Improving Outcomes for Children of Incarcerated Parents

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Parents in the Criminal Justice System

Total Criminal Justice Population = **7.3 Million** and…

- State Prison, 1,461,171
- Federal Prison, 175,954
- Jails, 747,520
- Probation, 4,150,000
- Parole, 765,355

…and of those, **3.7 Million** are Parents

Source: Mumola (2002), “Incarcerated Parents and Their Children.” Presentation at the National Center for Children and Families. 10/31/02
More People Entering and Exiting Prison

1.5 million incarcerated adults at any given time

Source: The Urban Institute, 2001. Based on BJS National Prisoner Statistics
Incarcerated Females Increasing Faster than Males

57% increase in women 34% increase in men

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>1995</th>
<th>2005</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>68,468</td>
<td>107,518</td>
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<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>1,600,000</td>
<td>1,420,000</td>
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2 million children have an incarcerated parent, an increase of 50% since 1990.

Approximately 10 million children have a parent who has been imprisoned or under supervision at some point in their lives.

For each parent incarcerated, 2 children are left behind.

Children whose parents are in prison are many times more likely to be incarcerated someday than are their peers.
Circumstances of Children with Incarcerated Parents

- 2/3rds of incarcerated mothers lived with child before incarceration.
- 44% of incarcerated fathers lived with child before incarceration.
- 10% of children with an incarcerated mother are in foster care; 6% of children with an incarcerated father are in foster care.
Circumstances of Children with Incarcerated Parents

Visitation:

• Most children who lived with their parents prior to parental incarceration and will live with them again following release.
• Frequent visitation is essential to successful parent-child reunification following release.
• Most children have no visits with their parents in prison.
• Children in foster care are the least likely to have visits.
Barriers to Visitation

- Distance
- Lack of transportation
- Visits prohibited by custodial caretaker or conflict with caretaker’s schedule
- DOC policies
- Child Welfare practices and resources
Impact of Parental Criminality and Incarceration

• Many children begin to have school related problems – higher drop out rates.
• Many children experience severe anxiety or depression – 2 fold increase in mental health issues
• Higher rates of drug addiction and depression
• Poor parenting skills and parental offending are two of the strongest predictors of children’s criminal conduct
Implications for Child Welfare

Significant relationship between child maltreatment and future criminality:

- Higher rates of neglect
- Lower severity of physical abuse
- Higher rates of termination of parental rights
- Higher levels of physical abuse post release
Why is this Important to Policy-Makers?

- Criminal Justice decisions have consequences for Social Services.
- Pro-Social Contact improves Criminal Justice and Child Outcomes.
- Family Connections are important for successful return.
- Child Welfare/Criminal Justice systems are the most intrusive.
Child Welfare Perspective

• Prevent re-entry into the child welfare system

• Prevent re-abuse

• Prevent child welfare children from entering the system
Current Areas of Focus

- Arrest
- Judicial Proceedings
- Jail
- Prison
- Reentry
- Child Welfare
- Education K-12
Advocacy Required

To improve outcomes for children whose parents are involved in the criminal justice system you need someone with:

- Objective vantage point for policy review
- Coordination of activities across the system
- Technical assistance and training
- Encourage evidence-based practices
- Ability to advocate for system reform
- Ability to generate funds and leverage resources
And How Are the Children?

Local Community Curriculum for Community Partners

– 1 Day Training
– Multi-disciplinary
– Collaborative Approach
– Identification of Local Issues
– Development of Local Action Plan
Conclusions

• Persistent and growing problem nationally

• Continuing to search for solutions that involve entire family

• Efforts require systemic change in all agencies that interact with these families
References


References


Mumola, C.J. (2002). Incarcerated Parents and Their Children. Presentation at the National Center for Children and Families. 10/31/02

References


Phillips, S., & Gleeson, J., (2007) What we Know Now that we Didn’t Know Then about the Criminal Justice System’s Involvement in Families with whom Child Welfare Agencies have Contact.


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