Developmental Trajectories of the Children of the Incarcerated: From an Educational Psychological Perspective

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Developmental Trajectories of Prisoners’ Children: Perspectives from Educational Psychology

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GEORGIA EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION
2015 CONFERENCE
Roundtable Outline

- Motivation for work in progress
- Purpose of this study
- Prevalence
- Review of the Literature
Motivation for this Work in Progress

- Personal identification as “a child of an incarcerated person”
- Exposure to indigent defense
- Professional associations
  - Dr. Miah in Social Work at Valdosta State University
- Recent news coverage
  - Bernie Sanders article
  - Atlantic Article
- Interest in longitudinal, development research methods
Goals

- To identify previous work examining educational outcomes of prisoners’ children
- To apply an educational psychological perspective to previous findings
- To propose new research that utilizes educational research methods and fills gaps in existing knowledge
- Ultimately, better understand the barriers and supports for this population
Prevalence – Who is actually affected?

- US Stats here
- Georgia stats here
Review of Literature – Fields & Theories

- Fields concerned with this population include:
  - Criminology & Legal Studies
  - Sociology
  - Social Work
  - Psychiatry
  - Psychology

- Corresponding theoretical frameworks include:
  - Strain theory
  - Social Learning/Labeling theory
  - Family systems
  - Genetics
  - Ecological theory
Review of Literature – Aims

- Aims of previous research
  - Descriptive
  - Predictive (risk factors)
  - Programmatic
  - Policy evaluation
Review of Literature - Methodology

- Protected Populations
- Largely ethnographic
- Subsamples
  - Gender bias in terms of children observed
  - Gender bias in terms of parent incarcerated
- Lack of educational outcomes
  - Academic achievement measured by a 5-point scale (Murray et al., 2011)
Obvious psychological perspectives

- Development hindered by traumatic experience
  - Varying degrees of severity depending on the following variables
    - Parent incarcerated
    - Family structure
  - Age not relevant
  - Unknown gender effects
- Role of moral development
Theories of Learning in Educational Psychology

- **Behaviorism**
  - Learning is seen as a change in behaviors based on environmental factors
  - Parental incarceration seen as a change in environment
    - Punishment or possible negative reinforcement (protective factor)

- **Social cognitive**
  - Incarceration/Parents as models
    - Removal of a negative role model possible
  - Other role models
  - Vicarious learning (punishment)
Major Gaps – Unbalanced Approaches

- Primary focus of previous research is criminality or anti-social behavior
  - Prosocial behavior is unexamined
- Risk factors have been calculated for negative outcomes
  - Parental incarceration as a protective factor is overlooked
- Despite longitudinal data collected, trajectories are not examined based on moderators
  - Cluster analysis or latent class analysis has not been attempted
- Measurement issues exist with educational outcomes
  - Multiple sources are used, but all are based on questionnaires and made into composite scores
Unanswered ed psych questions

- Social cognitive
  - How does parental incarceration affect self-efficacy, metacognition, self-regulation, locus of control, motivation, etc.?
  - Do changes in these psychological phenomena affect learning?
- What about children of prisoners that are academically successful?
  - How do they differ from the antisocial students mostly studied?
Future Directions

- Embedded quantitative work
  - Longitudinal data collection in areas with high incarceration rates
    - South Georgia
- More qualitative work based on referrals
Thank you for your support and feedback

See handout for selected references and contact information

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