

**From Prison to Home:
The Effect of Incarceration and Reentry on
Children, Families and Communities**

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**Effects of Parental Incarceration
on Young Children**

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For imprisoned mothers, one of the greatest punishments incarceration carries with it is separation from their children. As one mother put it, “I can do time alone OK. But its not knowing what’s happening to my son that hurts most” (Baunach, 1988, p. 121, cited in Garcia Coll et al., 1998). As this quote suggests, when parents are incarcerated, “what’s happening” to their children is a great concern. It is a concern for us as well. Our goal in this paper is to examine the impact of parental incarceration on children’s well-being and development, to determine just what is happening to these children.

Several assumptions guided our examination of this problem. First, we assumed that the child is located in a family system and to understand the impact of incarceration on the child, the network of relationships within the family system needed to be considered (Belsky, 1984; Sameroff, 1994). Second, we assumed that the developmental level of the child at the time of parental incarceration and the quality of the relationship the child had developed with the incarcerated parent needed to be considered (Bowlby, 1973). Third, the gender of the incarcerated parent was examined, because separation from mother may affect children differently from separation from father (Parke, 2001) Fourth, characteristics of the extended kin network in which the family of the incarcerated parent is located were considered (Cochran & Brassard, 1979). Finally, the nature and availability of formal institutional supports for the family of the incarcerated parent were given attention (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

Scope of the Problem

Who is incarcerated and how many of those incarcerated are parents? According to recent estimates (Mumola, 2000), nearly 3.6 million parents are under some form of correctional supervision, including parole. Of these parents, almost 1.1 million are incarcerated in federal, state, or local jails. These parents have an estimated 2.3 million children. Alarming, the rate of parental incarceration has gone up sharply in the last decade. In 1991, there were 452,500 parents in state and federal prisons, with 936,500 minor children. By 2000, the number of parents in prisons had nearly doubled to 737,400, and the number of children affected rose by over a third to 1,531,500 (Mumola, 2001). Although the absolute numbers have increased, however, the percentage of state and federal prisoners with minor children has not changed over this time period. In 1991, 57% of prisoners had minor children; in 2000, 56% were in the same situation. Moreover, the increase in parents who became prisoners (63%) was similar to the rate of growth for non-parental prisoners (69%) -- a finding that suggests that being a parent is not necessarily a protective factor in reducing the chances of incarceration.

Gender of parent is a major factor in patterns of incarceration; fathers account for 90% of incarcerated parents. However, the number of mothers in prison grew at a faster rate than the number of incarcerated fathers across the decade 1991-2000. There was an 87% increase for mothers, but only a 61% increase for fathers. Not surprisingly, in view of their unequal rates of incarceration, the parents' ethnicity matters, too. As expected, in both state and federal prisons, there are more African American parents (47% and 49% in state and federal prisons respectively) than either Hispanic parents (19% and 30%) or white non-Hispanic parents (29% and 22%). Stating this racial disparity in terms of minor-age children, nearly 7% of African American children, 3% of Hispanic children, and 1% of white children of the total population of children in the United States had an incarcerated parent (Mumola, 2000).

In terms of age, 58% of children with incarcerated parents are under 10 years of age, with 8 years being the mean age. Nearly half (48%) of the parents in state facilities and over a third in federal prisons (38%) were never married; 25-28% were divorced or separated. Only 23% of state inmate parents and 36% of federal inmate parents were married. In terms of education, most did not have a high school diploma (7% in state prison; 6% in federal prison), but nearly 30% had obtained a GED. Only 13% of state inmate parents reported any college education, but 25% of federal inmate parents reported some college education.

To understand the impact of parental incarceration, it is important to determine the nature of the family living arrangements prior to incarceration. Many of these children were living with non-parental caregivers prior to the incarceration of their mother or father. In fact, only half of the inmate parents in either state (43%) or federal prison (57%) lived with their children at the time of admission to prison. Gender differences are again evident. Specifically, mothers in either state (64%) or federal (84%) prisons were living with their children at the time of admission to prison. In contrast, only half of the fathers were living with their children at the time of their incarceration (44% for state and 55% for federal prison). Unfortunately the nature of the prior living arrangements is not generally considered in assessments of the impact of incarceration on children, but it would be expected that incarceration would carry different meanings and have different consequences for children who do or do not reside with their parents before incarceration. As we know from other research literatures, meaningful social relationships may or may not exist between children and their non-resident parent (Furstenberg, Morgan, & Allison, 1987; Garfinkel, McLanahan, Meyer, & Seltzer, 1998). The extent to which incarceration disrupts the contact patterns between these non-residential parents and their children, as well as the effects of incarceration on children who were living with their parent at the time of imprisonment, are both issues that merits examination.

Another important issue is who looks after the children when parents are incarcerated. Again the answer varies with the gender of the parent. For incarcerated fathers, the child's mother is the usual caregiver before the father is arrested, and in the case of both state and federal

incarceration, 90% of the time, mothers assume the caregiving responsibility after the father goes to prison. On the other hand, when mothers are put in prison, fathers assume responsibility only 28% - 31% of the time. Instead, most commonly, the grandparent becomes the caregiver (53% of the time for state incarcerations and 45% of federal). Other relatives in the kin network pick up the parenting role for between 26% and 34% of the cases. Friends do so about 10% - 12% of the time. Fewer than 10% of the children of mothers in state prisons and fewer than 4% of the children of mothers in federal prisons are in foster care. These disparities in parenting responsibilities mirror the larger picture in our society whereby mothers assume the largest share of parenting in intact families (Coltrane, 1996; Parke, 1996; 2002) and post-divorce families (Hetherington & Kelley, 2001).

On average, mothers and fathers also spend different lengths of time away from their children. Fathers serve 80 months in state prison and 103 months in federal prison, on average, whereas mothers serve 49 months and 66 months in state and federal prison respectively. The lengths of incarceration reflect the nature of the different offenses committed by males and females. Fathers are more likely than mothers to be in prison for violent crimes (45% vs. 26% in state prison; 12% vs. 6% in federal prison). Mothers, on the other hand, are more likely to be in prison for drug-related offenses (35% vs. 23%) and fraud (11% vs. 2%). Therefore, in answering the question of the impact of incarceration on the mother-child versus father-child relationship it is important to consider these gender-related patterns of incarceration. As we note below, although the short-term impact on children may be greater when mothers are imprisoned, the long-term impact of the lengthier period of separation of fathers may bode poorly for maintenance of father-child ties (Gadsden & Rethemeyer, 2001).

The Impact of Incarceration on Children

Incarceration is not a single or discrete event but a dynamic process that unfolds over time. To understand the impact of the incarceration process on children it is necessary to consider separately the short-term effects of the arrest and separation of the child from the parent, the impact of the unavailability of the parent to the child during the period of incarceration, and the effects -- both positive and negative -- of reunion after the incarceration period.

It is also critical to consider whether the child is living with the parent at the time of incarceration, whether a single or two-parent household is involved, and, in the case of a two-parent household, which parent is incarcerated. As we have noted, only a small percentage of children live with their father as the sole caregiver; it is more usual for children to be living with a single mother prior to incarceration. The most recent figures (Mumola, 2000) indicate that 36% of state and 16% of federal inmate mothers were not living with their children at the time of admission. In contrast, 56% of state and 45% of federal inmate fathers were not living with their

children at the time of their incarceration. Thus, when a parent is incarcerated, it is more likely that children will experience separation from mother than separation from father.

Short-term Effects

The arrest phase. Unfortunately, only an incomplete picture of the impact of the initial arrest on children is available. According to Johnson (1991), one in five children is present at the time of the arrest and witnesses the mother being taken away by authorities. More than half of the children who witness this traumatic event are under 7 years of age and in the sole care of their mother. Jose-Kampfner (1995) interviewed 30 children who witnessed their mother's arrest and reported that these children suffered nightmares and flashbacks to the arrest incident. Children in middle childhood who are in school at the time of the arrest may return to an empty residence and be unaware of the arrest of their mother (Fishman, 1983). The impact of father's versus mother's arrest is unknown and needs to be assessed in future research.

The management of the explanation. There is controversy surrounding the wisdom of providing children with information concerning the arrest and the reasons for their parent's incarceration. Some argue that children ought to be protected from the knowledge that their parents are incarcerated as a way of minimizing the trauma associated with the separation (Becker & Margolin, 1967). Others argue that the emotional distress of children is exacerbated by the unwillingness of family, friends or caregivers to discuss their parent's incarceration (Snyder-Joy & Carlo, 1998). This failure to disclose has been variously termed the "conspiracy of silence" (Jose-Kampfner, 1995) or "forced silence" (Johnson, 1995). Mothers are usually the ones who take responsibility for explaining the situation to the children -- regardless of whether or not they are the incarcerated parent. For example, Sack, Seidler and Thomas (1976) found that in only 7 of 31 cases did the father or both parents together offer the child an explanation. Moreover, when explanations were provided, they were often vague and general; one typical mother told her children that their father "did wrong and had to be punished." Other explanations were distorted or deceitful. Deception took a variety of forms, from total lies to strong shading of the truth, in which prison was referred to as an army camp, a hospital or a school. Total deception occurred in 4 of the 31 families in the study, and partial deception occurred in another 6 families. In other words, nearly a third of the families engaged in some form of deception. Similarly in a much larger study carried out in England, Morris (1965) reported that 38% of the families used partial or total deception in explaining a parent's incarceration to the children.

What is the impact of this "conspiracy of silence" or deception on children? In light of the literature on children's coping (Ayers, Sandler, West, & Roosa, 1996; Compas, 1987), which suggests that uncertainty and lack of information undermines children's ability to cope, it is not surprising that children who are uninformed about their parent's incarceration are more anxious and fearful (Johnson, 1995). Although the situation of a parent lost through death is more

extreme, some of the insights gained from this literature concerning ways of helping children cope with loss is instructive. As Nolen-Hoeksema and Larson (1999) argue, children need honest, factual information, and they need to have their experience validated. Providing children with reliable, dependable information allows them to begin to make sense of their situation and begin the dual processes of grieving the loss of their parent and coping with their new life circumstances. On the other hand, silence about the parental incarceration often results not from a deliberate attempt to deceive the children but from an effort to avoid other complications. As Johnson (1995, p. 74) notes “There may be a very good reason for such a forced silence; family jobs, welfare payments, child custody, and even housing may be jeopardized when others become aware of the parents’ whereabouts. However, children of prisoners are more likely to have negative reactions to the experience when they cannot talk about it.”

Long-term Effects

A variety of long-term effects of parental incarceration on children have been identified. The long-term impact varies with a variety of factors, including the developmental level of the child.

Incarceration and infants. A small number of women (6%, U.S. Department of Justice, 1994) are pregnant at the time of their incarceration, but few prisons in the United States permit mother to keep their infants with them during incarceration (Gabel & Girard, 1995). In most cases, mothers of newborn infants are permitted only a few days of contact before they must relinquish their infant and return to prison. As a result, there is little opportunity for the mother to develop a bond to the baby or for the baby to become familiar with the mother and form an attachment to her -- a critical developmental task for both mothers and infants. As Myers et al. (1999) note, after the mother’s is released, she comes home to an infant or young child with whom she has not developed an emotional bond and who is not attached to her, with the likely result that the children will have emotional and behavioral problems.

Incarceration and young children. Even if a child-parent attachment bond has already developed, as in the case of infants who have been in their mother’s or father’s care for the first 9 to 12 months of life, the disruption associated with parental incarceration will likely adversely affect the quality of the child’s attachment to their parent (see Thompson, 1998, for a general discussion of the effects of separation on attachment in non-incarcerated samples). Even less drastic changes such as job loss, divorce, or residential re-location have been found to adversely affect the quality of the infant or toddler child-parent attachment quality (Thompson, Lamb, & Estes, 1982; Vaughn et al., 1979). Insecure attachments -- a consequence of adverse shifts in life circumstances -- in turn, have been linked to a variety of child outcomes, including poorer peer relationships and diminished cognitive abilities (Sroufe, 1988). In light of the results of this research on separation and attachment, it is not surprising that when their parents are incarcerated, young children (ages 2 - 6 years) have been observed to suffer a variety of adverse

outcomes that are consistent with the research on the effects of insecure attachments (Johnson, 1995). In fact, according to one estimate (Baunach, 1985), 70% of young children with incarcerated mothers had emotional or psychological problems. Children exhibit internalizing problems, such as anxiety, withdrawal, hypervigilance, depression, shame and guilt (Bloom & Steinhart, 1993; Dressler et al., 1992). They exhibit somatic problems such as eating disorders. And, perhaps most clearly, young children exhibit externalizing behaviors such as anger, aggression, and hostility toward caregivers and siblings (Fishman, 1983; Gaudin, 1984; Johnston, 1995; Jose-Kampfner, 1995; Sack et al. , 1976).

Incarceration and school-age children. School-age children of incarcerated parents exhibit school-related problems and problems with peer relationships. Sack et al. (1976) reported that over 50% of the children of incarcerated parents had school problems, such as poor grades or instances of aggression, albeit many of these problems were temporary. Among the younger children (6-8 years old) in the Sack et al. (1987) study, 16% exhibited transient school phobias and were unwilling to go to school for a 4-6week period after their parent's incarceration. In another report, Stanton (1980) found even higher rates of school problems: 70% of 166 children of incarcerated mothers showed poor academic performance and 5% exhibited classroom behavior problems. Another school-based problem is that children are sometimes teased or ostracized by other children as a result of their parent's incarceration (Jose-Kampfner, 1991). As Reid and Eddy (this volume) note, as children reach adolescence, suspension and dropout rates are higher for these children (Trice, 1997).

Effects of incarceration on boys versus girls. Although it would be expected that boys would be more adversely affected by this stressful separation -- in light of evidence that boys are more vulnerable to stressful changes than girls are, in general (e.g., Hetherington et al., 1998), the evidence on this issue is unclear. Instead, the most likely scenario is that both boys and girls are adversely affected by parental incarceration, but their modes of expressing their reactions differ. Boys are more likely to exhibit externalizing behavior problems, while girls are more likely to display internalizing problems (Cowan et al., 1994; Cummings, Davies, & Campbell, 2000).

What leads to these problems? The answer to this question is not simple. There are a number of interpretative problems that merit elaboration. First, incarceration is often preceded by a period of familial instability, poverty, child abuse or neglect, marital discord and conflict, or father absence. A combination of these conditions may have already increased the base rates of children's problem behaviors. Consequently, without measures of the child's environment and behavior prior to incarceration, it is difficult to attribute the problem behaviors to incarceration per se. Other events also transpire at the time of incarceration that could account for some of the negative effects on children. Re-location and placement with alternative caregivers are both major disruptions in the children's lives, which past research has shown to be detrimental to

children (Rutter, 1987). A similar set of interpretative problems has plagued the literature on the effects of other kinds of stress, such as divorce on children's functioning (Hetherington & Kelley, 2002; Hetherington et al., 1998).

Modifiers of Children's Reactions to Incarceration

Before the incarceration, during incarceration, and during the reunion phase after incarceration, different factors modify children's reactions.

Pre-incarceration conditions. The most important predictor of how well the child will adjust to the immediate separation is the quality of the parent-child relationship. Theoretically, a high quality parent-child relationship should serve as a protective or buffering factor in helping the child cope with the temporary loss of a parent (Myers et al., 1999; Thompson, 1998). Unfortunately, however, many parents who end up in prison are limited in their parenting abilities, and thus this potential protective factor is unavailable to their children (Johnston, 1991). Unfortunately, research is not available to determine empirically whether children with a closer relationship with their parent transcend the separation with greater ease.

Another predictor of how well the child adjusts to parental incarceration is likely to be the quality of relationships with the extended family and non-family informal social networks. This support is especially relevant when the father is incarcerated and leaves the mother to cope as a single parent. There is an extensive literature that suggests that the quality of family ties within the extended family network is related to mothers' more positive parenting attitudes and behavior (Cochran & Brassard, 1979; Cochran, 1995). In addition, Crnic, Greenberg, Ragozin, Robinson, and Basham (1983) reported that mothers with higher levels of informal social support were more responsive and affectionate with their infants. More recently Goldstein, Diener, and Mangelsdorf (1995), similarly, found that women with larger social networks were found to be more sensitive in interactions with their infants. In turn, the children of parents who receive more social, emotional, and physical support are better adjusted than children of parents with limited kin or network support (Thompson, 1995). Moreover, when it is the mother rather than the father who is incarcerated, extended family members such as grandmothers often assume the role of primary caregiver (Mumola, 2000). To the extent that the child has already established close emotional relationships with the extended family, the trauma of transition to grandmother care will be lessened (Bloom & Steinhart, 1993).

Factors during incarceration. The major determinants of child adjustment during the period of parental incarceration are (1) the nature and quality of the alternative caregiving arrangements and (2) the opportunities to maintain contact with the absent parent.

As we have noted, the gender of the incarcerated parent is a major determinant of the type of alternative care arrangement. When fathers are incarcerated, the mother is generally the caregiver who continues to be responsible for child care; when mothers are incarcerated, grandmothers assume their responsibility (Bloom & Steinhart, 1993; Mumalo, 2000). The latter arrangement provides greater continuity for the child relative to foster care because the child is with a familiar caregiver. Moreover, kinship placements tend to be more stable and avoid transethnic discontinuities that are likely to occur in the foster care system. It is assumed that children make better adjustments in kinship homes, but comparative studies of kinship versus foster care placements are not available. Moreover, there are problems with kinship arrangements as well. Young and Smith (2000) cite a range of challenges faced by grandparents raising grandchildren, including emotional, physical, and financial difficulties, which, in turn, may undermine their effectiveness as substitute caregivers. As in the case of grandmothers raising infants for their teenage daughters (Brooks-Gunn & Chase-Lansdale, 1995), the relationship between the grandmother and the incarcerated mother is often strained and characterized by a range of negative feelings such as resentment, anger, guilt, or disappointment (Bloom & Steinhart, 1993; Young & Smith, 2000). In turn, this complicates decision-making on behalf of the child, which requires cooperation across generations if the child's best interests are to be served. Parallel problems are evident in joint custody arrangements after divorce (Hetherington & Kelley, 2001; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1993). Grandmothers serve as gatekeepers in terms of their children's access to the parents just as divorced mothers regulate fathers' access to their children (Braver, 2000). In spite of this potential barrier to maintaining contact, 94% of caregivers surveyed by the National Counsel on Crime and Delinquency endorsed the idea that contact between mother and child is important and 97% helped promote contact during incarceration (Bloom & Steinhart, 1993).

The second important determinant of children's adjustment to their parent being in prison is regular contact with the incarcerated parent. Institutional, attitudinal, and practical barriers make this contact difficult to maintain, however. As Young and Smith (2000) note, correctional policies regarding visitation and phone use make it difficult for mothers to stay in touch with their children. Facilities are typically located in remote areas, often long distances from where children and caregivers live, making visitation extremely difficult for families with limited resources, and visitation hours are scheduled for set times each week rather than depending on would-be visitors' schedules (Kaplan & Sasser, 1996). In addition, rules about who is eligible to visit, the number of visitors allowed at one time, appropriate behavior during the visit, lack of privacy, harsh treatment of visitors by correctional staff, and the physical layout of the visiting room often deter family members and caregivers from coming. Other problems include child-unfriendly visiting rooms, lack of privacy, and increased anxiety on the part of the visiting child (Bloom & Steinhart, 1993; Simon & Landes, 1991). These conditions, in part, flow from cultural and institutional beliefs that incarcerated individuals, including parents, do not deserve privileges

such as family visitation. As Clark (1995) notes, the children become the “unseen victims” of a mother’s incarceration. Parents’, caregivers’, and social workers’ attitudes also play a role in visitation patterns. Some resist the idea of visitation by children either because of the unpleasant and inhospitable visiting conditions (Hairston, 1991) or because of their belief that visitation will produce negative reactions in the children (Bloom & Steinhart, 1993). However, Johnston (1995) found that the excitability and hyperactivity associated with children’s visitation were relatively short-lived and there was no evidence of long-term negative responses. Visiting can calm children’s fears about their parent’s welfare as well as their concerns about the parent’s feelings for them (Sack, 1977). Investigations of the patterns of visitation reveal that approximately half of incarcerated parents do not receive any visits from their children (Snell, 1994). Children are most likely to visit their mother in the first year and less likely to do so after this initial period. Moreover, even when children do visit, they do not visit often. According to one large-scale survey of state prison inmates, only 8% of the incarcerated mothers saw their children as often as once a week; 18% saw them once a month; 20%, less than once a month (U.S. Department of Justice, 1993).

Programs for Incarcerated Parents

Programs to aid incarcerated parents and their children take a variety of forms and are targeted at several different audiences -- imprisoned parents, alternative caregivers, and the children themselves. Moreover, these programs are delivered by a range of agents and agencies, including prison social work agencies, schools, and clinics. In addition, goals and timing of interventions vary. Some aim to increase contact between incarcerated parents and their children; some attempt to improve the structure of visits and facilitate family interactions; others seek to improve parenting skills of incarcerated parents; still others have the goal of easing the inmate parents’ reentry into society and the parental role by offering post-incarceration training, job placement services, and housing assistance. Unfortunately, although such programs exist, information about which approaches – if any -- are most effective is limited. A variety of problems characterize research in this area. The major problems include the lack of comparison groups, failure to carry out systematic evaluations of the impact of the interventions, use of non-standardized measurement instruments, and limited follow-up to assess the long-term effects of the intervention.

Interventions for parents. In light of the well-documented finding that many incarcerated mothers are limited in their parenting skills (Johnston, 1991), several programs have been developed to provide parent education for incarcerated mothers. Improvements in parenting practices, we expect, will result in improvements in children’s adjustment to their parents’ incarceration and reentry. Educational programs vary in their samples, their assessment methods, and their training strategies. In one model program, Showers (1993) compared 203 women who

completed a parent education curriculum based on the Systematic Training for Effective Parenting program (STEP; Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1982) with 275 women who were being released without taking the classes. The intervention involved 15 hours of instruction over a 10-week period. Women in both groups completed a 36-item Child Management Behavior Survey, which assessed knowledge about child development and child behavior management techniques before and after either the educational intervention or, in the case of the comparison group, on two occasions without an intervening educational program. There were significant improvements for women in the intervention group in comparison with the control group. Moreover, the effect held for both Caucasian and African-American women. Recidivism rates were altered too: for those in the intervention group, the rate was 1%, versus 19% for the participants in the comparison condition. In a smaller scale effort, Moore and Clement (1998) provided twenty mothers with 18 hours of parenting instruction over 9 weeks and compared these mothers to twenty waiting-list control mothers. Mothers in the treatment group, compared with those in the control group, showed a significant increase in knowledge about positive management techniques from pre- to post-test periods. Two other studies reported significant improvements in parenting as a result of educational interventions, but lacked comparison groups and therefore are difficult to interpret. Harm and Thompson (1997) provided weekly parent education classes over a 15-week period and reported improvements in self-esteem, increases in positive attitudes about parenting, and self-reported improvements in the quality of the mother's relationships with their children. Finally, Brorone (1989) reported improved self-esteem after 96 hours of instruction over a 24-week course. However, this investigator also reported more endorsement of physical punishment and an increase in inappropriate expectations -- findings that are inconsistent with the investigator's hypotheses and with other work in the area.

These studies alone do not make a compelling case for this approach to intervention, although the overall picture is positive. However, the success of parent training programs with non-incarcerated parents in modifying parent-child interaction patterns and parental behavior and, in turn, improving children's adjustment, suggests that it is worthwhile to continue to develop parent educational intervention for incarcerated samples as well. Examples of recent well-designed and carefully evaluated parent education interventions include programs for single mothers (Forgatch & DeGarmo, 1999), for parents of children making the transition to school (Cowan & Cowan, 2001), and for parents of high-risk children (Ramey et al., 2001). It is unfortunate that, in the studies of incarcerated mothers, more attention has not been given to the impact of intervention on the parents' behavior and parent-child interaction patterns instead of merely the well-being and attitudes of the incarcerated parents. Our assumption that these programs will, in fact, benefit children of incarcerated parents as well as parents themselves remains an untested assumption.

Another assumption is that fathers as well as mothers could benefit from parent-education intervention. There is a growing research literature that suggests that non-incarcerated fathers of

various types -- single, married, non-custodial -- improve their parenting skills and their relationships with their offspring as a consequence of parent education programs (see Fagan & Hawkins, 2001). Support for the effectiveness of parent education for inmate fathers comes from one recent study by Wilezck and Markstrom (1999). After an eight-session STEP parenting class, the fathers scored higher on parental knowledge and parental efficacy and decreased their belief that fate or chance played a role in their parenting. They also experienced higher overall satisfaction with their parenting. Inmate fathers in the control group did not show any significant changes. As in the studies of interventions with incarcerated mothers, measures of the impact of the parental intervention on the children were not collected. In a related project, Harrison (1997) found that male inmates who participated in a 6-week program including parent education and behavior management training, compared with fathers in a control group, improved their attitudes toward appropriate parenting. Harrison did measure children's perceptions of their own self-worth in this study and found no differences between children of fathers in the experimental and control groups. However, there was little visitation between fathers and their children in either condition, and, therefore, limited opportunity for the changes in fathers' attitudes to be expressed and changes in children's attitudes to follow.

More evidence of the effect of a father-oriented intervention on children comes from a study of the effects of "filial therapy" training on the father-child relationship (Landreth & Lobaugh, 1998). According to Landreth and Lobaugh, filial therapy training teaches parents basic child-centered play therapy skills and helps them learn how to create an accepting environment in which their children feel safe enough to express and explore their thoughts and feelings. In comparison to fathers in a control group, the fathers in the 10-week training program scored significantly higher on both their acceptance of their children and their empathic behavior toward their children. These fathers scored significantly lower than control fathers on parenting stress and on perceptions of problem behavior in their children. Of particular relevance to this review was the finding that the children of the fathers in the play therapy program showed a significant increase in their self-concept relative to children of control fathers. The relative success of this approach in promoting positive change in the children stems, in part, from the fact that both fathers and their children were participants in the program, not just fathers alone. As Cowan et al. (1998) argue, programs that focus on both partners in a relationship are often more effective than focusing on only one member of the dyad. A word of caution about the generalizability of these findings is necessary, however. The success of this program was due, in part, to the availability of the children to participate in weekly sessions with their fathers. In many families, practical constraints, such as conflicting schedules and long distances between home and prison, limit children's participation in such programs.

Beyond the Incarcerated Parent: The Family Unit as a Target of Intervention

Most programs have focused on the incarcerated parent and given less attention to the needs of either the non-incarcerated partner or the couple. The importance of focusing on the family unit stems from claims that post-release success is higher among inmates who have maintained family ties during incarceration (Clements, 1986; Hairston, 1987). Interventions can be directed to the marital unit, which is often strained by the incarceration. A variety of mechanisms, including conjugal visits, furloughs, and family and marital counseling, have all been suggested as ways of strengthening the marital relationship. The United States lags other countries (e.g., Mexico, Sweden, Denmark, and Canada) in providing those conjoint family services when one parent is incarcerated. In view of the clear links between the quality of the marital relationship and child outcomes -- either directly or indirectly through parenting -- it is critical that more effort be devoted to this form of intervention (Grych & Fincham, 2000).

Another form of conjoint family intervention when one parent is incarcerated involves the provision of services to all family members. In a promising but extremely small-scale demonstration, Marsh (1983) provided parent education aimed at improving communication and child management skills to couples in which the father was incarcerated. Both the inmate father and his wife attended eight weekly classes. Communication skills increased in all parents, and child management skills increased in two of the three families in the program, as evidenced by observations of parent-child interactions in the home. By providing services to help the non-incarcerated parent deal with the problems of temporary single parenthood, the children's adjustment could be enhanced and the marital relationship could be stabilized as well.

Visitation Programs

In spite of the problems associated with child visitation of incarcerated parents noted earlier, many parents feel that, on balance, visits are worthwhile. As one incarcerated mother put it, "The main advantage of the visits are tightening up the relationship, watching your children grow, how you've changed, being able to love one another" (Datesman & Cales, 1983, p. 147, cited by Bloch & Potthast, 1998). In light of sentiments like these, several women's institutions have developed visiting programs for inmates. Features of these programs include special play areas for parents and children, extended visits, more flexible scheduling, and special housing of children in the institution (Clement, 1993). Evaluations of visitation programs underscore the benefits of these efforts. For example, Snyder-Joy and Carlo (1998) initiated a mother-child visitation program for 40 mothers and their children, which provided special monthly visits in addition to regular visits. Activities (crafts, games, reading, etc.) were encouraged in a room set aside for these programs, and transportation was provided as well. Based on interviews with 31 mothers and 27 waiting-list control mothers, Snyder-Joy and Carlo found that program mothers

had more frequent contact with their children and spent more time discussing issues of importance to them, such as their behavior and feelings. The mothers' fears about their parenting abilities decreased, and they viewed their children as doing better than control mothers did. The mother's perceptions of the quality of their relationships with their children, however, were not different in the two groups.

A second visitation program is the Sesame Street program (Fishman, 1983). In an effort to alleviate congestion in the visiting room, let parents communicate without interruption by young children, and provide children with an accepting environment in which to express their feelings about the prison, a number of prisons have opened special playrooms adjacent to the visiting room. Children can visit with their incarcerated parent and then go to the playroom when they get restless. There they participate in educational and entertaining activities. Parents indicate that children are eager to visit the prison; inmates and their families find visiting more rewarding; and correctional administrators have accepted the project as an important service to the institution.

Another example of a parent-child visitation program is "The Girl Scouts Beyond Bars Program" (GSBB; Bloch & Potthast, 1998). Objectives of the Girl Scouts program were to provide enhanced visiting between mothers and daughters so as to preserve or enhance the mother-daughter relationship, to reduce the stress of separation, to enhance the daughter's sense of self, to reduce reunification problems, and ultimately to help decrease the likelihood of the mother's failure in the community. To achieve these goals, the program provided transportation and regular Scout troop meetings for mother and daughters at the prison. Outside the prison setting, the girls participated in other regular Girl Scout activities (field trips, meetings), without their mothers, as well. Some GSBB programs offered both parenting programs for mothers and counseling for their daughters, in addition. Evaluations indicate that the GSBB program increases the frequency of daughter-mother visitation and improves the quality of the visits and the mother-daughter relationship. Moreover, daughters' self-esteem was enhanced, new friendships with peers were formed, and problems associated with separation were lessened. Daughters were less sad, angry, and worried about their mothers, and, in most cases, grades improved as well. Further work is needed to disentangle which of the multiple program components, such as increased visitation, involvement in organized activities, new friendships, or exposure to non-parental adult mentors, were responsible for these positive outcomes.

Co-detention: Raising Children in Prison

A central assumption underlying our review is that separation of parent and child during incarceration is detrimental to the parent-child relationship and to the child's adjustment. Several innovative programs in the USA and Europe have been designed to allow the mother and child to remain together during some portion of the incarceration period. Prison nurseries, in which the mother gives birth in prison and raises the infant in the institution have a long history in the

United States. Since 1901, the nursery program in the Bedford Hills Correctional facility in New York, the oldest such program in the country, has housed female inmates who have given birth during their prison stay. Mothers and infants are permitted to stay together until the child's first birthday and a parenting program is provided as part of the program. Unfortunately, there has been no formal evaluation of this effort. A program developed in the Nebraska Center for Women was modeled after the Bedford facility to provide a live-in nursery for infants up to 18 months of age. Only mothers who are eligible for release within 18 months can participate in the program, which also provides parenting and child development classes. In a preliminary evaluation of 11 women, Carlson (1998) found that 8 of them felt that the program increased mother-child bonding and all of them felt that the parenting classes improved their parenting skills. Moreover, misconduct reports for these women while they were in prison decreased, relative to rates observed prior to entry into the program, and recidivism rates after they were released were lower. The latter finding, if it is confirmed by further investigation, is of great importance for children's adjustment. If recidivism can be reduced, children will be spared the trauma of repeated separation, which, in turn, will improve their psychological adjustment. A further argument in favor of co-detention is that this arrangement provides an opportunity for the mother and child to develop a close emotional attachment or to maintain the relationship that they have already formed. However, there are several negative aspects to prison-based co-detention. These include restrictions on the child's freedom and the impoverished environment of the prison institution, which may lead to some impairment of young children's cognitive development. European countries offer a variety of approaches to co-detention that avoid these problems. In Hungary, for example, pregnant women's sentences are often delayed up to a year to permit the woman the opportunity to give birth and care for her child at home (Jaffe, Pans, & Wicky, 1997). In France and Switzerland, co-detention programs have been organized to permit mother and child to be together for a 2-3 year period in a special prison section adapted to children's needs and providing an enriched prison milieu and opportunities to experience life outside prison (Jaffe et al., 1997).

Alternatives to Incarceration

Many of the problems associated with either separation from the parent or co-detention can be avoided by provision of some form of community-based sentencing, instead of prison-based incarceration (Meyers et al., 1999). These alternatives include house arrest, half-way houses where mother and children reside, and day programs in which mothers attend programs in a correctional institution during the day but are permitted to return home at night. Devine (1997) surveyed 24 community-based programs for mothers and children in 14 states. Community sentencing programs yielded reduced recidivism and increased family preservation -- outcomes that have positive implications for children's adjustment. In view of the cost effectiveness achieved by reducing the number of incarcerated women, it is surprising that these types of

programs are available to only a small percentage of women violators. Because the vast majority of offenses committed by women are relatively minor and non-violent (e.g., drugs, prostitution), alternatives to regular incarceration merit more consideration (Jaffe et al., 1997).

Programs for Children of Incarcerated Parents

Although most intervention programs are designed for the incarcerated adults rather than their offspring, there have been some attempts to intervene directly with the children. These interventions can take a variety of forms, including individual counseling or therapy, family therapy, or group therapy, located in schools, clinics, or prisons. We have already reviewed “Girl Scouts Beyond Bars,” a program that includes not only visitation opportunities but non-prison group activities as well. Another small-scale intervention program for children with incarcerated parents was conducted by Springer, Lynch, and Rubin (2000). A group of five Hispanic 4th and 5th grade children met for a 6-week period under the guidance of two adult leaders. It has long been believed that a group approach is most effective for children of incarcerated parents (e.g., Konopka, 1949). Group treatment can address the need for social support and provide a structured setting for expression of mothers’ concerns (Springer et al., 2000). Groups can diffuse the sense of shame that often accompanies parental incarceration, as children learn that other group members have similar experiences (Kahn, 1994). In their study, Springer et al. compared shifts in self-esteem for children in the intervention group with children in a waiting-list control group. Children in the intervention group increased in self-esteem, while control children showed a slight decrease in self-esteem over the 6-week period (effect size = .57). These results were similar to those in studies of group treatment for children and adolescents of non-incarcerated parents, according to a meta-analysis by Hoag and Burlingame (1997; effect size for differences between group treatment and wait-list and placebo control groups = .61). The Springer study does suggest that sons and daughters of incarcerated parents can benefit from a time-limited group intervention; however, the small sample size (N = 10 across both experimental and control groups) and the restriction of the sample to Hispanic children limits the generality of their results.

Another promising approach to intervening directly with the children of incarcerated parents can be found in the Youth Advisory Program. This is an intervention aimed at adolescents. It addresses issues of the adolescents’ feelings of isolation, self-esteem, and shame, helps them deal with their peers regarding their absent parent, directs them in making positive choices, setting goals, and developing support systems, and promotes an understanding of the corrections system (Weissman & La Rue, 1998). This approach could be modified for use with younger children and pre-adolescents. In light of the evidence that children who begin a deviant career path early in childhood are more likely to develop stable, serious criminal patterns (Moffitt, 1993; Patterson

et al., 1989), it is particularly important that intervention begin in childhood to try to avoid a deviant trajectory.

Parental Re-entry: The Implication for Children

As detailed by Jeffries (this volume), the impact of parental incarceration on children does not end with the release of the parent. Children, as well as their parents face a range of problems challenges and opportunities when the parent and child are reunited after the incarceration is over. In addition to the problems faced by the parent, such as finding a job and housing and re-integrating into the community, the child and parent face the formidable task of re-establishing their relationship. This task of reuniting is a complex one, because new relationships have been formed during the period of the incarcerated parent's absence. The parent is reentering a revised family system, one that was formed or stabilized without clear roles or responsibilities for the returning parent. As Sullivan (1993) observed in his ethnographic studies of both incarcerated and non-incarcerated young unwed African-American fathers, family members may limit a returning father's access to his children. Or a mother may have begun a new relationship during the incarcerated father's absence, and that may discourage the involvement of the reentering father with her or the child (Furstenberg, 1995; Nurse, 2001). Perhaps most critical, the child may have developed close ties with a substitute parent, such as a grandmother or foster-care parent. The process of shifting the focus of intimate relationships from this caregiver to a long-absent, returning parent may be disruptive for the child and present another stressful transition that further undermines the child's adjustment. To date, little is known about either the short-term consequences of this process of reestablishment of ties with an absent parent or the long-term effect on the child's well-being. A variety of factors will likely affect the transition, including the quality and duration of the parent-child relationship prior to incarceration, the nature and extent of contact between parent and child during incarceration, the quality, stability, and duration of the new caregiver-child relationship developed during incarceration, and the management of the transition back to the original parent-child caregiving arrangement. In addition, the option to maintain ties with multiple caregivers -- the parent and the substitute caregiver -- after the reentry of the incarcerated parent is probably a further determinant of child adjustment. Finally, the implications of non-reunion for the child's adjustment merit examination. The 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act mandates termination of parental rights if a child has been in foster care for more than 15 of the last 22 months (Genty, 1998). This often has consequences for children of incarcerated mothers, because women typically serve 18 months in prison. Thus, many children are deprived of their right to reunite with their mother. Although the reunion process is a complex one, it is unclear whether being in permanent foster care is preferable, especially in light of the relative instability of foster-home placements (Beckerman, 1998; Genty, 1998). On the other hand, some recent evidence (Horowitz et al.,

2001) suggests that children's functioning in foster care improves over time. The debate over permanent placements for children of incarcerated parents is far from settled (Beckerman, 1998).

Problems Associated with Intervention and Evaluation Efforts

In formulating an agenda for future efforts in this area, it is important to recognize the difficulties of conducting theory-based intervention with this population (Eddy, Powell, Szubka, McClool, & Kuntz, 2001) According to Eddy et al., several problems limit the scope and type of interventions that can be implemented. One problem is the high prevalence of mental impairment among incarcerated parents and the concomitant difficulty these parents have with reading. It is critical that intervention materials be written and administered at an appropriate level. Second, barriers to acceptance by prison staff have to be overcome. As Hairston (1991) found in a survey of prison policies and practices, correctional institutions are not generally supportive of inmate-family relationships or family-oriented services. A third set of problems relates to the dynamic nature of inmates' families. As Eddy et al. found, families of inmates exhibit frequent changes in roles and relationships. Some male inmates may be involved with multiple families as a result of having children with several women. The nature of these family ties, including the amount and frequency of contact, the quality and quantity of parenting, and even the parent's knowledge of children's living arrangements varies across inmates. This family instability both during and after incarceration presents serious problems for any longitudinal research design. Transience of inmates after release and of partners and children during incarceration pose additional problem for follow-up research. Whereas 16% of Americans move in a given year, Eddy et al. report that 62% of inmate participants in their study moved at least once in the previous year. At a 6-month follow up, only 5% of subjects were still residing at their pre-arrest residence.

Theoretical Perspectives to Guide Research and Policy

A variety of theoretical perspectives are relevant to this topic and can usefully provide guidelines for the design of future research, intervention, and policy. These theoretical perspectives include developmental and ecological contexts and cross-level analyses of the individual child and parent, the parent-child dyad, the family network, the community, the institution, and the culture.

Developmental theory. From a developmental perspective, several theories are relevant to understanding the consequences of parental incarceration. One important theory is Bowlby's (1973) attachment theory. This theory serves as a framework to aid in understanding the importance of the development of the parent-infant or parent-child relationship. According to Bowlby, the lack of opportunity for regular and sustained contact between an infant and parent will prevent the development of the infant's attachment to the parent. After an attachment has

developed, separation from the parent can generate a set of adverse emotional reactions from sadness to anger, which, in turn, will interfere with the optimal development of the child (Sroufe, 1988). At the same time, children can form multiple attachments, including attachments to fathers and other non-maternal caregivers, as well as to mothers. The fact that infants can develop strong attachments to their fathers (Parke, 2002) underscores the importance of assessing the reactions of children to separation from their incarcerated fathers as well as reactions to the loss of their incarcerated mothers. It also suggests that children who “lose” their relationship with an incarcerated parent can be helped by forming or maintaining a secure attachment relationship with another caregiver. For example, Howes and Hamilton (1993) found that children with an insecure attachment with mother but a secure attachment to a day-care provider tended to be more socially competent than insecurely attached children who had not formed a strong compensatory relationship outside the family. This work underscores the need to assess the quality of children’s attachment relationships with alternative caregivers such as grandparents when the parent is unavailable due to incarceration. Finally, Bowlby’s theory alerts us to the fact that mothers experience anxiety just as children do when the two are separated.

Life-span theory. According to the life-span theory of development (Elder, 1998), development is a process that continues throughout the life cycle into adulthood. Childhood is important, but other ages are also important in shaping later stages of development. The importance of examining developmental change in adults is gaining recognition, and it is now appreciated that parents continue to change and develop during their adult years. For example, age at the time of onset of parenthood can have important implications for how women and men manage their maternal and paternal roles. In the current context, how parents and their children adjust to the parent’s incarceration will vary greatly depending on the age of the parent as well as the developmental level of the child. According to life-span theory, change over time can be traced to three sets of causes. First, there are normative events and experiences that most children and adults undergo at roughly the same ages. Second, there are unexpected events that push development in a new direction. Incarceration, like job loss, divorce, or death of a family member, is one of these events. Third, historical time periods can influence development. Historical periods provide the social conditions for individual and family transitions, and across these periods, incarceration, its consequences, and policies may vary. Over the last several decades, there are a number of secular changes that could affect families’ reactions to incarceration. These include declines in fertility and family size, the increased participation of women in the workforce, the rise of divorce and the increase in the number of single-parent families. These societal trends and the historical era in which the incarceration takes place can profoundly shape the management of the child and their subsequent developmental outcomes.

Developmental analyses need not be restricted to the level of the individual, either parent or child, but refer to dyadic and family levels as well. At the dyadic level, relationships (between husband and wife, mother and child, father and child) may follow separate and partially

independent developmental courses over childhood (Belsky et al., 1989; Parke, 1988). At the family level, changes in structure (e.g., through the loss of the incarcerated member or the addition of the child to a foster family or a grandparent-headed household) also occur over time, with implications for both children and caregivers. The mutual impact of different sets of relationships on each other varies as a function of the nature of all these developmental trajectories.

Risk and resilience theories. Another set of theorists (e.g., Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Rutter & Sroufe, 2001) have recognized that children's successful adaptation in the face of stressful life events like the incarceration of a parent varies as a function of two things: the form and frequency of the risks and the protective or resilience factors that buffer the child from the adverse events. Individual children respond to risks in a variety of ways. Some suffer permanent developmental disruptions and delays. Others show sleeper effects; they appear to cope well initially, but exhibit problems later in development. Still others exhibit resilience under the most difficult circumstances and may even be strengthened by it. Moreover, when they confront new risks later in life, these children seem better able to adapt to challenges than children who have experienced little or no risk, a kind of inoculation effect (Hetherington, 1991; Rutter & Rutter, 1993). Three sets of protective factors have been identified that appear to buffer the child from risk and stress and promote coping and good adjustment in the face of adversity. The first set of factors consists of positive individual attributes. Children who have easy temperaments and high self-esteem and who are intelligent and independent are more adaptable in the face of stressful life experience (Rutter, 1987; Werner, 1993). Girls and women have a slight edge on resiliency in comparison with boys or men. The second set of protective factors is found in a supportive family environment. The presence of a supportive parent can help buffer the adverse effects of poverty, divorce or incarceration (Luthar et al., 2000). The final set of factors involves people outside the family, in the school system, peer groups, or churches, who support children's and parents' coping efforts.

Cumulative risk models. Cumulative risk models A closely related theoretical perspective with clear relevance to the issue of the effects of incarceration on children is the cumulative risk perspective (Rutter, 1987; Sameroff et al., 1998). According to this perspective, risks often co-occur and are best understood not as single events, but as sets or combinations of events. Children are most likely to be adversely affected when multiple risks co-occur. Moreover, the nature of the particular risk may be less critical than the number of risks that the child encounters. In the case of incarceration, it should be recognized that any attempt to attribute effects on children to parental incarceration alone may be doomed to failure, because many events before, during, and after the incarceration co-occur and contribute to child outcomes. For example, children who suffer the loss of a parent through imprisonment may also be at risk because of poverty, changes in residence, shift in caregivers, and stigmatization by peers and community. Recognition of the multiple risks experienced by children of incarcerated parents is

a critical step in gaining a better understanding of the multiple factors that contribute to children's adjustment and merit consideration for designing interventions and crafting social policy.

Putting the pieces together. No single theoretical perspective is sufficient to encompass the complexity of the problem of parental incarceration. Instead, a framework that integrates these perspectives into a unified theoretical whole is necessary. A transactional model of risks and supports associated with parental incarceration is presented in figure 1. Incarceration and reentry increases the probability of parents' and children's encountering a set of interrelated risks. These risks interact and are mediated in a variety of complex ways, just as in the case of other transitions such as divorce and remarriage or job loss (Conger & Elder, 1994; Hetherington, Bridges, & Insabella, 1998). According to our model, incarceration leads to changes in family composition and shifts in caregiving arrangements. The ability of alternative caregivers to cope adequately and to avoid depression will affect the child indirectly through caregiving processes. Other variables serve as moderators. Children's coping strategies, for example, serve as a moderator of the effects of caregiving processes on children's adjustment. Similarly, the opportunity to maintain contact with the parent during the period of separation will modify the nature of the parent-child relationship, which, in turn, will affect children's adjustment. Different variables may play different roles at various points across time. For example, whereas child characteristics may play a similar role during separation and reunion, the quality of caregiving processes (e.g., the child's relationship with the alternative caregiver) may play a protective role during parental incarceration but present a risk to successful reunion with the incarcerated parent after the separation is over. Finally, as the risk and resilience perspective suggests, it may be the balance between risks and resources that determines the impact of stresses of parental incarceration and reentry on children. Our argument is that static and cross-sectional slices out of the lives of parent and children yield a misleading portrait of how risk and protective factors operate across time to affect children's adjustment to parental incarceration. As our figure suggests, only by examining this issue in a dynamic and transactional framework will we fully appreciate the complexities of the interacting trajectories followed by parents, alternative caregivers, and children across time and the roles of risks and protective factors in accounting for variations in children's outcomes.

Research and Policy Issues: A Look Ahead

In the closing section we outline a series of issues, both research and policy issues, that need to be addressed if we are able to make serious progress in understanding the issue of parental incarceration.

Research issues. In view of our conceptualization of this issue as a dynamic set of processes that unfold over time, the most important need is to design and execute prospective, longitudinal

studies of the effects of parental incarceration on children. Only by doing so will we be able to trace the various pathways followed by different children and begin to describe the nature of the changes that affect the child's functioning. This type of design requires the identification of parents at risk for incarceration before the period of incarceration occurs, so that pre-existing conditions and relationships can be described. This design would be a step toward disentangling the impact of incarceration per se from the impact of preexisting family conditions on children's subsequent adjustment. These children and their incarcerated parents would then be followed during the period of incarceration through the post-prison period of reunion. In recognition of the difficulty of this type of prospective approach, careful retrospective interviews with the incarcerated parent, the child, and informed kin could begin to provide a profile of life in these families before incarceration. Second, designs should include developmentally sensitive measures that have been well-standardized and demonstrate adequate psychometric properties. Third, multi-measure and multi-informant designs are needed. Direct assessment of children is needed, as much of the literature relies on potentially-biased parental reports (Meyers et al., 1999). Observation of children in a variety of contexts (home, school, playground) with a variety of interactive partners (parents, substitute caregivers, siblings, peers) would begin to provide a solid descriptive data base. Careful evaluations of children's psychological functioning and patterns of coping are also needed (Johnson, 1998). Fourth, more attention needs to be given to the unique effects of the incarceration of fathers versus mothers. Less attention has been paid to paternal incarceration than to maternal imprisonment, but the father-child relationship is an important focus for future research and policy efforts (see Gadsden & Rethemeyer, 2001, for a recent report on this issue). Fifth, it is increasingly recognized that cultural background plays a major role in shaping children's reactions to various types of family transitions and stressors and in developing the coping strategies children and families use in the face of adversity (Demo, Allen, & Fine, 2000; Parke & Buriel, 1998). Therefore, the role of incarcerated parents' cultural and ethnic backgrounds needs to be given more attention in future research. Sixth, research needs to move beyond simple descriptions of differences in children to explanations of processes in the individual, family, context, or culture that account for children's adjustment. Only when we have begun to identify these processes will we be positioned to design meaningful theory and data-based interventions. Seventh, our interventions need to be theoretically guided and should be viewed not simply as a plan to help children and/or their families but as an opportunity to evaluate the adequacy of our theories as well. Eighth, progress is likely to flow from recognition of the need for interdisciplinary research teams. A variety of disciplinary specialists including child developmentalists, family psychologists, social workers, criminologists, and organizational and community social scientists each have important and distinctive perspectives to offer and need to work cooperatively in the design and evaluation of research and intervention efforts.

Policy needs. The major policy issue that needs to be addressed in this area is "connecting the systems" (Adalist-Estrin, 1994). In many states, fragmented services and agencies result in

service gaps, unmet needs, and overlapping or conflicting service delivery agendas (Phillips & Bloom, 1998). The systems that provide services for children and families affected by incarceration need to coordinate their efforts across time to permit continuity of services. For example, decisions and services on behalf of family members during incarceration need to be recognized in the planning of post-incarceration services to ensure continuity across the transition from prison to home. The criminal justice system, including correctional officers and prison administrators, needs to be involved in decision-making about family contacts and family support. The social welfare system needs to be involved with the family members of incarcerated parents to provide coordination between their services and the needs of the imprisoned parent (visitation, reentry services), and, in turn, these activities need to be coordinated with the criminal justice system, including prison and later parole systems. For children, schools need to be partners in the support provision process so that the child's needs beyond the family setting are recognized. Only when all the various players -- courts, prisons, community and social service agencies, schools, and policy makers -- begin to coordinate their efforts will we be able to develop and implement programs that will maximally support children, families, and kin of incarcerated parents. Second, and equally important, social policy needs to address the issue of public attitudes toward incarcerated individuals and their families. By educating the wider community about the needs of incarcerated parents, their children, and their families, more humane policies may emerge and the difficulties faced by these individuals will be better appreciated. Third, in recognition of the diversity in our society and the disproportionate numbers of minority group members who are incarcerated, social policies should be made more culturally sensitive. If they are to be maximally effective, social policies, social services, and intervention programs need to be tailored to the needs of different cultural groups.

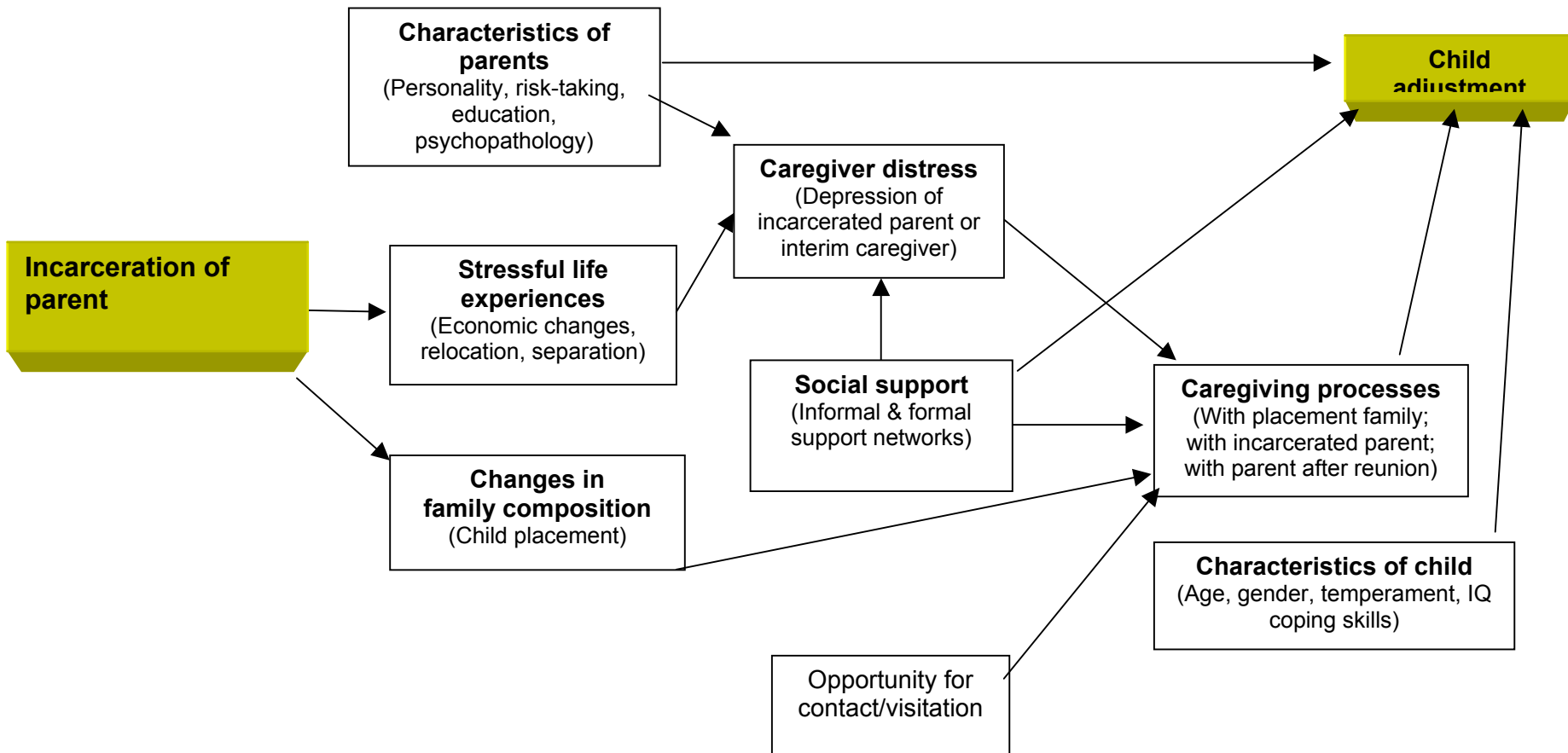


Figure 1. A transactional model of the predictors of children's adjustment following parental incarceration and reunion (after Conger & Elder, 1994; Hetherinton et al., 1998).