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BREAKING THE CYCLE OF INTERGENERATIONAL CRIME

Breaking the Cycle of Intergenerational Crime:
Theoretical Analysis and Intervention Program Recommendations

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Abstract

With approximately 2.3 million individuals incarcerated in the United States, important questions arise about the consequences of mass incarceration. Of particular concern is the impact on juveniles with one or both parents incarcerated, who are an especially disadvantaged group in society. They face unique challenges because of their parent's incarceration, and research documents this resulting in problems with health, education, and criminal behavior. The literature on intergenerational crime emphasizes the statistically significant rates of children following in their parent's footsteps of criminal behavior, with parental incarceration being an important risk factor. The purpose of my research is to explain the effects of parental incarceration on children's delinquency. Informed by this research, I propose an intervention program for children of incarcerated parents in hopes to stop the cycle of criminal behavior.

Keywords: *intergenerational crime, parental incarceration, delinquency, intervention program, criminological theory.*

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Introduction

The number of individuals incarcerated in the United States is at an all-time high. With approximately 2.3 million individuals behind bars, the repercussions of this mass incarceration need to be addressed. Importantly, between 50 and 75 percent of incarcerated people have a child who is a minor (Martin, 2017). This means that over the course of their lives, 2.7 million children in the United States will have an incarcerated parent (Martin, 2017). There are racial discrepancies in the data on parental incarceration as well (Siennick, 2016). One study found that 40 percent of incarcerated parents were African American fathers. Overall the number of African American children with an incarcerated parent has doubled since 1970, and African American children are 7.5 times more likely than white children to have an incarcerated parent (Foster and Hagen, 2009). Parental incarceration can lead to a number of poor outcomes for their children, particularly in their education (Trice and Brewster, 2004), mental health (Muftić & Smith, 2018), and behavior (Farrington, 2008). Research thus far has supported the argument that children are highly likely to follow their parent's criminal behavior as expressed by the term intergenerational crime (Muftić & Smith, 2018; Kjellstrand & Eddy, 2011; Murray & Farrington, 2008). The literature highlights the fact that mass incarceration cannot be ignored, and neither can the detrimental circumstances that the children of this incarcerated population will face, especially antisocial behavior.

Throughout the literature, researchers document that antisocial and criminal behavior is an outcome of parental incarceration. Specifically, they find that antisocial behavior is a prevalent result of parental incarceration and, even when other variables are controlled for, the correlation is strong (Kjellstrand & Eddy, 2011; Murray & Farrington, 2008). It has been suggested that social and emotional impairments caused by parental incarceration lead children

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to engage in high-risk behaviors and lead to more problems in adolescence and adulthood (Arditti & Salva, 2015). Antisocial behavior as a result of parental incarceration is also moderated by factors like race and gender. Specifically, studies have documented that mental illness and substance abuse as a result of parental incarceration is especially influential for racial minorities (Kjellstrand, 2009). Additionally, a child with an incarcerated mother was found to be two and a half times more likely to exhibit criminal behavior than a child whose father was incarcerated (Burgess-Proctor et al., 2016). Overall the literature indicates that the gender of both the parent and the child are essential in contextualizing the outcome of parental incarceration (Burgess-Proctor, Huebner, & Durso, 2016). Racial and gender discrepancies are seen throughout the criminal justice system's policies and literature. One explanation for this is that societal norms of what is morally correct are created by the social elite. As Merton (1938), discusses, the less powerful groups—racial minorities, women, and other vulnerable populations—can struggle to meet the legal standard of behavior that has been created by the more powerful members in society because of unequal opportunities (Merton, 1938). Based on this evidence, it is vital that these racial and gender discrepancies with intergenerational crime are addressed. With rapidly growing rates of incarceration, the immediate and detrimental consequences for these children need to be addressed as well. The consequences of parental incarceration can last a lifetime. It is important to address the impact of parental incarceration that can change as a child ages. Parental incarceration can serve as a turning point in a child's life and result in a number of adverse outcomes. (Moffit & Loeber, 1993). There can also be various trajectories throughout a child's life that can affect their relationships with others and their behavior (Sampson and Laub, 2003).

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Overall, the literature consistently documents that parental incarceration can cause a variety of negative outcomes for children and ultimately lead to delinquency. In this paper I conduct a review of the literature on intergenerational crime with a focus on the theoretical explanations for that link. Using these theoretical perspectives, I examine the reasons for the effect of parental incarceration on children's delinquency. My study builds on the literature by using the theoretical mechanisms to inform the design of intervention programs. The current intervention programs are centered on a child's attachment to their parent, which is important. However, areas of economic strain, stigma, and poor educational outcomes need to be addressed in programs as well.

Theoretical Approaches

Intergenerational crime is the consequence of parental incarceration that this study hopes to prevent. To explain why children with incarcerated parents ultimately exhibit criminal behavior, I employ an extensive theoretical study. First, I describe each theory and the different ways they explain criminal behavior. Second, I take a closer look at how each theory explains intergenerational crime specifically. Lastly, I use the theories with the most statistically valid explanations of why parental incarceration can lead to delinquency to recommend a more effective, theoretically informed intervention program.

Parental Incarceration Causes Strain

Merton's (1938) theory of social structure and anomie attempts to explain how individual circumstances push some to turn to criminal behavior. He explains that society creates goals for all individuals. These goals, although desirable and expected for all, are impossible for some individuals to achieve due to the social class structure. He states, "Every social group invariably couples its scale of desired ends with moral or institutional regulation of permissible and

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required procedures for attaining these ends"(Merton, 1938, pg.680). Society restricts access to these expected achievements because of the unequal access to the "permissible and required procedures." This means that the goals set by society are too implausible for some of the population which creates the strain he calls "anomie." This strain placed on individuals to achieve society's goals of success is what ultimately leads to deviant behavior (Merton, 1938). Merton lays out two adaptations to strain that cause crime, innovation and rebellion. Innovation is when individuals achieve society's goals, but the means by which they do so are deviant. For example, a person may reach the American Dream by laundering money through their business. Rebellion is when an individual is unable to achieve society's goals and decides to reject them and make a new set of achievable goals and means. Often times this involves deviant behavior. For example, Anderson (1994) describes an urban subculture where the goal of respect is achieved by displays of aggression.

Merton's (1938) social structure and anomie theory is limited in explaining deviance. He only describes one type of strain, failure to achieve positively valued goals. Agnew (1992) builds off of this theory and defines other types of strain in his General Strain Theory (GST). Merton tends to focus on economic success, whereas Agnew shows that strain can be caused in many ways and is not limited to economic success.

GST states that crime and delinquency are adaptations to stress. There are three types of deviance-producing strain. They include failure to achieve positively valued goals, the removal of positively valued stimuli, and confrontation of the individual with negative stimuli. The first type of deviance producing strain is failure to achieve positively valued goals and has subtypes of strain that build from it. It can be the disjuncture between aspirations and expectations and includes both immediate and future goals. It also includes both failures based on blocked

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opportunities and individual inadequacies in ability and skill. Then there is the gap between expectations and actual achievements. This is when an individual anticipates rewards that fail to materialize, which leads to anger, resentment, and disappointment. Lastly there is discrepancy between what one views as a fair or just outcome and the actual outcome. This includes when a positive outcome of an activity or relationship is not perceived as comparable to the amount of effort put into it and is viewed as unfair when compared to others' efforts. The second type of deviance-producing strain is when there is a removal of positively valued stimuli. This could be the individual's experience with stressful life events. Such events include the loss of something or someone of great worth to the adolescent (significant other, family member, or friend). The third type of deviance producing strain is strain that can be caused by the individual's confrontation with negative actions by others. This includes child abuse, victimization, adverse school experiences, and other "noxious" stimuli (Agnew, 1992). Deviance is most likely to occur when strain generates negative emotions, especially anger. For example, anger results when one blames the system or others, rather than oneself, for the adverse experiences. Whether a deviant or conforming mode is adopted depends on one's access to legitimate coping skills as well as internal and external constraints (Agnew, 1992).

Strain theory is a useful perspective for understanding children's response to parental incarceration. Parental incarceration arguably can produce all three types of deviance producing strain. Negative stimuli may be presented if a child experiences adverse experiences in school and at home. Negative stimuli can also be seen as mental health problems and stigma. Parental absence, which is inevitable with incarceration, is the absence of positively valued stimuli. Failure to achieve positively valued goals such as good grades in school or a good financial standing are also a result of parental incarceration. Having an incarcerated parent causes

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economic strain and emotional strain. This strain can lead children of incarcerated parents to resort to criminal coping. Having a parent go to prison is something that is undoubtedly stressful on a child. Their life is impacted in a tremendous way and this instability may not end until the parent returns home. Parental incarceration can cause negative stimuli seen as mental and physical health problems (Swisher & Shaw-Smith, 2015) and stigma. Parental incarceration also causes the absence of positive stimuli, in particular the absence of a parent (Farrington, 2008). Parental incarceration also can cause failure to achieve positively valued goals, such as poor educational outcomes (Trice and Brewster, 2004) and poverty (Murray & Farrington, 2008).

The health of a child with incarcerated parents is a huge concern, and children are often found to have both physical and mental health problems as a result of the strain of parental incarceration (Muftić & Smith, 2018). The strain caused by the trauma of being separated from their parent, along with economic strain and instability in the home can undermine a child's health (Swisher & Shaw-Smith, 2015). As a result of the strain of having a parent incarcerated, children have been found to have health problems and array of other problems (Muftić & Smith, 2018). One common mental health outcome of parental incarceration is trauma as a result of being separated from a parent (Swisher & Shaw-Smith, 2015). Parental incarceration has the harmful effect of being associated with depression and illegal drug use (Siennick, 2016). Agreeing with this statement, Swisher and Shaw-Smith found that girls who lived with their father at any point before or after his incarceration were found to have much higher rates of depression than boys in the same situation (Swisher & Shaw-Smith, 2015). This strengthens the argument that parental incarceration causes delinquency, because it is demonstrated to affect a child's emotional and physical well-being and heighten the use of illicit substances, both of which have strong correlations with crime.

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Stigma surrounding parental incarceration has a detrimental effect on their children. One of the key mechanisms that incarceration studies propose is the strain created through the parent's absence and stigma surrounding incarceration. General Strain Theory (Agnew 1992) argues that strains, like those documented in this literature, are one important cause of crime. Stigma surrounding parental incarceration can affect a child's behavior and can cause a child to exhibit criminal behavior as a coping strategy.

The absence of a parent is a result of parental incarceration that has documented effects on children. Farrington (2008) found that parental incarceration leads to children exhibiting internalizing behavior problems, which can lead to anti-social behavior and crime (Farrington, 2008). Internalizing behavior means that someone keeps their feelings inside. This can be seen as social withdrawal and anxiety. This can be a sign of strain because it is a coping mechanism often seen as a result of a traumatic experience such as parental incarceration. Internalizing behavior can also be a result of non-supportive parenting (Rodas & Baker, 2017). The strain of parental incarceration is likely to cause this internalization because the parent is not as able to be a supportive parent with less contact with their children. According to Aaron and Dallaire, family victimization refers to the suffering of the family as a whole from emotional, physical, financial, or other harm as a result of another person's actions (Aaron and Dallaire, 2010). These factors can lead children to use criminal coping strategies.

Children with incarcerated parents often have been seen to have poor educational outcomes. According to Trice and Brewster (2004) adolescents with incarcerated mothers were more than four times as likely to be absent from school than their peers. Poor educational outcomes can be a mediator of parental incarceration and delinquency. If a child is unsuccessful in school it can hinder their ability to get a good job, which can ultimately lead to innovation,

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rebellion, or criminal coping. Based on one study, adolescents with incarcerated mothers were four times more likely to be suspended and almost four times more likely to be failing. Additionally, for disciplinary reasons during the previous year, more than half of these children required school visits (Trice and Brewster, 2004). Interestingly, another study compared maternal and paternal incarceration, and found that juveniles who have a father that is incarcerated are more likely to have poor educational and occupational outcomes compared to juveniles who have a mother incarcerated (Foster & Hagan, 2015). In the same study, paternal incarceration was found to have a greater effect on educational outcomes compared to maternal incarceration (Foster & Hagan, 2015). Additionally, children who are affected by parental incarceration are likely to struggle with discipline while in school and also associate with delinquent peers (Muftić & Smith, 2018). This indicates that the educational problems are not limited to attendance and grades.

Poverty is arguably the most noted effect of parental incarceration. Children with incarcerated parents experience instability, disruption, and disadvantage. These factors impact children immensely and can link parental incarceration to negative health and economic problems for children (Murray, Bijleveld, Farrington, Loeber, 2014). As a result of economic strain, children with incarcerated parents have more social problems and display anti-social behavior (Murray & Farrington, 2008). Murray and Farrington (2008) make a strong argument that parental incarceration is a cause of economic strain with a comprehensive review of the literature, however they do not test this argument. Another argument that is made throughout the literature, but not empirically tested is that intergenerational crime is explained by labeling theory.

Being Labeled "A Criminal's Kid"

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Labeling theory, developed by Tannenbaum (1938), Becker (1963), and Lemert (1957), focuses on the informal and formal act of stigmatizing individuals with deviant labels. The primary mechanism in labeling theory is that the delinquent redirects their behavior to align with the delinquent identity that they are labeled (Matsueda, 1992). Agents of control, who function on behalf of the powerful in society, impose the labels on the less powerful. The concern of the theorists is to show the effect that labels can have on individuals and how labeled individuals ultimately can become their label (Becker, 1963). Another mechanism of labeling theory is the external processes that are the result of societal perception of the label (Lieberman, Kirk, & Kim, 2014). For instance, a person may hear that someone's parent is in jail and automatically think that because they are a child of a criminal, they are going to be a criminal as well. Lemert's (1957) secondary deviance is an important concept of labeling theory. Primary deviance is the first act of deviant behavior. Secondary deviance is when the individual who has been labeled deviant because of their previous behavior commits another deviant act as a result of the label. Secondary deviance can occur when members within a social institution treat a person differently because they are labeled delinquent by others within that social institution. This different treatment can cause the labeled individual to begin to identify with the label and act delinquent again as a result.

Labeling theory also focuses on how deviant labels restrict opportunities. A powerful example of this is seen in Pager's (2003) study on the discrepancies in job attainment due to criminal records. In particular it showed the effect of the stigma of having a criminal record and the stigma of being labeled a minority. The study found that applicants with criminal records were significantly less likely to receive job callbacks. Additionally, a white man with a criminal record was more likely than a black man with no criminal record to be chosen for a job. A black

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man with no criminal record was chosen for a job a third of a time compared to a white man when they had identical resumes (Pager, 2003). The differential application of official stigmatizing labels is the result of a relative lack of power. The powerful people in society decide which behavior will be discredited as deviant or illegal. Branding persons with stigmatizing labels results more from who they are than from what they have done (Lemert, 1957). For example, stereotypes surrounding different racial groups are derived from a person's looks alone and not their behavior. Children with incarcerated parents are automatically stereotyped because of their situation and not necessarily their behavior. These stereotypes can lead to deviance when a child begins to identify with the labels they've received.

Labeling theory is a potential explanation of intergenerational crime because children who have incarcerated parents receive labels. Having a parent in prison has a negative stigma that can sway the societal perspectives of these children and lead to reduced social opportunities for them (Lemert, 1957). For example, children who have incarcerated parents can be perceived and treated differently by their teachers who know of their situation. The children of incarcerated parents are more likely to lead a life a crime as a result of these labels and other factors. As explained earlier with strain theory, a parent's incarceration can lead to disparate educational outcomes and poverty (Murry & Farrington, 2008). Labeling theory offers a different means for explaining the same outcomes which lead to delinquency. Reduced opportunities can occur as a result of being labeled the child of a criminal. Parents of other children may limit their child's interactions with children of incarcerated parents.

Parental Incarceration Breaks Bonds

Travis Hirschi's (1969) *Causes of Delinquency* introduces social bond theory. It is centered around an individual's relationship or bonds to others. It is a control theory, which

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means that it focuses on the factors that would prevent a person from committing crime. A person who has strong relationships with others places value on their opinions and believes committing crime is immoral. Social bond theory in particular is centered on a person's relationships with others who provide constraint for committing crime. This bond is composed of four elements: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. First, attachment to others is the extent to which we have close affectional ties to others, admire them, and identify with them so that we care about their expectations. The internalization of norms is dependent on these attachments to others. Second, commitment is the extent to which individuals have built up an investment in conventionality or a "stake in conformity" that would be jeopardized or lost by engaging in crime or delinquency. Both education and employment build stakes in conformity. The greater the commitment, the more one risks losing and the cost of losing, one's investment in conformity prevents norm violations. Third, involvement is one's participation in conventional activities, such as studying, spending time with the family, and participation in extracurricular activities. An individual is restrained from delinquent behavior because one is too busy to become involved in delinquency. Fourth, belief is the endorsement of conventional values and norms. This is a belief that society's rules are morally correct and that they should be obeyed. The less that a person believes that he or she should obey the rules, the more likely they are to violate them (Hirschi, 1969).

In *Causes of Delinquency*, Hirschi empirically studies many bonds a person can have with others as related to their self-reported criminal or delinquent acts. These bonds are directly related to parental incarceration. One important variable is intimacy of communication with parents. Hirschi (1969) found that only 5 percent of boys who have intimate communication with their fathers reported committing delinquent acts, whereas 43 percent of boys who do not

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communicate with their fathers reported committing delinquent acts (Hirschi, 1969, pg.91).

Paternal incarceration would likely negatively impact the communication between fathers and sons. As a result, boys with incarcerated fathers could be more likely to commit delinquent acts because incarceration effects their ability to have an intimate father son relationship.

Hirschi (1969) also illustrates the association between self-reported delinquency and affectional identification with the father. He asked boys, "Would you like to be the kind of person your father is?" Out of the boys who reported that they wanted to be like their father in every way, only 16 reported committing two or more delinquent acts. Of the boys who reported that they wanted to be not at all like their father, 38 reported committing two or more delinquent acts. He noted that when asked the same question about their mothers, the correlation to delinquency was somewhat stronger (Hirschi, 1969, pg.91). It can be inferred that a child would not want to be at all like their parent if that parent was incarcerated. It is a common belief that behavior that results in incarceration is wrong. Children are taught in school, through the media, and often times at home to behave and stay out of trouble. If a child does not aspire to be like their incarcerated parent, based on the evidence in Hirschi's (1969) empirical study, children of incarcerated parents are more likely to commit two or more delinquent acts.

Hirschi (1969) also examined the correlation between maternal supervision and delinquency. When a mother's supervision was low, 55 boys reported committing two or more delinquent acts. On the contrary, when a mother's supervision was high, only 12 boys reported committing two or more delinquent acts (Hirschi, 1969, pg. 89). Maternal incarceration would significantly lower maternal supervision because the mother would not physically be home to supervise her children. This would mean children with incarcerated mothers are more likely to commit delinquent acts.

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It is clear based on Hirschi's (1969) empirical study of delinquency that the bond between a parent and a child is the most important social bond at some developmental stages. Attachment to parents and parental supervision are important pieces of this bond. This bond is significantly altered when a parent goes to prison, which is why social bond theory is vital in explaining delinquency as a result of parental incarceration. For example, children who have incarcerated parents are likely to have negative bonds with teachers and also have bonds with delinquent peers. The absence of a parent can harm a child's attachment to others (Hirschi, 1969). One effect of parental absence on children is that they are less likely to cohabit (Siennick, 2016). This means that they are less likely to live with a roommate or significant other in their adult life. This shows that incarceration potentially affects the bonds that a person has with others. Burgess-Procter et al. (2016) explained that maternal incarceration had a stronger effect on adult daughters than paternal incarceration had on adult sons (Burgess-Procter, Huebner, & Durso, 2016). There are not as many woman's prisons which means that children could have trouble visiting their mothers because of where they are incarcerated because they may be further away (Christian, 2005). Another study found that children who have high communication with their mothers have better educational outcomes (Brewster, 2004). It can be inferred that children who have incarcerated mothers would be have less communication with their mothers than children whose mothers are at home. And because of this, children with incarcerated mothers would be more likely to have poor educational outcomes as a result of low communication with their mothers.

Criminal Behavior is Learned

Aker's (1990) social learning theory is an extension of Sutherland's (1947) differential association theory. It uses operant conditioning developed by behavioral psychologists to explain

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learning mechanisms (Akers, 1990). Social learning theory offers an explanation of crime that includes variables that operate both to motivate and control criminal behavior. It focuses on four different concepts: Sutherland's (1947) differential association and definitions, and Bandura's (1977) differential reinforcement and imitation. Differential association means that a person becomes delinquent because of an excess of definitions of the legal codes as favorable or unfavorable. "Definitions are one's own attitudes or meanings that one attaches to given behavior" (Akers, Sellers, & Jennings, 2017, pg. 65). Differential reinforcement is the balance of anticipated or actual rewards and punishments that follow or are consequences of behavior. Imitation is behaving in a certain way after witnessing others behave in a similar way (Bandura, 1977). The relationships between the social learning variables and delinquent, criminal, and deviant behavior found in the research typically have a strong to moderate relationship. There is very little negative evidence found in the research and it is well supported both in the United States and other countries (Pratt et al., 2010).

Social learning theory offers a simple explanation for intergenerational crime. It differs from the other theories discussed thus far because it implies that it isn't the incarceration that matters, but the parent's criminal behavior. Children learn how to behave by following their parent's behavior. According to parental reports, children's delinquent behavior was predicted by a history of parental incarceration (Aaron and Dallaire 2010). To examine the intergenerational transmission of criminal behavior, Besemer et al. (2017) used a meta-analysis. They found that children whose parents are criminal are at a significantly heightened risk for engaging in criminal behavior (Besemer et al., 2017). Another study found that a father's violent behavior was a significant predictor of a son's violent behavior (Van de Weijer, Bijleveld, & Blokland, 2014). Social learning theory argues that by being around criminal behavior, a child is likely to exhibit

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criminal behavior on their own one day. This could potentially be heightened if a child lives with their criminal parent because that would mean they are around this behavior consistently.

Swisher and Shaw-Smith examined the effects of co-residence with the father who was or is incarcerated. They found that girls who lived with their father who had been incarcerated were exhibiting delinquent behavior more than boys in the same situation (Swisher and Shaw-Smith, 2015). Therefore, parental incarceration could actually reduce children's crime if the child were to not live at any point with their criminal parent.

Implications of Criminological Theories

After a close look at a number of criminological theories that help explain intergenerational crime, a few conclusions can be drawn. First, and most importantly, there is a significant relationship between parental incarceration and delinquency. Second, the effects of parental incarceration are extensive and certainly not limited to delinquency. Third, strain theory offers the largest sum of literature to explain the relationship between parental incarceration and a number of poor outcomes for their children. These outcomes of poverty, mental and physical health problems, poor educational outcomes and stigma can lead to delinquency (Murray & Farrington, 2008; Swisher & Shaw-Smith, 2015; Muftić & Smith, 2018). Social bond theory explains that a child's attachment to their parent would be affected severely by incarceration (Hirschi, 1969). Social learning theory contradicts this by implying that being around a criminal parent would increase a child's criminal behavior (Swisher and Shaw-Smith, 2015). Labeling theory explains that the stigma surrounding parental incarceration could potentially lead to adverse opportunities (Lemert, 1957). However, researchers have had trouble distinguishing whether the initial trauma of parent separation or the potential adverse outcomes of parental incarceration had a larger impact of children's behavior (Farrington, 2008). In order to be

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successful, and intervention program would need to address each of these potential outcomes and offer ways to cope with or avoid them in order to prevent delinquency.

Recommendations

Based on the research on intergenerational crime with a focus on criminological theories, it is evident that an intervention program would be helpful for these children. The theories that have the best explanations for linking parental incarceration and deviant behavior are strain theory, social bond theory, labeling theory and social learning theory. These theories coupled with a review of current programs could produce a more successful intervention strategy. Parental incarceration has life-long impacts on children's lives and that is why intervention is so vital. Mental health problems as a result of parental incarceration could lead to a number of adverse outcomes throughout a child's lifetime. Poor educational attainment could lead to trouble in finding job placement which could lead to a number of other life-long problems.

Intergenerational crime is aligned with life course theory and the literature has an abundance of research focused on the adolescent stage because that is where delinquent behavior peaks. The effects of parental incarceration have been documented throughout the life course of these children. When studying a group of adolescents through the life course, Farrington (2008) found that the initial trauma of parental incarceration is a turning point in the children's behavior because is the point at which the child's life is dramatically changed. He also found it hard to distinguish whether this initial trauma or the adverse experiences of parental incarceration were more influential on the children's behavior (Farrington, 2008). The initial trauma of a parent being removed from the home and put behind bars can have immediate effects on a child. There are also documented life-long effects on children because of parental incarceration. Swisher and Shaw-Smith (2015), also noted that the trauma of a parent being incarcerated and removed from

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the home sets a trajectory or cause for future antisocial behavior (Swisher and Shaw-Smith, 2015). Having a parent incarcerated is the start of a life-long journey of adverse outcomes.

To prevent a lifetime of adverse outcomes, intervention programs are important. Before making recommendations, it is important to research the current programs available for children with incarcerated parents. It is helpful to see the approaches to deterring deviant behavior and carrying out other goals were used in these programs. It is also important to see the results of the program and whether the methods have been successful. *The Sesame Workshop* helps comfort children during overwhelming changes and transitions caused by parental incarceration. *SKIP (Saving Kids of Incarcerated Parents)* focuses on providing children a circle of supportive relationships. *Children of Inmates* provides children with "bonding visits" to keep open lines of communication between parent and child. *One Day with God* brings children to visit their parents in correctional facilities.

The Sesame Workshop's mission is, "We're dedicated to helping children grow smarter, stronger, and kinder"(The Sesame Workshop, 2018). This is a program available in over 150 countries that has helped millions of children. The program is listed as a resource when researching for programs for children with incarcerated parents, but they are not the sole beneficiaries of the program (7 Helpful for Children of Incarcerated Parents, 2019). They help children to learn in a safe environment and offer special "circles of care" for children who have been through traumatic experiences. Circles of care are a variety of local professionals and volunteers that offer families support during tough times. They aim to assist children and their families in times of need by providing resources. Their main focus and where they have been evaluated and successful in the past is on their ability to help children with their educations (The Sesame Workshop, 2018).

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SKIP's mission is "to provide support services to children of incarcerated parents and their families and to increase public awareness of the underlying problems of these children as victims through education, advocacy and research" (SKIP Inc., 2017). After assisting in a study in 1976, Mrs. Gloria Jean Canty-Williams found that there were no services available to the children of prisoners and decided to establish *SKIP*. The program helps to inform the community of the problems children with incarcerated families face and informs families of the services available to them. The program focuses on helping children cope with being separated from their parent and helping them keep relationships with their family (SKIP Inc., 2017). They do this by providing services to families that can minimize financial hardship as a result of incarceration. This program includes aspects of strain and social bond theory in its design.

Children of Inmates focuses on "reaching out, rebuilding, and reconnecting lives" (Children of Inmates, 2016). This program intends to help children rebuild the bond with their incarcerated parent. They recognize the many negative outcomes of parental incarceration and hope to ease these outcomes by bringing the children to visit their incarcerated parent. *Children of Inmates* also advocates for children of incarcerated parents in regards to public policy and helping children receive public assistance (Children of Inmates, 2016). Although this program acknowledges the many outcomes of parental incarceration, it only seems to address a child's bond to their parent.

One Day with God has a mission to reconcile families using a restorative approach. The program aims to help all who are affected by crime to make communities safer. It is similar to a camp and involves bonding activities for children, members of the community and inmates (One Day with God, 2016). This program has a very religious approach, which may limit its ability to help all members of this community because not everyone shares such a strong faith. The

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program's focus is on a child's restored bond with their family and the inmate's restored bond with the community (One Day with God, 2016).

Unfortunately, the literature is lacking in evaluation of the current intervention programs. However, it is clear that existing programs are limited in the goals of their interventions. The current intervention programs focus on a child's attachment, which is an element of social bond theory. The literature would support an intervention program that includes aspects from strain theory, labeling theory, social bond theory, and social learning theory. It would make sense to expand the current intervention programs to include a more complete approach to helping this unique population of kids. For instance, *SKIP* could include financial and educational tools for children. To improve *Children of Inmates*, the resources offered need to extend past visits to parents. This could mean providing resources to children that help with financial stability or building relationships with positive role models. *One Day with God* also has an incomplete approach to helping children with incarcerated parents because it only focuses on the bond between parent and child. A more complete intervention program would offer children tools to help with strain and labeling as well.

Many of the programs that are currently available focus on a child's bonds with their parents. They offer a support system for children or bring the children to visit their parents. Having a support system outside of home can be beneficial for children affected by parental incarceration. Children with incarcerated parents have their bond with the parents significantly altered because of incarceration. If a program can provide children with visits to their parents, it can help mend this bond. A child's bonds with their parents and other adults are vital for development and for preventing delinquency (Burgess-Proctor, Huebner, & Durso, 2016). Social

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bond theory is not the only theory that offers a solution for preventing delinquency with these kids even if it is the only theory supported in current programs.

Parental incarceration can lead to a few different types of strain. A child who has a parent incarcerated can suffer economically because they have at least one parent not bringing in an income (Murry & Farrington, 2008). We can assist children experiencing this financial burden in multiple ways. First, a program could provide children educational tools in budgeting and saving money. Second, the program could help older children find jobs, build their resumes, and prepare for interviews. Thirdly, a program could run fundraisers to raise money for these children to help them live more comfortably. Economic strain can lead to delinquency because children may turn to criminal means of obtaining money. A program that offers children alternative solutions to assist their financial situation could potentially reduce this economic strain and ultimately reduce delinquency (Murray & Farrington, 2008).

Parental incarceration can also cause poor educational outcomes. Although one of the current programs, *The Sesame Workshop*, has helped children do better in school, their approach is incomplete. Educational strain should be addressed in intervention programs and there a few ways to approach this. For example, the program could offer tutoring for children or teach study skills. It is important to recognize that appropriate educational intervention may vary with age. Poor educational outcomes can be due to not having a parent home at night to help with homework, whether they are incarcerated or at work (Trice and Brewster, 2004). Therefore, another way a program can help children do better in school is simply by helping children with homework or reading to them. Helping children achieve educational success can prevent some aggressive behavior (Wilson, Lipsey, & Derzon, 2003).

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Labels given to children because they have an incarcerated parent can also cause many problems. The negative stigma surrounding the label can lead to bullying and the child may act out as a result of this. It would be beneficial to have coping skills taught in an intervention program to help children with bullying and emotional trauma. Labeling theory states that a person who is labeled deviant can embody this label and commit crime as a result of it (Matsueda, 1992). When a child is looked at differently because of their parent's incarceration, they are at a heightened risk for criminal coping. An intervention program should teach children different ways to deal with the stigma surrounding their parent's incarceration (Lemert, 1957). For example, a program could teach children how to express their feelings to a trustworthy adult. A program could also teach a child to communicate with their peers, both friends and bullies, in healthy ways. A program could also teach children ways to deal with anger from their parent's incarceration (Agnew, 1992). A program might offer art or sports to help children release stress in a healthy way.

Discussion

Mass incarceration poses a number of problems for the United States. Of particular importance are the consequences of incarceration for the children whose parents are behind bars. Perhaps the most extreme consequence of parental incarceration is delinquency. Children with incarcerated parents are faced with various outcomes and disadvantages that are directly correlated with their parent's incarceration. The literature on intergenerational crime and the other effects of parental incarceration is extensive. Researchers have found a significant correlation between parental incarceration and delinquency. The current study contributes to the literature through its primary focus on the theories that propose mechanisms of the relationship between parental incarceration and delinquency. Many researchers touch at least one theory in

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their studies of intergenerational crime, but very few solely focus on theoretical research. The abundance of theory-based literature used in this study allowed strong recommendations for an intervention program for children with incarcerated parents to be made. The study found that strain theory, labeling theory, social bond theory, and social learning theory provide the strongest explanations for delinquency as a result of incarceration. The absence of a parent alone can cause economic strain, emotional problems, and children are unable to bond with that parent. Parental incarceration can also cause mental health problems, poor educational outcomes, and stigma. These outcomes cause strain on a child and to cope with this strain a child may exhibit criminal behavior. A child may also learn their criminal behavior from their incarcerated parent or begin to identify with a negative label that they received by being a prisoner's kid.

The idea of an intervention program for these children is not new. There are several programs for children with incarcerated parents, and their goals vary. The most common goal is to help children mend or keep relationships with their incarcerated parents. Although this is an important aspect to have in an intervention program, it may not be successful on its own at preventing delinquency. Based on the current study, an intervention program with theoretically supported suggestions is the recommended approach to deterring intergenerational crime. This program would include tools to help children perform better in school, be able to have economic success, cope with stigma, and build good relationships with their parents, peers and other adults. The goal of the intervention program would be to help children to overcome the potential troubles that their parent's incarceration causes to ultimately prevent delinquency. If this method was implemented in an intervention program, based on the current study, the outcome of delinquency would be prevented or reduced.

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When a child's parent is sent to prison, this serves as a turning point in their life. Parental incarceration leaves children with a number of outcomes that are disparate. Society sets goals and standards for people to follow. When these standards are not met or are met in a way that is deviant or not socially acceptable, a person may face less opportunities. The powerful in society also set the standard of who is delinquent or criminal. Unfortunately, this could rope children of incarcerated parents into this deviant group. When someone is faced with unequal opportunities they can use criminal means to achieve society's goals or set their own standards. Children whose parents are in prison may be put in this position.

With any research comes limitations. The ideal situation would have allowed me to implement an intervention program that included theoretically supported resources for children. Additionally, my research would be stronger if it was reinforced by similar recommendations for intervention in other articles. Future research should implement these recommendations and continue to attempt to prevent delinquency resulting from parental incarceration. This study supports an approach to intergenerational crime that offers children the resources they need to guide them through life's challenges. Parental incarceration can result in various negative outcomes throughout a child's life that an intervention program could prevent or reduce.

Conclusion

With an ever-growing population of incarcerated people in the United States, it is vital that the ramifications of mass incarceration are studied and addressed. This study is important because children with incarcerated parents are a vulnerable population that are adversely affected by their parent's incarceration. The racial and gender discrepancies in the outcomes of parental incarceration are substantial and need to be addressed as well. The theoretical evidence has documented that there is a strong correlation between parental incarceration and delinquency.

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This study focuses on this significant and potentially preventable outcome of parental incarceration. The data suggests that strain, social bond, labeling, and social learning theories offer explanations for intergenerational crime. Using this evidence, and researching the current intervention programs for these children, allowed for this study to make recommendations for improving these programs. This research contributes to the study of intergenerational crime because it fights for a solution to this growing problem. A successful intervention program could solve a generational problem. With no solutions there is no doubt that crime would continue to pass down through generations, so it is time to break the cycle.

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