

**Kathleen Petgrave**

**Critical Analysis of Community Mental Health Issue**

**Professor Carlton Jean, LCSW, MA**

**Social Work & Mental Healthcare Systems**

**NYACK College**

**Abstract**

Families face many vulnerabilities today, four major vulnerabilities are parental incarceration, parental mental illness, parental substance use, and poverty. These stressors have a negative impact on the outcome of children and adolescents. Research has not been able to separate the causal effects of incarceration from the effects of other risk factors that were already present. Although, it still impacts the outcomes in similar ways. After looking at all of the risk factors and how they effect children's outcomes, social workers are seeking to become more knowledgeable and skilled in order to implement interventions that will improve the overall outcomes.

### **Statement of Purpose**

There needs to be a clear understanding of the vulnerabilities faced by children and families, a theoretical understanding for family intervention, and an evidence-based intervention for vulnerable families in order for social workers to be equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to work toward change in the face of multiple challenges. "When trying to determine the impact of existing risk factors it is important to determine whether any one risk factor places a child at greater risk or if, in fact, it is the combination of risk that creates the *perfect storm*, resulting in negative child outcomes including criminality and addiction." (p. 159) (Rosenburg, 2018)

### **Literature Review**

Parental incarceration has a unique set of risk factors, which include the trauma of separation, shame and stigma, depleted resources when a

parent goes to jail/prison, and possible genetic predisposition, to criminality (Johnson, 2009). Incarceration has become so prevalent among minority groups that it has become an expected part of life in many communities. (Rosenburg, 2018).

The United States (US) has one of the highest incarceration rates in the world. In 2016, the imprisonment rate was 450 sentenced prisoners per 100,000 US residents of all ages and 582 per 100,000 US residents aged 18 years and older. Over 2.7 million children, or one in 28 children in the US, have an incarcerated parent. Between 1991 and 2007, parents held in state and federal prisons increased by 79%, and children of incarcerated parents increased by 80%. Approximately 10 million children in the US have experienced parental incarceration at some point in their lives. About half of children with incarcerated parents are younger than 10 years old. Children of incarcerated parents often suffer from substantially poorer psychosocial outcomes. (An et. al, 2019)

Keva Miller pointed out that Children of inmates are often referred to as the “hidden victims” of crime because they traditionally have been underserved and understudied (Seymour, 1998). In the 1990s, professionals increasingly encountered youth who experienced myriad adverse reactions that were associated with parent-child separation. A study was conducted on youth with incarcerated mothers to determine if parental separation increased the likelihood of acute stress reactions (Kampfner, 1995). One of the main research hypotheses was a combination of parent-child separation

and forced silence about the incarcerated parents due to potential shame on the family would increase trauma in children. Approximately 75% of the children in the study group reported symptoms characterized as trauma-related stress. (Miller, 2006).

The potential resilience of adolescents of incarcerated parents is best understood from a developmental ecological model (Bronfenbrenner and Ceci 1994; Dallaire et al. 2010; Poehlmann et al. 2010). This theory stresses that development is influenced by proximal interactions immediate social contexts, such as the home and school (Bronfenbrenner and Ceci 1994). Essentially, development is influenced by any ongoing social relationships within the youth's immediate context (microsystem), as well as the systems and environments in which development occurs (mesosystem). Accordingly, to utterly understand both the potential risks and resources of adolescents with incarcerated parents, this theory stresses the examination of the relationships and the social environments that contextualizes the experience. (p 1091). However, there are multiple theories that explain how parental incarceration may pose a threat to development by impacting the adolescent's relationships (microsystem) and their environment (mesosystem). Mechanisms that link incarceration and lifetime adjustment within the microsystem include a broken sense of attachment or loss of connection (Poehlmann et al. 2010; Murray and Murray 2010).

Studies have also shown that children who experience parental incarceration face other adverse experiences and conditions that are likely to

lead to poor outcomes, irrespective of parental incarceration, interventions should address these preexisting and ongoing disadvantages rather than focusing solely on the parental incarceration experience. (Noyes, Paul, & Berger, 2018).

## **Theoretical Framework**

Research has shown that the multiple risks and vulnerabilities faced by families are difficult to understand in that they often co-occur and overlap. The bioecological model reflects the systemic impact of the multiple vulnerabilities faced by families. The bioecological model is a framework of human development that considers different ways people interact with the environments. This model suggests five distinct levels, or systems, where interactions take place: a) microsystem, b) mesosystem, c) macrosystem, d) exosystem, and e) chronosystem. (Bronfenbrenner, 1995, p. 623).

The ecology is closest to the individual, describing people and institutions. The microsystem includes a child's family, school, peers and other components of the environment. This includes the parent-child relationship before, during and after incarceration. Several recent studies have demonstrated the strong relationship between parental incarceration and negative child outcomes (e.g., mental health problems, behavioral outbursts, educational inadequacies, and substance use). (Davis, & Schlafer, 2017).

The ecology reflects the relationship between people or institutions that are closest to an individual. In other words, it encompasses two or more microsystems, whose interactions indirectly influence the child. Interacting among family members and the child's school would be considered part of the mesosystem. (Robillard et al. 2016)

The ecology reflects the environmental contexts that indirectly influence the individual. Connections between an environment in which an individual is directly connected and an environment where they are not. Children and adolescents sometime lack the ability to attach because they do not trust.

This ecology describes the culture and sociopolitical climate, including growing rates of incarceration in the United states. It also includes laws and policies that affect individual and their families. The macrosystem evolves over time because each generation influences change. (Utrzan, & Carlson, 2017)

This ecology reflects environmental patterns, transitions, and sociocultural events. It encompasses age of developmental level, changes in living accommodations, and release or re-incarceration of a caregiver. Incarceration of a caregiver has been described as a critical turning point in children's lives. (Trotter, Flynn, and Baidawi, 2017)

The bioecological model provides a useful framework for understanding the complex and systemic nature of these impacts. The decision to incarcerate a

parent has reverberating effects, putting children and families at a higher risk for a variety of negative outcomes. Given that more than 5 million children have experienced the incarceration of a parent at some point in their life, this represents a significant population at risk. Now, more than ever, it is important to consider sentencing reforms, rehabilitation programs, and other alternatives to incarceration. (Utrzan, & Carlson, 2017).

### **Critical Analysis of the Problem**

The four common vulnerabilities faced by children and families, that Rosenberg looked at are, parental incarceration, parental mental illness, parental substance use, and poverty. Children and families face so many issues when the family system breaks down t many issues occur, there are unmet developmental needs, impaired attachment issues, economic issues, legal problems, anxiety, depression, truancy from school. As the author points out all four risk factors have been shown to impact the outcomes of children in similar ways. Any one of these risk factors are difficult for families to endure but when these issues co-occur and overlap which is the case with many families. “Much of the existing literature fails to distinguish the risk posed by traumatic and stressful circumstances from those posed by factors such as losing a parent to incarceration. Due to the type of data available and the lack of longitudinal data it is difficult to determine accurately the impact of these risk factors independently from other factors. (Rosenberg, 2018). The author also points out that “when trying to determine the impact of existing risk factors it is important to determine

whether any one risk factor places a child at greater risk or if, in fact, it is the combination of risk that creates the perfect storm, resulting in negative child outcomes including criminality and addiction.” (Rosenberg, p. 159).

At the beginning of the chapter there was a quote by Kahlil Gibran “Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life’s longing for itself. They came through you, but not from you, and though they are with you, yet they belong not to you.” (p. 158). It was compared to a ritual that the Masai tribe of Africa does, when warriors respond that all the children are well it indicates that peace and safety reign and the priorities of protecting the young and powerless are in proper order. (Jones, 2008). In this country we don’t protect our children like we should. Our children’s innocents are stolen, and they lose their childhood far too soon. When they began to act out, we pretend we don’t know what went wrong. However, so many parents had the same things happen to them and they live with unresolved issues, so they are in no position to teach or nurture their children. So, this vicious cycle continues to repeat itself for generations, until someone seeks help and makes changes.

### **Social Action Plan**

The social action plan I would like to see happen would have satellite programs set up in the schools and work with the school social workers. Children or adolescents would be referred to our program and we could

service them at the school. We could provide counseling services, as well as connect them with peer support. Perhaps get their caretaker to come in and meet with us as well and assess the needs of the whole family and make sure the family unit is receiving services.

The program could also create a satellite program at the jails/prisons in order to prepare the incarcerated parent for his/her release and address their needs, so they are prepared to parent their children once they return home. They will come to the mental health clinic when they are released so the family unit as a whole can come together and we can address and provide treatment services where needed. (Micro)

We will make sure the families are getting any entitlements needed to start eliminating any barriers to treatment. Such as public assistance, for medical benefits, or if someone is coming home from being incarcerated, they may need to go to DMV for NYS ID., Someone in the family may have a substance use disorder. We can provide referrals for detox or rehab. We can refer clients to employment services that can help them with their resume and training programs. (Mezo)

We can also involve our children and adolescents in programs such as The New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents they will work in partnership with government agencies and community and faith-based organizations to advocate for and support policies and practices that meet the needs and respect the rights of children and youth whose parents are

involved in the criminal justice system. This is empowering and it will keep them active with their community in a positive way and allows them to advocate for their family member and the well-being for their family.

(Macro).

### **New York Mental Hygiene Laws**

The relevant New York Hygiene Law 22.05 Patient's records. (a) After the admission of any patient, the director of a chemical dependence program or treatment facility shall, within five days excluding Sunday and holidays, forward to the office such information from the record in such time and manner as the commissioner shall require by regulation. Such information from the record in the office shall be accessible only in the manner set forth in sections 33.13 and 33.16 of this chapter.

(b) All records of identity, diagnosis, prognosis, or treatment in connection with a person's receipt of chemical dependence services shall be confidential and shall be released only in accordance with applicable provisions of the public health law, any other state law, federal law and duly executed court orders.

Record keeping is particularly important especially in this line of work.

Clients have an absolute right to confidentiality and in my action plan this

writer will be referring clients for Substance Abuse Treatment and as a

CASAC I have been following these guidelines. These laws will protect clients

as well as this writer.

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