

Children of Incarcerated Parents: The Family Characteristics Associated
with Child Welfare Contact Prior to Parental Incarceration

by

Whitney McCaskill

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Nancy Rodriguez, Chair
Kevin Wright
Melinda Tasca
Judy Krysik

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ABSTRACT

Much of the current literature regarding the well being of children of incarcerated parents has focused largely on the trauma that results from losing a parent to incarceration. Little research has been dedicated to examining the pre-existing trauma and negative life experiences these children are exposed to prior to parental incarceration. Using cross-sectional data on children (N = 1,221) from a representative study of Arizona Department of Corrections inmates, the present study examines the relationships among children who have contact with Child Protective Services (CPS) prior to parental incarceration and: (1) parental substance abuse, (2) exposure to violence and (3) parental mental illness. Nearly a quarter of all children whose inmate parents were interviewed were contacted by CPS before experiencing parental incarceration. Children whose inmate parents reported being unemployed or less involved in the lives of their children and children who were reportedly exposed to violence were significantly more likely to have been contacted by CPS prior to experiencing parental incarceration as were younger children. The children of incarcerated mothers were more likely to have been contacted by CPS than were the children of incarcerated fathers. This effect remained even after controlling for additional parent, child and family risk factors for CPS contact such as prior history of incarceration and race.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES.....	iv
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 BACKGROUND LITERATURE	2
Child Maltreatment	2
Negative Effects Associated with Child Maltreatment	3
Risk Factors Associated with Child Maltreatment	5
Mass Incarceration and Parent Child Separation	8
Children, Families and Parental Incarceration	9
Child Maltreatment and Parental Incarceration.....	11
3 CURRENT STUDY	13
4 METHODS	15
Data	15
Dependent Variable	15
Independent Variables	16
Control Variables	16
Analytic Strategy	18
5 RESULTS	19
Bivariate Associations	19
Logistic Regression Model	21
6 DISCUSSION	23

CHAPTER	Page
REFERENCES.....	28

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1.	Coding Scheme	17
2.	Descriptive Statistics of Contact with CPS	20
3.	Logistic Regression Results: Life Circumstances on Contact with CPS	21

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

An estimated 1.5 to 2 million children, or 1 in every 40 children (Dallaire, 2007) are exposed to parental incarceration nationwide (Akesson, Smyth, Mandell, Doan, Donina & Hoven, 2012; Bruster & Foreman, 2012; Kjellstrand, Cearley, Eddy, Foney & Martinez, 2012; Miller, 2006; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). It is generally accepted that these children face an increased risk of experiencing economic hardship, instability and behavioral problems among other negative life experiences (Geller, Garfinkel, Cooper & Mincy, 2009; Johnson & Easterling, 2012; Phillips, Erkanli, Keeler, Costello & Angold, 2006). Although a sizeable amount of the existing literature dedicated to parental incarceration has focused on the negative child and family outcomes associated with parental incarceration, little research has focused on the lives of these children prior to the loss of a parent due to incarceration (DeHart & Altshuler, 2009).

This study will examine the relationships among children who have had contact with Child Protective Services (CPS) prior to experiencing parental incarceration and: (1) parental substance abuse, (2) exposure to violence and (3) parental mental illness.

Information regarding the life experiences of these children prior to the parent-child separation that results from parental incarceration may prove to be critical in determining effective methods of intervention (DeHart & Altshuler, 2009) by exposing pre-existing trauma and negative life experiences which may have otherwise gone unnoticed.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

Child Maltreatment

Official data indicates that for the 2012 federal fiscal year, approximately 3.4 million reports of child maltreatment were made to Child Protective Service (CPS) agencies nationwide (Department of Health and Human Services [DHHS], 2012). Of these reports, an estimated 2.1 million warranted CPS investigation (DHHS, 2012). It is further estimated that 1,640 children died as the result of abuse and neglect in 2012 alone (DHHS, 2012). Although official records indicate that the prevalence of child maltreatment has declined by an estimated 30,000 victims from 2008 to 2012, (DHHS, 2012) it is generally believed that the actual incidence of child maltreatment occurs on a much grander scale but is typically undetected, unreported, and unaccounted for (Cicchetti & Toth, 2005; MacLeod & Nelson, 2002).

It was not until the publication of “The Battered-Child Syndrome” in 1962 that the occurrence of child maltreatment gained widespread public recognition (Gilbert, Widom, Browne, Ferguson, Webb & Janson, 2009; Whitaker, Lutzker & Shelley, 2005). Kempe, Silverman, Steel, Droegemuller and Silver (1985) explained that the “Battered-Child Syndrome,” also referred to as “unrecognized trauma,” were terms coined by medical professionals to describe the medical conditions of children who suffered from severe physical abuse and neglect at the hands of parents and foster parents. Although the occurrence of child maltreatment was gaining public attention, it was not until 1974 that the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), was passed into legislation (Whitaker et al., 2005). Recent modifications made to this Act have led to what many

now use to define child maltreatment (Goldman, Salus, Wolcott & Kennedy, 2003; Slack, Holl, McDaniel, Yoo & Bolger, 2004).

Today, child maltreatment is at the forefront of our country's social problems (DePanfilis & Zuravin, 1998; DHS, 2012; Gilbert et al., 2009; Whitaker et al., 2005). Originally believed to be the result of negative parent-child relationships or unconventional parenting (Freisthler, Merritt & LaScala, 2006; Garbarino, 1977; Garbarino & Sherman, 1980), our understanding of child maltreatment has evolved to include the interplay of environmental and social factors (Zielinski & Bradshaw, 2005). There are four general types of child maltreatment which have been widely recognized: (1) physical abuse, the purposeful infliction of bodily injury; (2) sexual abuse, sexual contact or attempted sexual contact between a minor and his/her caregiver or other adult for the financial gain or sexual gratification of the caregiver; (3) neglect, the most common form of maltreatment (Hussey, Cheng & Kotch, 2006; Portwood, 1999; Slack et al., 2004; Whitaker et al., 2005) the inability of a caregiver to provide a minimal level of care and supervision to a child; and (4) emotional abuse, denying a child's basic emotional needs (Cicchetti & Toth, 2005). Maltreatment may also occur in the form of abandonment, which is the temporary or permanent relinquishment of a child by a parent or caregiver (Martin & Walters, 1982).

Negative Effects Associated with Child Maltreatment

Child maltreatment has become a serious and expensive social problem (DePanfilis & Zuravin, 1998; Gilbert et al., 2009; Whitaker et al., 2005). Victims, families and society all suffer from the consequences of child maltreatment (Gilbert et al., 2009). Societal pains are most immediate in financial losses. In 1996, it was estimated

that 56 billion dollars were spent annually on medical expenses, mental health care, public programs, law enforcement, and court expenses among other costs associated with child maltreatment (Cicchetti & Toth, 2005). This number has since grown to an estimated 94 billion dollars as of 2001(Cicchetti & Toth, 2005).

In addition to death, victims of child abuse and neglect may suffer from a wide range of long-term negative consequences. Instances of child maltreatment have been found to lead to psychological, social and developmental deficiencies in children (Cicchetti & Toth, 2005; Gilbert et al., 2009; Zielinski & Bradshaw, 2006). Maltreated children face a greater likelihood of developing insecurely attached relationships as research indicates that maltreated infants are often insecurely attached to their caregivers (Cicchetti & Toth, 2005). Research also indicates that these insecure attachments may be found among school-aged children and can lead to symptoms of depression (Cicchetti & Toth, 2005).

Children who are maltreated have been found to have lower levels of academic success and are more likely to participate in special education classes than are their non-maltreated counterparts (Cicchetti & Toth, 2005; Gilbert et al., 2009; Zielinski & Bradshaw, 2006). Maltreated children are also less likely to assume leadership roles and are often described as being, “disliked, unpopular, and more socially withdrawn” by their peers, teachers and mothers than were non-maltreated children (Cicchetti & Toth, p.422, 2005). Personality disorders, suicidal tendencies, anxiety, aggression, conduct disorders and substance abuse have also been linked to child maltreatment (Arata, Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Bowers & O’Farrill-Swails, 2005; Cicchetti & Toth, 2005; Gilbert et al., 2009; Hussey et al., 2006; Stuewig & McCloskey, 2005; Zielinski & Bradshaw, 2006).

The effects of child abuse and neglect may manifest differently according to the type and frequency of abuse or neglect endured (Arata et al., 2005; Cicchetti & Toth, 2005; Gilbert et al., 2009; Zielinski & Bradshaw, 2006). Physical abuse, neglect and sexual abuse have all been linked to obesity while sexual abuse alone has been associated with blatant and disturbing sexualized behavior in preteens (Gilbert et al., 2009). Exposure to physical and sexual abuse has also been found to predict violent and delinquent behavior among both boys and girls (Gilbert et al., 2009). Research shows that the effects of maltreatment may follow children into adulthood (Gilbert et al., 2009; Zielinski & Bradshaw, 2006). Adults who have been abused or neglected as children, are more likely to suffer from depression, substance abuse, sexual problems, demonstrate increased levels of aggression, and may engage in more criminal activity than adults who do not experience child maltreatment (Zielinski & Bradshaw, 2006).

Risk Factors Associated with Child Maltreatment

The existing literature identifies multiple risk factors which may lead to child maltreatment, with the majority falling under one of four categories: family demographics, family dynamics, parent characteristics (i.e., substance abuse and mental health) and child characteristics (i.e., exposure to violence and disabilities) (Belsky, 1993; Brown, Chohen, Johnson, & Salzinger, 1998; Hamilton & Browne, 1999; Zielinski & Bradshaw, 2006). Demographic risk factors include: low socioeconomic status, the ethnicity and gender of the child, parental education, parental age at the birth of the child, non-participation in religious activities, single parent households and receipt of welfare (Brown et al., 1998; Hartley, 2002; Hussey et al., 2006; Mersky, Berger, Reynolds & Gromoske, 2009; Slack et al., 2004). In their 1998 study, Brown et al., found that low

maternal education, low religious participation, maternal youth at age of child's birth, and receipt of welfare were all associated with reports of physical abuse. Brown et al., (1998) also found that in addition to these risk factors, ethnicity, low income and single parent households were associated with neglect. High levels of unemployment, vacant housing and residential instability have also been linked to child maltreatment (Freisthler et al., 2006; Mersky et al., 2009; Zielinski & Bradshaw, 2006).

Family dynamics associated with child maltreatment include large family size and single parent households (Brown et al., 1998). Large family size has been positively correlated with neglect while single parent households have been associated with instances of physical child abuse (Brown et al., 1998). Drake and Pandey (1996) however found a positive relationship between two parent households and physical abuse as well as neglect (as cited in Brown et al., 1998). According to a study done by Radhakrishna, Bou-Saada, Hunter, Catellier and Kotch (2001) households with a non-biological parent present faced the highest risk for maltreatment. Radhakrishna et al., (2001) also revealed that households with a non-biological father present in the home faced an increased risk of maltreatment that was more than two fold. The presence of domestic violence in the home has also been found to impact child maltreatment in the form of increased physical abuse (Hartley, 2002).

Studies have found that children with a caregiver who suffers from depression, substance abuse disorder or a serious mental illness are more likely to be abused or maltreated (Brown et al., 1998; Hartley, 2002; Mersky et al., 2009; Smith, Johnson, Pears, Fisher & DeGarmo, 2007; Zielinski & Bradshaw, 2006). It is estimated that one in every thirteen children living with a substance abusing parent are maltreated annually

(Smith et al., 2007). Additional parental risk factors for child maltreatment include criminal involvement, particularly the criminal involvement of fathers as this factor often relates to neglect (Hartley, 2002). There has also been some indication that parents and caregivers who were victims of child abuse or neglect themselves as children are more likely to mistreat their children (Mersky et al., 2009).

Parental control and methods of discipline have also been correlated with child maltreatment. Parents who lack control and employ authoritarian parenting techniques tend to be less physically affectionate towards their children (Slack et al., 2004). These parents are more likely to discipline their children physically (Slack et al., 2004). It has been shown that parents who maltreat their children have low quality relationships and decreased interactions with their children compared to parents who do not maltreat their children (Slack et al., 2004).

Children who suffer from anxiety disorders, are withdrawn or handicapped, are born at a low birth weight, have low levels of verbal intelligence, are severely ill or have difficult tempers are at an increased risk of being maltreated (Belsky, 1993; Brown et al., 1998; Mersky et al., 2009; Zielinski & Bradshaw, 2006). Younger children, typically between the ages of three and eight, also face an elevated risk for maltreatment as they tend to spend more time with their caregivers, are more dependent on their caregivers, have difficulty regulating their emotions and their abuse is less likely to be detected by others (Belsky, 1993). Strains placed on caregivers due to the high demands typically associated with caring for a disabled child may lead to neglect and possibly abuse (Mersky et al., 2009). Caring for children who misbehave and have trouble controlling

their emotions may also prove to be stressful and can lead to maltreatment (Mersky et al., 2009).

Mass Incarceration and Parent Child Separation

Implementation of the criminal justice policy reforms during the 1980s and 1990s has led to an influx in parental incarceration (Johnson, 2009; Phillips, Burns, Wagner & Barth, 2004; Phillips, Dettlaff & Baldwin, 2009). Conservative estimates indicate that anywhere from 1.5 to 2 million children are exposed to parental incarceration nationally (Akeson et al., 2012; Bruster & Foreman, 2012; Dallaire, 2007; Kjellstrand et al., 2012; Miller, 2006; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). In 2007 there were 1,518,535 prisoners detained nationwide (Bruster & Adalist-Estrin, 2012; Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Of these inmates, it is believed that approximately 809,800 were the parents of minor children below the age of 18 (Bruster & Adalist-Estrin, 2012; Glaze & Maruschak, 2008).

Fathers are believed to make up 90% of the U.S inmate population (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2001). It was estimated that in 2007 there were 744,200 fathers being detained in U.S prisons (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2001). These inmates are believed to be the fathers of 1,559,200 children (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Although the numbers are smaller in comparison for female inmates, the number of incarcerated mothers has increased rapidly (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Miller, 2006; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2001; Phillips et al., 2004). In the same year, female prisoners reported being the mothers to 147,400 children (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Collectively, the children of male and female inmates account for 2.3 percent of the nation's population of minors below the age of 18 (Akeson et al., 2012; Bruster & Adalist-Estrin, 2012; Bruster & Foreman, 2012; Glaze & Maruschak, 2008).

Children, Families and Parental Incarceration

Many of the identified risk factors associated with child maltreatment have also been linked to parental incarceration (De Hart & Altshuler, 2009). The children of incarcerated parents are more likely to be exposed to economic, residential and caregiver instability (Geller, Garfinkel, Cooper & Mincy, 2009; Johnson & Easterling, 2012; Phillips, Erkanli, Keeler, Costello & Angold, 2006), parental substance abuse, parental mental illness, adverse life events (Dallaire, 2007) and violence (DeHart & Altshuler, 2009; Johnson & Easterling, 2012) than are those who do not experience parental incarceration. Children of incarcerated parents are also more likely to experience anxiety, depression (Huebner & Gustafson, 2007; Johnson, 2009), low self-esteem, school related problems (Aaron & Dallaire, 2010; Huebner & Gustafson, 2007), and engage in conduct disorder such as running away, substance abuse, and aggressive or antisocial behavior when compared to children whose parents have not been incarcerated (Huebner & Gustafson, 2007; Kjellstrand et al., 2012).

Residential and caregiver instability have been commonly observed among children exposed to maternal incarceration (Huebner & Gustafson, 2007; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2001). The majority of female inmates report living with their children prior to their incarceration while only about half of all male inmates report doing so (Hanlon, Carswell & Rose, 2006; Johnson, 2009; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2001; Poehlmann, 2005). Children who lose a mother to incarceration are more likely to be cared for by a relative placement or to be placed in foster care than are the children of incarcerated fathers (Huebner & Gustafson, 2007; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2001; Swann & Sylvester, 2006). This change in caregiver may result in the disruption of an existing parent-child

attachment, negatively impact a child's ability to form and maintain securely attached relationships with others, and may cause children to exhibit symptoms commonly associated with anxiety (Dallaire, 2007). Children may also develop poor adaptive strategies, low self-esteem, or engage in delinquent behavior (Geller et al., 2009). The burden of caring for another child may impose additional strain on caregivers and may result in the loss of essential financial resources (Aaron & Dallaire, 2010; Huebner & Gustafson, 2007; Miller, 2006), which may lead to residential instability (Geller, Garfinkel, Cooper & Mincy, 2009).

Children of incarcerated parents may experience an increased likelihood of exposure to parental mental illness and substance abuse (Aaron & Dallaire, 2010; Carlson & Shafer, 2010; Dallaire, 2007; Poehlmann, 2005). In a 2006 study conducted by James and Glaze, it was found that of 20,000 inmates studied, 25% were likely to have a history of mental illness compared to 11% of the general population (Dallaire, 2007). Although prevalent among both male and female inmates, there is evidence, which suggests that female inmates are more likely to suffer from mental illness than are male inmates (Dallaire, 2007; Glaze & James, 2006). Female offenders are also more likely to be serving a sentence related to drug associated charges (Dallaire, 2007; Carlson, Shafer & Duffee, 2010; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2001) and to have a substance abuse problem (Carlson et al., 2010). Female inmates are more likely to report an addiction to heroin or cocaine while male inmates are more likely to be alcohol dependent (Carlson et al., 2010). Having a parent with a mental health problem and a co-occurring substance abuse problem may suggest exposure to differential substance abuse patterns and may also interfere with a parent's ability to effectively engage with their children and provide a

substantial level of parenting (Dallaire, 2007). Exposure to poverty and illegal drug use have been linked to maladjustment among children such as depression and a lack of academic achievement (Aaron & Dallaire, 2010).

In addition to mental illness and substance abuse, inmates themselves are likely to have a history of sexual and physical abuse and are often the children of incarcerated parents themselves (Carlson & Shafer, 2010; Johnson & Waldfogel, 2002). According to James and Glaze (2006), the relatives of incarcerated mentally ill inmates are also more likely to abuse substances and have a history of incarceration. Greene, Haney and Hurtado (2000) found that 86% of incarcerated mothers studied were exposed to violence or subjected to either sexual or physical abuse as children. Moreover, abuse experienced in childhood has also been associated with reported abuse in adulthood (Greene, Haney & Hurtado, 2000). Female inmates have also reported being introduced to criminal activity such as theft and prostitution during childhood by their substance abusing and neglectful parents (Carlson & Shafer, 2010).

Child Maltreatment and Parental Incarceration

Existing research has identified an overlap between those involved with child welfare services and the criminal justice system (Phillips et al., 2004). Recent studies state that for every eight children who are the subjects of an investigated maltreatment report, one will have a parent with a history of arrest (Arditti 2012; Phillips et al., 2004; Phillips et al., 2010). Many of the identified risk factors for child maltreatment are also common characteristics found among criminal justice system involved families (Phillips et al., 2004; Phillips et al., 2010). Families involved with the criminal justice system are more likely to experience substance abuse, mental illness, domestic violence, poverty

(Phillips et al., 2004; Phillips & Dettlaff, 2009; Phillips et al., 2010) and inadequate education than are members of the general population (Phillips & Dettlaff, 2009).

Substance abuse, mental illness, domestic violence, financial hardship (Arditti, 2012; Phillips et al., 2004; Phillips et al., 2010) and inadequate education (Phillips & Dettlaff, 2009) are also common risk factors for child maltreatment.

Previous research has also addressed the many pathways to simultaneous child welfare involvement and criminal justice system involvement among families. Dual involvement with the criminal justice system and the child welfare system, typically Child Protective Services (CPS), (the agency which oversees reports of child maltreatment such as abuse and neglect in the state of Arizona) may occur due to one of four identified scenarios: (1) parental arrest occurs first, leaving a child without an appropriate caregiver; (2) the investigation of child maltreatment allegations result in the arrest of a parent; (3) the criminal record of a parent has been found to compromise the child's safety; and (4) in instances when caregivers have decided that they are no longer able to or are unwilling to care for a child whose parents are currently incarcerated (Arditti, 2012; Phillips et al., 2010). Although it is widely accepted that there are some commonalities found among families involved with the child welfare system and the criminal justice system, detailed information pertaining to this dually involved population is limited (Phillips et al., 2004).

CHAPTER 3

CURRENT STUDY

Much of the literature regarding parental incarceration has focused primarily on negative child outcomes following parental incarceration. Although more recent research has begun to acknowledge that the children of incarcerated parents may face an increased likelihood of being maltreated, little research has been dedicated to examining the life experiences of the children of incarcerated parents prior to incarceration. The current study seeks to examine the relationships between: (1) parental substance abuse, (2) exposure to violence and (3) parental mental illness, and child contact with CPS prior to the incarceration of a parent.

Gaining a more comprehensive understanding of a child's life is important when making decisions regarding effective treatments and family services as well as understanding child behaviors. Research of children's lives prior to parental incarceration may demonstrate that parental incarceration is a compounding factor that exacerbates traumatic events and behaviors associated with trauma, rather than a precursor for adverse behaviors. It is important to know whether a child has been exposed to negative life experiences, such as exposure to violence, parental mental illness or parental substance abuse, in order to ensure that all areas of trauma are addressed. Information gleaned from examining the lives of children prior to the loss of a parent to incarceration may also assist service providers when determining how to address family reunification following the release of a parent. Much research assumes that children do not become vulnerable until experiencing parental incarceration; the current study will identify the number of children who are reportedly exposed to parental substance abuse,

violence or parental mental illness and are also contacted by CPS prior to experiencing parental incarceration. The findings presented in this study will be useful when developing effective interventions and service plans which address the trauma these children experience prior to facing parental incarceration. Based on the current literature, it is expected that the children of inmate parents with a history of parental substance abuse, exposure to violence, or parental mental illness will be more likely to have been contacted by CPS prior to experiencing parental incarceration. It is further expected that low levels of parental involvement will be associated with increased levels of reported contact with CPS prior to parental incarceration.

CHAPTER 4

METHODS

Data

Data are from a broader statewide study, which examined the children of incarcerated parents (Arizona Criminal Justice Commission [ACJC], 2011). The study relied on face-to-face interviews with a representative sample of inmates incarcerated in the Arizona Department of Corrections (ADC) in February 2010 (ACJC, 2011). The original sample included 300 incarcerated mothers and 300 incarcerated fathers who reported being the biological, stepparent or adoptive parent to at least one child below the age of 18 at the time of the interview (ACJC, 2011). The current project relies on the information obtained from the original 600 inmate interviews (ACJC, 2011). After controlling for missing data, a total sample of 1,221 minor children were examined (ACJC, 2011).

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable of interest, *CPS Contact*, is a dichotomous construct reflective of parental reports indicating whether a child was contacted by CPS prior to parental incarceration or not (1 = yes; 0 = no) (ACJC, 2011). According to parent reports, nearly a quarter (24.65%) of children had contact with CPS compared to 75.4% of incarcerated parents who reported that CPS did not contact their children prior to their incarceration. The coding scheme used for all variables examined in this study is presented in Table 1. It is important to note that CPS contact is not indicative of confirmed maltreatment; it is unknown whether these claims were substantiated or unsubstantiated.

Independent Variables

Parental substance abuse, a dichotomous construct (1 = yes; 0 = no), indicates whether incarcerated parents reported engaging in illicit drug use during the month prior to the responding parent's incarceration (ACJC, 2011). More than half of the parents interviewed (58.15%) reported using illicit drugs during the month prior to their incarceration. *Child's exposure to violence*, a dichotomous construct (1 = yes; 0 = no), captured whether incarcerated parents reported that their child had a history of exposure to violence (ACJC, 2011). Slightly less than one-quarter (24.08%) of children had a reported history of exposure to violence. *Parental mental illness*, also a dichotomous construct (1 = yes; 0 = no), measures whether incarcerated parents reported ever being diagnosed with a mental illness by a professional (ACJC, 2011). Approximately one third of the population sampled (36.36%) reported having a history of mental illness.

Control Variables

The present study also includes a variety of parent, child and demographic factors which prior research has found to be associated with child maltreatment. Parent factors include: *prior incarcerations*, a continuous construct which measures the number of prior prison terms the parent has served, *unemployed month prior*, a dummy variable indicating whether the incarcerated parent was unemployed during the month prior to his or her incarceration at the time of interview (1 = yes; 0 = no) and *parental involvement*, a factor measure based on three parent-reported measures (ACJC, 2011). Parental involvement was determined by considering: (1) whether the incarcerated parent reported providing most of the daily care for his or her child during the month prior to incarceration,

Table 1. Coding Scheme (N = 1,221).

		n	%
<i>Dependent Variable</i>			
CPS Contact	1 = yes	301	24.7
<i>Independent Variable</i>			
Parental substance abuse	1 = yes	710	58.2
Child exposure to violence	1 = yes	294	24.1
Parental mental illness	1 = yes	444	36.4
<i>Control Variables – parent factors</i>			
Prior incarcerations	Prior prison terms (M; SD)		.9; 1.2
Unemployed month prior	1 = yes	638	52.3
Parental involvement	Factor score (M; SD)		0.1; 1.0
Parent's race/ethnicity			
White	Whites are reference category	396	32.4
Black		189	15.5
Latino/Latina		499	40.9
Native American		117	9.6
Type of parental incarceration			
Paternal	Paternal incarceration is reference category	588	48.2
Maternal		633	51.8
<i>Control Variables- child factors</i>			
Child's age	In years (M; SD)		8.7; 5.0
Child's gender			
Boys	Boys are reference category	595	48.7
Girls		626	51.3

(2) whether the incarcerated parent reported providing for his or her child financially during the month prior to incarceration, and (3) whether the incarcerated parent reported living with his or her child prior to incarceration (ACJC, 2011). Prior studies have found these measures to be unidimensional and a reliable scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .79$) with a mean of 0.1 (Tasca, Turanovic, White & Rodriguez, 2014). *Parent race/ethnicity* was also included and was captured using several dummy variables, which include White,

Black, Latino/a, and Native American (ACJC, 2011). For this measure omitted responses are categorized as White (ACJC, 2011). The majority of the parents (40.87%) were Latino/Latina, 32.43% were White, 15.48% were Black, and 9.58% were Native American. *Type of parental incarceration* was also examined and captured whether the child was experiencing maternal or paternal incarceration (1 = maternal; 0 = paternal) at the time of the inmate interviews (ACJC, 2011).

Child risk and demographic factors include: the *child's age*, reported in years, and the *child's gender* (1= female; 0 = male) as reported by the incarcerated parent (ACJC, 2011). Slightly more than half of the children were female (51.27%) and the mean age for children was 8.7 years; child age ranged from less than one year to 17 years old (ACJC, 2011).

Analytic Strategy

The bivariate relationships between all measures and CPS contact were examined first. Multivariate regression models were then estimated to determine whether incarcerated parents were more likely to report that CPS contacted their children prior to their incarceration based on the child's exposure to violence, parental substance abuse, and parental mental illness net of additional negative life experiences. Unstandardized coefficients, odds ratios and robust standard errors are reported.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

Bivariate Associations

The binary analysis, presented in table 2, shows all variables according to CPS contact. This analysis allowed cross comparisons to be made between all variables and incarcerated parent reports of child CPS contact. In terms of the three key independent variables, nearly 30% of children whose inmate parents reported engaging in illicit drug use during the month prior to their incarceration were contacted by CPS. Additionally, according to inmate parent reports, 40% of children who were exposed to violence were contacted by CPS and 30% of children whose parents had a history of mental illness were contacted by CPS.

On average, children whose inmate parents reported slightly fewer prior incarcerations (8.1 prior arrests vs. 8.8 prior arrests) were more likely to have been contacted by CPS. Over one third (33%) of children whose inmate parents reported being unemployed during the month prior to their incarceration were contacted by CPS. It was also found that the children of inmate parents who reported being less involved in the lives of their children prior to incarceration were more likely to have been contacted by CPS. Among cases in which children were contacted by CPS, the majority of inmate parents were Native American (35%), whereas the children of Black inmate parents were least likely to be contacted by CPS (16%). Children who were exposed to maternal incarceration (37%) were more likely to have been contacted by CPS prior to parental incarceration than were the children who were exposed to paternal incarceration (11%). Children of inmate parents who were reportedly contacted by CPS prior to the

incarceration of their parent were only slightly younger than the children of incarcerated parents who were not contacted by CPS (8.6 years vs. 8.7 years). With regards to gender, more male children of incarcerated parents

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Contact with Child Protective Services (N = 1,221).

	Contact with Child Protective Services	
	Yes (%)	No (%)
<i>Independent Variables</i>		
Parental substance abuse**	28.87	71.13
Exposure to violence**	39.45	60.54
Parental mental illness**	29.5	70.5
<i>Control Variables – parent factors</i>		
Prior incarcerations	0.81; 1.29	0.88; 1.18
Unemployed month prior**	33.07	66.93
Parental involvement**	-0.09; 1.01	0.18; 0.95
Parent’s race/ethnicity		
White**	31.06	68.94
Black**	15.87	84.13
Latino/Latina*	20.84	79.16
Native American*	35.04	64.96
Type of parental incarceration**		
Paternal	11.4	88.6
Maternal	37	63
<i>Control Variables –child factors</i>		
Child’s age	8.55; 4.87	8.73; 5
Child’s gender		
Boys	26.39	73.61
Girls	23	77
n	301	920

Note: Differences across contact with Child Protective Services were tested using a chi-square for categorical indicators, and a *t* test for continuous indicators.

p* < .05. *p* < .01.

(26%) were reportedly contacted by CPS than female children (23%). Collectively, these descriptive statistics indicate that the children of incarcerated parents who were exposed to negative life experiences (e.g., parental substance abuse, exposure to violence, parental mental illness, parental unemployment and decreased parental involvement) were also likely to have been contacted by CPS prior to experiencing parental incarceration.

Multicollinearity was not found to be a problem among independent and control variables.

Logistic Regression Model

Table 3 contains a logistic regression equation, which examines the effects of parental substance abuse, exposure to violence and parental mental illness on child contact with CPS prior to parental incarceration. Demographic variables and other factors

Table 3. Logistic Regression Results: Life Circumstances on Contact with Child Protective Services (N = 1,221).

	b	SE	Odds
<i>Independent Variables</i>			
Parental substance abuse	0.374	.0331	1.454
Exposure to violence	0.671**	0.445	1.956
Parental mental illness	-0.034	0.205	0.967
<i>Control Variables- parent factors</i>			
Prior incarceration	0.114	0.101	1.121
Unemployed month prior	0.451*	0.339	1.570
Parental involvement	-0.318*	0.084	0.727
<i>Race/ethnicity</i>			
Black	-0.373	0.236	0.688
Latino/Latina	-0.269	0.187	0.764
Native American	0.528	0.654	1.696
<i>Type of parental incarceration</i>			
Maternal	1.414**	0.988	4.114
<i>Control Variables - child factors</i>			
Age	-0.052*	0.019	0.950
<i>Gender</i>			
Girls	-0.038	0.140	0.963
Constant	-2.174**	0.036	
Log Likelihood	-616.849		
LR X2	130.11**		
Df	12		
N	1,221		

Note: Unstandardized coefficients, odds ratios, and clustered robust standard errors are reported. Whites are the reference racial group.
*p < .05. **p < .01.

often found to be associated with child maltreatment were controlled for. Results indicate that among the three key independent variables examined, exposure to violence was a significant predictor of CPS contact among children of incarcerated parents. Children who were exposed to violence were 2 times more likely to have been contacted by CPS. Of the parent factors examined, children whose inmate parents reported being unemployed during the month prior to their incarceration were nearly 2 times more likely to have had reported contact with CPS. Parental involvement was negatively associated with CPS contact. It was also found that the children of incarcerated mothers were 4 times more likely to have had contact with CPS prior to parental incarceration than were the children of incarcerated fathers. Children whose inmate parents reported being less involved in the lives of their children were more likely to have had contact with CPS. Of the child factors and demographics, age was also negatively related to CPS contact, with younger children being more likely to have had reported contact with CPS prior to experiencing parental incarceration. These findings indicate that children of incarcerated parents are a vulnerable population and face an increased likelihood of being contacted by CPS prior to experiencing parental incarceration.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

Although more recent research has focused on parental incarceration, child maltreatment, and the negative outcomes often associated with exposure to these two factors, little research has been dedicated to examining the lives of children of incarcerated parents prior to parental incarceration. The purpose of this study was to bring awareness to the many adversities and trauma experienced by the children of incarcerated parents prior to experiencing the loss of a parent to prison. This study set out to uncover the relationships between some of the common negative life experiences children of incarcerated parents face and child contact with CPS. Based on the findings two major conclusions can be made.

First, the results indicate that the children of incarcerated parents, specifically incarcerated mothers, are a vulnerable and at risk population prior to experiencing parental incarceration. The findings suggest that children of incarcerated parents experience an increased likelihood of exposure to violence, are less likely to have parents who are involved in their daily lives and are more likely to have parents who are unemployed. Although an exhaustive examination of negative life experiences could not be conducted, the findings demonstrate that the children of incarcerated parents are likely to experience trauma and negative life circumstances even before they experience the trauma associated with parental incarceration. The findings from the current study give reason to believe that parental incarceration may compound pre-existing trauma and lead to social, emotional and mental deficiencies (e.g., school failure, poor self-esteem, internalizing behaviors, anti-social and delinquent behavior).

Second, the findings presented in this study demonstrate that the children of incarcerated parents may be in need of therapy and services which address pre-existing trauma as well as trauma associated with parental incarceration. Prior research has found that trauma can reduce a child's ability to think clearly, learn, and may limit physical, emotional and intellectual development (Huskey & Tomczak, 2013). Severe trauma, specifically trauma related to child maltreatment such as abuse or neglect, can lead to severe health and behavioral problems such as depression, anxiety, conduct disorder, violent behavior and alcohol or drug use among other behaviors (Huskey & Tomczak, 2013). By examining the lives of children of incarcerated parents prior to parental incarceration, this study was able to find that many of the children who are contacted by CPS are exposed to trauma (e.g., exposure to violence) as are the children who are not contacted by CPS. This is key as it demonstrates that many children who may be in need of CPS related services may not be receiving these services.

Findings from the current study may be used by professionals who work with children, particularly child welfare workers, teachers, and juvenile justice officials. In addition to the physical harm that may result from being the victim of a violent encounter, exposure to violence can also impact a child's social/emotional state, and/or behavior (DeHart & Altshuler, 2009). Children who are not the direct witnesses of violence may also experience psychological harm and may live in fear as they experience the aftermath of a violent encounter (DeHart & Altshuler, 2009).

Understanding that children with an incarcerated parent are significantly more likely to have been exposed to violence will help child welfare workers when determining what services a family may be in need of. Child welfare workers may need

to be more cautious when serving families with an incarcerated parent as the violence may not be a current problem in the home due to the removal of a parent but may have resulted in certain psychological, emotional or behavioral problems for a child. Parental incarceration may be beneficial for some families as incarceration may remove parents who are sporadically involved in the lives of their children, engage in substance abuse in the presence of their children or are abusive (Turanovic, Rodriguez & Pratt, 2012). The removal of a violent, substance using or minimally involved parent to incarceration may improve the lives of children and their families as caregivers are able to provide a stable, consistent and routine environment for the children (Turanovic et al., 2012).

Child welfare workers may need to be aware of the risk for prior exposure to violence among families with a history of parental incarceration when a parent may be facing release. They should also take into consideration the possible gains these children and their families have faced due to the removal of a possibly violent and disruptive parent when considering reunification. Child welfare workers may need to suggest parents participate in couples counseling, parenting classes, or domestic violence courses when determining what services would be most beneficial for these children and their families. These children may also need to participate in counseling services themselves to address the trauma they have endured due to exposure to violence and parental incarceration.

Teachers may also benefit from the information presented in this study as the findings provide further insight into the traumatic, and chaotic home environments many children of incarcerated parents may face (Dallaire, Ciccone & Wilson, 2010). Teachers can be an important source of support for children and academic success can serve as a

pathway to stability for this vulnerable population (Dallaire et al., 2010). Teachers who understand that children of incarcerated parents are more likely to be exposed to violence and have parents who are less involved in their daily lives may be more patient and understanding when dealing with these children who may demonstrate behavioral problems.

Knowledge of parental incarceration was found to impact decisions made by juvenile justice officials (Dallaire et al., 2010). Understanding that the children of incarcerated parents are likely to have parents who are unemployed or who are minimally involved in their lives may cause juvenile justice officials to consider out-of-home housing options for these children, especially if there is concern that the child may have or may be exposed to violence if released to family or if family members are not able to provide adequate financial support (Dallaire et al., 2010). Juvenile justice officials who are aware of the additional trauma children of incarcerated parents may have been previously exposed to may be more inclined to order these children be provided counseling services to address trauma.

Although the present study illuminates some of the negative life experiences children of incarcerated parents face even prior to experiencing parental incarceration, additional research is needed. Future studies should focus on possible protective factors such as parental involvement, to better determine which children are in need of services. Child interviews should also be conducted in follow up studies to gain a better understanding of the impact these negative life experiences may have on a child's life as well as the extent of the negative life experiences. The present study does not focus specifically on inmates whose children were the victims of verified and substantiated

child maltreatment reports and does not examine what type of maltreatment report lead to the child's contact with CPS. Future research should delve deeper into the contact CPS has had with the children of incarcerated parents, the nature of the investigation conducted and whether the claims of maltreatment were substantiated or not. It should also be noted that the children of incarcerated parents are likely to be exposed to multiple risk factors such as exposure to violence and parental substance abuse. Follow up studies should take the possible overlap of these factors into consideration and examine the interplay of these risks in relation to contact with CPS.

In sum, this study has demonstrated that the children of incarcerated parents are an especially vulnerable population as they are exposed to trauma and negative life experiences before being exposed to parental incarceration. These children are significantly more likely to be exposed to violence and are more likely to have parents who are unemployed and are minimally involved in their day-to-day lives. Prior research has found that the children of incarcerated parents are likely to experience adverse outcomes as the result of parental incarceration. Family disruption, disrupted parent-child bonds (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2001), signs of anxiety and engagement in delinquent behavior (Huebner & Gustafson, 2007) are just a few of the negative outcomes found to be correlated with parental incarceration. The present study indicates that these outcomes may be the result of exposure to pre-existing trauma such as exposure to violence and demonstrates that family disruption may be present prior to parent-child separation due to parental incarceration. Although the current study has gained insight into the lives of the children of incarcerated parents prior to parental incarceration, much is left to be studied.

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