

INTRODUCTION: INVIGORATING RESEARCH AND PRACTICE ON CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS

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Parental incarceration—once a rare event experienced by only the most unfortunate children—is now common for American children, especially African American children and children whose parents have low educational attainment. Point-in-time estimates indicate that roughly one in 25 American children has a parent incarcerated on any given day (Sykes & Pettit, 2014), whereas roughly one in 12 children (one in four for African American children; Wildeman & Andersen, 2015) will have a parent incarcerated at some point in their life (Wildeman, 2009). These high rates of parental incarceration are historically unique within the United States, and they are also extreme compared with all other developed democracies in the world.

Given the extremity of contemporary rates of parental incarceration in the United States, it is perhaps unsurprising that there has been such great

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When Parents Are Incarcerated: Interdisciplinary Research and Interventions to Support Children,
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interest in the topic in recent years. In the past 20 years, parental incarceration has moved from being a fringe area of research within the social sciences to being of central interest to criminologists, demographers, psychologists, family scientists, and sociologists.

But research on the broader effects of incarceration, specifically the effects on children, was initially slow to develop. Just how peripheral the subject of children with incarcerated parents were to the social science community can be expressed by just how light early reviews on the topic were. In 1999, for instance, Hagan and Dinovitzer encountered such a dearth of high-quality studies on the topic that they spent more time suggesting ways for this research program to move forward than reviewing the research on how parental incarceration affects children (Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999).

However, in the past 15 years, the pace of research in this area has accelerated at an incredible rate. Psychology has been at the forefront of this line of work, producing research on parental incarceration consistently over the past decade, focusing on developmental impacts as well as insights from the family science perspective (e.g., Arditti, 2012; Dallaire, Ciccone, & Wilson, 2010; Murray, Bijleveld, Farrington, & Loeber, 2014; Murray & Farrington, 2005, 2008; Poehlmann, 2005a, 2005b; Shlafer, Poehlmann, & Donelan-McCall, 2012). Within criminology, interest has been driven by the realization that parental incarceration—not just parental criminality—could have consequences for children’s criminal activity and criminal justice contact (e.g., Murray, Loeber, & Pardini, 2012; Roettger & Swisher, 2011; Wildeman & Andersen, 2017; see also Hagan & Palloni, 1990). For sociologists and demographers, interest has been driven by the realization that the combination of high, unequally distributed risks of parental imprisonment in the population (e.g., Wildeman, 2009), when combined with substantial effects on children’s behavioral and mental health outcomes (e.g., Geller, Cooper, Garfinkel, Schwartz-Soicher, & Mincy, 2012; Haskins, 2015; Wildeman, 2010) and school outcomes (e.g., Hagan & Foster, 2012; Haskins, 2016; Turney & Haskins, 2014), could have implications for the future of inequality in the United States (e.g., Wakefield & Wildeman, 2011, 2013). Among social science researchers, only economists, with a few exceptions (e.g., Cho, 2009; Johnson, 2009), have continued to pay little attention to this topic.

This research explosion has resulted in a dramatic increase in what we now know about the consequences of parental incarceration for children. We could, of course, have stronger causal evidence, better insight into how stages of parental criminal justice contact affect children in different ways, and stronger evidence regarding resilience among children of incarcerated parents. However, we believe that one would be hard-pressed to find another

social stressor affecting child development and well-being that we have learned more about in the last 15 years than parental incarceration.

Progress aside, we see two major areas in which research has moved at a glacial pace. First, virtually none of the research on the consequences of parental incarceration for children is interdisciplinary in any real sense. The more tightly allied disciplines of sociology and demography have engaged little with child psychology and family science, and criminology is essentially divided down the middle into a more sociological side and a more psychological side, neither of which seems to talk directly to each other. The fact that we remain so stuck in our silos is problematic because it means that we lack a complete understanding of the consequences of parental incarceration for children. Second, the research on which most interventions are based—especially those looking to intervene beyond mentoring programs and parenting programs—remains weak. As a result (and also as a cause), researchers are very much in the dark regarding the sorts of interventions that might work for children of incarcerated parents. Yet, more and more children have a parent incarcerated each year, making interventions for these children especially vital.

In this volume, we address each of these problems. Specifically, we set out to accomplish three goals. First, we summarize what we see as the three core social scientific perspectives on how parental incarceration affects children, each of which is described by leaders in the field: demographic and sociological (Chapter 1 by Anna R. Haskins and Kristin Turney); criminological (Chapter 2 by Sara Wakefield and Robert J. Apel); and psychological, including developmental and family perspectives (Chapter 3 by Julie Poehlmann-Tynan and Joyce A. Arditti). The combination of these three unique perspectives provides the broadest and most accessible primer on parental incarceration possible and paves the way for how we all might think about how to better engage in interdisciplinary research and intervention in this area.

Second, we provide insight into the various types of interventions possible for children of incarcerated parents and what the evidence regarding each of these types of interventions says to date. Three chapters consider programs targeted for children of incarcerated parents and their families, focusing on interventions targeted at incarcerated mothers (Chapter 4 by Danielle H. Dallaire and Rebecca J. Shlafer), incarcerated fathers (Chapter 5 by J. Mark Eddy and Bert O. Burraston), and children of incarcerated parents (Chapter 6 by Derrick M. Gordon, Bronwyn A. Hunter, and Christina A. Campbell). Following Urie Bronfenbrenner's legacy, we also look at broader systems when thinking about interventions, as we also consider interventions that shift stints of parental incarceration to noncustodial sentences (Chapter 7 by Signe Hald Andersen, Lars Højsgaard Andersen, Maria Donovan Fitzpatrick,

and Christopher Wildeman) and whether a broader set of interventions that focus on all at-risk children, rather than just children of incarcerated parents, might also work (Chapter 8 by Jennifer L. Noyes, June C. Paul, and Lawrence M. Berger).

Finally, we close this volume by trying to chart a path forward for our subfield, focusing on opportunities for more interdisciplinary research that acts in concert with shifts in practice and on the difficulties inherent in such work. In so doing, we attempt to consider exactly what a research and intervention program for children of incarcerated parents shaped by the legacy of Urie Bronfenbrenner would look like and how it could affect children.

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