of the stress process model is the interconnectedness of the individual's well being and the larger society. The previous discussion provides sociologists with insight into the lives of these children from a theoretical perspective. Stressors are the experiences that manifest into stress, and mediators modify the effects of the stressor on the outcomes. The research on mediators of stress in this population is also the weakest and needs the most attention in the future. I feel this will be the most beneficial, useful, and effective strategy in combating negative outcomes in children of offenders. Overall, the experiences of the children of incarcerated parents have been demonstrated theoretically through the stress process model.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this qualitative study. The findings from this study are not generalizable to all children of incarcerated parents. Particularly because one can not assume that all children of incarcerated parents are in a program that caters to their needs nor can religious affiliation be assumed when studying children of incarcerated parents. Another limitation of the study, due to time constraints and strict IRB guidelines, is that the results from the study are based on the caregivers' perceptions of the changes observed in the children in their care; which could inhibit the reliability of the study. A small sample size was used in the study because of limited access to the specific population. A final limitation identified in the study is that change in the children was of specific interest however only one interview was conducted with each

participant therefore change overtime was not point of view, only the caregivers'

perceptions.

Conclusion and Suggestions for Future Research

Children of prisoners are a forgotten population. This research has sought to

apply the stress process model to the lives of children of incarcerated parents. It entailed

a brief overview of the literature pertaining to children of incarcerated parents, followed

by a detailed description of the theoretical model. The next chapter revealed the findings

from the three domains of the stress process model to the lives of children of incarcerated

parents. The analysis reveals that the stress process has valid predictive potential for

understanding the experiences of children of prisoners.

In conclusion, there are some suggestions for future research in this field. First

and foremost we need an accurate count of the number of children of incarcerated parents

in the United States. Current counts of the number of children affected are merely

approximations. Furthermore, there is a need for more research on the children of

prisoners, more importantly; there is a need for theory to be utilized in the research.

Basically, all of the previous research on these children has been atheoretical. Employing

a theoretical approach to this type of research will aid in helping the children of

incarcerated parents. The literature is lacking longitudinal data looking at the children of

incarcerated parents at two or more points in time. Also, it may be interesting to compare

children of mothers who are incarcerated to children of fathers who are incarcerated.

Lastly, gender and race and ethnicity need to be addressed from a theoretical perspective

in research on the children of incarcerated parents. It is important to examine the links

between an individual's well being and the greater society. It is also of great significance to give this invisible and often forgotten population a voice in society. The number of incarcerated individuals in the United States has increased steadily over the years and there is no sign that this institutionalization will cease anytime in the near future. Therefore, this process will affect more and more children and families. Children of incarcerated parents are a great example of how connected humans are to the greater society. This population is also a great candidate to further social research in the stress process. Lastly, further research must be conducted on the correctional institutions themselves. Visitation, phone privileges and prices, and ways to facilitate the maintenance and building of family bonds must be at the forefront of this type of research. Ultimately, the scholarly and academic world need to focus on the children of incarcerated parents and how to present this invisible population with the best possible life chances.

APPENDIX A

PARENTAL PRE-INTERVIEW SURVEY

Mother/Guardian Characteristics

Age_____ Race_____

Highest Level of Schooling (circle one)

Did not finish High School   High School Diploma   Some College

Associate Degree   Bachelor Degree

Occupation_____

Feelings about what is going on with child (children's) fathers incarceration
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Father's Characteristics

Age_____Race_____

Highest Level of Schooling (circle one)

Did not finish High School   High School Diploma   Some College

Associate Degree   Bachelor Degree

What crime charged with? _____

Length of Sentence_____

Time Already Served_____

Anticipated release date_____

Prior Incarceration (circle one)   YES   NO

If yes, how many times? _____

Did he live with the child/children before the time of incarceration? (circle one)

         YES   NO

Family Characteristics

Length of Relationship with Father of child/children _____

Married (circle one)   YES   NO

If no, did you live together? (circle one)   YES   NO

Number of Children _____

How many girls?_____How many boys?_____

What are the ages of the children? Girls_____Boys_____

Comments _____
_____
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APPENDIX B

MOTHER/CAREGIVER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

For the record how many kids do you have?
Do they share the same father?

1. Did your children witness the arrest?

2. Does your youth know the reason the parent is incarcerated? If no, why not?

3. Is the incarcerated parent a topic of discussion with the youth?

4. How does the youth feel about the incarcerated parent?

5. Has the relationship between you and the youth changed since the parent's incarceration?

6. How is the youth's physical health? Before and after incarceration of the parent?

7. Have you noticed any behavioral changes in the youth since the parental incarceration?

8. Have you noticed any change in the youth's participation or performance at school since the parent's incarceration?

9. (If there are boys and girls) Have you noticed any differences in the behaviors between the boys and girls? What are they?

10. (If there are children from different fathers) Do you notice any differences between the children whose father is incarcerated and those whose father is not?

11. Who does the youth see as there maternal figure? Paternal figure?

12. Has the relationship between the siblings changed?

13. Does the youth have any communication with the incarcerated parent?

14. Do you allow the youth to visit the incarcerated parent? If no, why? If yes, how often and what do the visits entail?

15. Prior to incarceration did the youth have a relationship with the incarcerated parent? Can you describe that relationship?

16. Upon release of the incarcerated parent, will you allow the youth to be reunited with him/her/ why or why not?

17. Any history of other family members involved in the criminal justice system? Can you expand upon that?

18. Any final comments or things you want to add?

19. Thanks you so much for your words and your time.

APPENDIX C

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION

OF HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Subject Name: Date

Title of Study:Children of Incarcerated Fathers

Principal Investigator:Ashley Jarvis

Before agreeing to participate in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the proposed procedures. It describes the procedures, benefits, risks, and discomforts of the study. It also describes your right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Purpose of the study and how long it will last:

To investigate how a father being in jail or prison affects his children. Each interview will last about twenty-five minutes and the respondents will receive $20.00 for the interview.

Description of the study including the procedures to be used:

The mother/custodial parent will be interviewed at a time of their choosing. The interview will be stopped at any time that the repondent feels uncomfortable with the questions. The information will be stored in a way so that the respondent will not be identified with his/her answers.

Description of procedures/elements that may result in discomfort or inconvenience:

This topic will deal with some sensitive material and for some of the participants may create discomfort with some of the subjects. For example, it may be that a child has severe emotional problems and that the mother/custodial parent does not want to answer the questions that address this issue. The participants will be assured verbally at the beginning of the interview that they can choose not to answer any question that they feel uncomfortable answering and that they can stop the interview if they are uncomfortable.

Description of the procedures/elements that are associated with foreseeable risks:

There are minimal forseeable risks in this study. The topic may deal with sensitive material and the participants will be informed they can choose not to answer any question or stop the interview at any time.

Benefits to the subjects or others:

This study could be used to improve the entire family system that has been affected by the father being in jail or prison. This study will also offer qualitative data that may be

useful in understanding a special population, children of prisoners. Furthermore, this information may aid in the understanding of how society can better serve these children who are left without their father's in the home due to prison or jail.

Confidentiality of research records:

It is necessary to gain the respondent's identity in order to set up the interview. However, upon completion of the interview there will not be a need to hold on to any identifying information. All records that connect the identity of the respondent to a particular interview will be purged within one week of the completion of the last interview of the study.

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the UNT Institutional Review Board (IRB). Contact the UNT IRB at [omitted] or [omitted] if there are any questions regarding your rights as a research subject.

RESEARCH SUBJECTS' RIGHTS: I have read or have had read to me all of the above.

Ashley Jarvis has explained the study to me and answered all of my questions.   I have been told the risks or discomforts and possible benefits of the study.

I understand that I do not have to take part in this study, and my refusal to participate or my decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of rights or benefits. The study personnel may choose to stop my participation at any time.

In case I have questions regarding this study, I have been told I can call Ashley Jarvis at [omitted] or Dr. Kevin Yoder at the Sociology Department at the University of North Texas at [omitted].

I understand my rights as a research subject, and I voluntarily consent to participate in this study. I understand what the study is about and how and why it is being done. I have been told I will receive a signed copy of this consent form.

———————————————   ————
    Signature of Subject   Date

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