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"Basic Stuff I Should Know About My Kids, I Don't Know": Incarcerated Mothers' Perception Of Incarceration's Effects On Mother-Child Relationships

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"BASIC STUFF I SHOULD KNOW ABOUT MY KIDS, I DON'T KNOW": INCARCERATED
MOTHERS' PERCEPTION OF INCARCERATION'S EFFECTS ON MOTHER-CHILD
RELATIONSHIPS

BY

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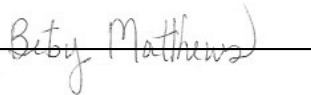RELATIONSHIPS

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ABSTRACT

Tougher sentencing policies have resulted in a dramatic increase in the jail and prison populations in the United States over the past few decades. The number of women who are spending time behind bars have vastly increased as a result of this. Despite increased interest in this area of research, a variety of questions remain as to how women experience incarceration. Most women who are incarcerated are mothers, but few criminologists have explored how imprisonment affects motherhood and mothers' perception of the mother-child relationship during incarceration. The research presented here contributes to this body of literature by exploring the effects of confinement on motherhood and on the incarcerated mothers' perception of mother-child relationships, focusing on how incarcerated mothers navigate the barriers to successful mother child-relationships. Data from this study come from qualitative interviews with mothers serving time in four jails in eastern and central Kentucky. Findings from this research expand upon the literature on incarcerated mothers and mother-child relationships and may provide a stimulus for further research and the development of programs related to the improving relationships among incarcerated mothers and their children.

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I. Introduction

Mass Incarceration

No discussion of the incarceration of American women, or men for that matter, would be complete without recognition of America's reliance on incarceration, particularly over the past few decades. As Gilmore (2009) observes, "crime went up, crime went down, we cracked down." In other words, incarceration became a solution for a variety of social problems that politicians, media and others translated into the language of crime and punishment. The United States is a world leader for incarceration rates, for example, with per capita incarceration levels six to ten times higher than in Europe (Foster & Hagan, 2009). More than 860 persons per 100,000 U.S. adult residents, totaling 2,162,400 persons, were in state and federal prisons and local jails in 2016 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2018). These trends comprise the contemporary U.S. policy phenomenon of "mass incarceration" (Garland, 2001). Poor, African American men have been disproportionately affected by this trend, as they are incarcerated at rates higher than any other demographic in the U.S. (Clear, 2007; Gilmore, 2009; Nurse, 2004; Western, 2007). While men make up the bulk of those incarcerated in the U.S, women have also been greatly affected by these policies.

The 1980s saw a dramatic increase in the number of female inmates, and the rate of incarcerated women began to rise faster than the number of male inmates (Mignon & Ransford, 2012). In 1986, 19,812 women were incarcerated in U.S. prisons (Sabol, Couture, & Harrison, 2007), and this number increased to 111,360 by 2017 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2018). Even though women still represent a much smaller

proportion of the overall prison population, the rate of female incarceration has grown more than that of male incarceration over the past few decades. U.S. policies such as the war on drugs, mandatory incarceration, and minimum sentencing have all aided in the U.S. imprisonment binge.

While the underlying theories of corrections in the U.S. sometimes shift with the social context of the time, the goals of modern American jails and seem to be contradictive: they are designed to punish inmates yet at the same time reform them through nonpunitive rehabilitative measures. Additionally, prisons and jails were overwhelmingly designed for the incarceration of men. Meaning women are incarecrated in facilities that are designed for men, at best, with very limited adaptations for their needs (e.g., trauma, physical and mental health, children). Almost all state Department of Correctional Services report that they offer programs (e.g., parenting classes) in at least one of their facilities for women, but these programs tend to be small in scale, serving far fewer women than the number who wish to participate. Also sorely lacking are programs to assist these women and their families once the incarcerated individual has been released from jail and prison. The disadvantages for families of the incarcerated do not stop once the incarcerated individual is released. Incarceration and the reentry process can create social problems that include, but are not limited to, increased poverty, problems for public safety, and family disruptions (Clear, 2007). The incompatibility between punishment and treatment can make rehabilitating an incarcerated offender incredibly difficult, making the journey back home to family life even more challenging.

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While the general public is inclined to accept mass incarceration, including the conservancy of such policies, it is important to recognize that the "popular opinion" that actually matters usually does not include the voices of the individuals and their loved-ones who are most directly affected by these laws and the criminal justice system in general.

Increased Parental Incarceration

As mentioned before in the United States, there were roughly 2.1 million people incarcerated in 2016 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2018), up from about 1.5 million in 1990 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1992). Mass incarceration affects not only the individual that is physically incarcerated, but also their loved ones that are left behind. The family members of incarcerated individuals often experience marital and financial difficulties and children of incarcerated individuals are prone to negative consequences, including psychological distress, behavioral problems, and problems in school (Reed & Reed, 1997; Lee et al., 2013; Haskins, 2016).

The social costs of mass incarceration are vast and disturbing, however families experiencing incarceration are often obscure in the public sense, as stigma and embarrassment often lead families to hide the incarceration of a family member. Children whose parents are incarcerated are less likely to receive sympathy and compassion compared to children experiencing different sorts of parental separations, such as divorce or death (Fritsch & Burkhead, 1981). In the remainder of this chapter, I examine research on how mothers and fathers experience incarceration differently

and suggest that incarcerated mothers constitute a special case of parental

incarceration, warranting a need for further research.

Incarcerated Fathers

While men are more likely to be incarcerated than women, fathers and

mothers experience incarceration very differently. In 2017, males were incarcerated in

jail at a (394 per 100,000 male U.S. residents) rate 5.7 times that of females (69 per

100,000 female U.S. residents) (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2019a, 2019b).

Additionally, incarcerated fathers are less likely to be present in their children's lives

compared to fathers who are not incarcerated, even preceding their incarceration.

Incarceration also brings a myriad of negative social and financial consequences for

incarcerated fathers, which adds additional financial hardship for their families left

behind (Clear, 2007; Schwartz-Soicher et al., 2011). This adds additional stress for the

incarcerated father and further complicates his relationship with family members. The

U.S. prison system's focus on punishment often results in incarcerated fathers

becoming alienated from their children, as well as their children's mothers. Fathers'

lack of presence in the lives of their children has been linked to increased risk of

poverty, aggression, and developmental disruptions (Turney, 2015; Wildeman, 2010,

2014). These problems do not just go away as they are often exacerbated once a

prisoner is released.

Incarcerated Mothers

Although men are more likely than women to become incarcerated, the

percentage of incarcerated women has greatly increased in recent decades. Women

who are incarcerated face multiple hardships, including abuse and mental health problems (Bello et al., 2020; Bronson & Berzofsky, 2017; Morash & Schram, 2002; Steadman et al., 2009). Incarcerated mothers are more likely than incarcerated fathers to have lived with their children prior to arrest, to have been the sole caregiver for the child, and to have been responsible for the child financially (Mumola, 2000). Incarcerated mothers often have intense distress at the initial separation from their children (Poehlmann, 2005). Prior research reflects that concerns over children's current living arrangements, safety, and emotional development are some of the main stressors that incarcerated mothers experience (Clark, 1995; Kazura, 2001). Many incarcerated mothers receive few, if any, visits from their children. Fewer child visits result in rises in depressive symptoms for incarcerated mothers. Many incarcerated mothers express the importance of contact, especially visitation and phone calls, for the maintenance of a mother-child relationship. Active parenting during incarceration can serve as a way to reduce negative psychological consequences. However, when conflicts in relationships between incarcerated mothers and their children's caregivers arise, content between incarcerated mothers and their children become more infrequent, creating further distress for mothers (Poehlmann, 2005).

Another issue facing women in prison is when pregnant women enter prison. A 2004 Bureau of Justice Statistics survey found that 3% of women in federal prisons and 4% of women in state prisons reported they were pregnant at intake (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2004). Oftentimes, when incarcerated women give birth, their newborns are taken away from them almost immediately after birth. These women receive very

little, if any, emotional support to prepare them for this separation and to help them cope with the loss. Maternal distress, including feelings of apprehension and grief is common among pregnant women and new mothers who are incarcerated and can also have negative outcomes for the unborn child (Wismont, 2000). Given the high incidence of psychiatric illness (Bello et al., 2020; Bronson & Berzofsky, 2017; Steadman et al., 2009) in incarcerated women, these additional stressors can further exacerbate existing psychiatric problems (Chambers, 2009).

Children of Incarcerated Parents

Just as mothers and fathers experience incarceration differently, their children also face unique challenges depending on which parent is incarcerated. With the female prison population growing, most of them being mothers, it is estimated that since 1991, the number of children with a mother in prison has more than doubled. There have also been similar increases in the number of mothers incarcerated in jails at the local level, and researchers estimate that there are millions of additional children who have a mother who is serving time in jail (Western & Wildeman, 2009). However, the exact number of affected children is difficult to calculate, which may be due to a number of different factors. For example, parents may be reluctant to give any information about their children because they are worried about the potential involvement of public systems into their children's lives. In addition, there are no formal procedures in place to collect these data at the national level.

One of the main disruptions during a child's life when a mother becomes incarcerated pertains to changes in living arrangements. With most mothers being the

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sole caregiver of their children prior to incarceration, when a mother becomes incarcerated under such conditions, the child is forced to change living arrangements. Grandparents are usually the ones who take care of children of incarcerated mothers; however, these children also make up a large portion of those in nonrelative foster care.

Children of incarcerated mothers may be at particular risk for a multitude of negative outcomes, including social, psychological, and emotional difficulties. For example, school-age children with incarcerated mothers exhibit higher levels of anxiety, depression, and aggressive behaviors (Murray & Farrington, 2005). Further, maternal incarceration potentially creates more problems for the family, including a higher likelihood that the child themselves will become incarcerated if the mother is incarcerated (Dallaire, 2007; Murray, Farrington, & Sekol, 2012).

In contrast to children of incarcerated mothers living without their fathers, most children of incarcerated fathers, around 78%, live with their mothers during their fathers' incarceration (Johnson & Waldfogel, 2004). Through a drastic change in the living arrangements in not as likely when a father is incarcerated, a variety of negative consequences are still found. Financial difficulties and concerns of public safety often haunt a child and family after the father is incarcerated. In neighborhoods that experience high levels of incarceration, children are more likely to experience a lack of informal social controls that discourage youth from criminal behavior, such as family disruption and low adult supervision (Clear, 2007).

Comparing the experiences of children having an incarcerated mother versus an incarcerated father, one study suggested that there may be some positive effects of paternal incarceration for children and the family (Wakefield and Wildeman, 2011). According to this study, if a father is incarcerated for a sexual crime, domestic abuse, or a violent crime in general, their children may benefit from the removal of their father. However, policies of mass incarceration are not exclusively removing fathers who are abusive and violent, however they are removing fathers with mostly non-violent records who for the most part have a good relationship with their children and contribute financially to their family (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2011).

Much of the literature on parental incarceration has identified social stigma and/or shame as an important issue for children experiencing parental incarceration (Johnston, 1995). Children need to express their feelings in order to overcome effects of trauma. This, however, is particularly difficult for children of incarcerated parents as family members may prohibit children from speaking about what has happened. Johnston (1995) refers to this practice as forced 'silence'. Although there might be good reasons for such silence (e.g., child custody and welfare payments), children of incarcerated parents suffer by having to grow up or mature faster in order to carry these adult-like burdens and responsibilities.

Current criminological research often focuses on incarcerated men, yet, as this chapter has highlighted, there are clear differences in family experiences when mothers versus fathers are incarcerated. Specifically, one could argue that incarcerated mothers and their families experience more significant disruptions,

warranting further exploration. I have chosen to focus solely on mothers for this study because of (1) the increased magnitude of maternal incarceration on family consequences and (2) the considerable societal pressures on mothers to assume certain roles and responsibilities. Mothering while incarcerated creates a unique incarceration experience as women are dealing with struggles of their children and family on top of their own personal struggles, while also being subject to an unrealistic set of expectations of being a mother by society.

Importance of This Study

This study extends previous work in this area by examining the effects of confinement on motherhood and mother-child relationships from the incarcerated mother's perspective. It adds to previous research in the following ways:

1. It explores confinement effects on motherhood and mother-child relationships from the incarcerated mother's perspective.

2. It explores parenting in jail and outside of jail from the incarcerated mother's perspective.

The literature review follows in chapter two, methodology in chapter three, results in chapter four, and a discussion of those results in chapter five.

II. Literature Review

Introduction

Incarcerated parents face many problems in maintaining meaningful relationships with their children, and this is especially true for incarcerated mothers. As previously mentioned, when a father is incarcerated, responsibility for his children is typically assumed by the mother. Families are more likely to be disrupted by women's incarceration than by men's because, in most cases, the mothers were the primary caregivers of their children prior to incarceration. Mothering while incarcerated presents a unique set of challenges. Even before their incarceration, mothers are subject to gendered expectations related to mothering (Enos, 2001). Incarceration not only violates gender stereotypes, but also spoils the perception of being a "good" mother by hegemonic standards. Their status as incarcerated women cause them to have unique struggles, prior to and during their incarceration, due to their status as mothers.

The Construction of Motherhood in the U.S.

The concept of motherhood is rooted within most cultures—including ours. Generally, within the United States, mothering has been socially constructed as natural and universal. Morash and Schram (2002) suggest that: "mothers do not experience incarceration in a vacuum, devoid of societal experiences. They are affected by the broader context of cultural and societal constructions of motherhood" (p.72). They broaden this discussion, suggesting that a hegemonic perception of a "good" mother in the United States consists of the following ideas (p.72):

- "Motherhood and womanhood are intermeshed; to be considered a mature, balanced, fulfilled adult, a woman should be a mother."

- "A "good" mother is always available to her children; she spends time with them, guides, supports, encourages, and corrects as well as loves and cares for them physically. She is also responsible for the cleanliness of their home environment."

- "A "good" mother is unselfish; she puts the needs of her children before her own needs."

- "The individual mother should have total responsibility for her children at all times."

- "Mothering is a low-status but important, worthwhile, and intrinsically rewarding job in our society. The non-material rewards outweigh the lack of financial and status rewards."

These ideas of mothering disregard the difficulties experienced by those women most likely to be incarcerated and who already face social disadvantages. Living up to the perception of a "good" mother is hard enough without the constraints of jail or prison. Once incarcerated, mothers confront challenges that make it hard for them to live up to such idealistic hegemonic standards. Specifically, they are unable to have regular contact with their children, cannot make mothering a priority because of jail or prison restrictions, cannot appropriately direct the development of their children, and have very limited resources to devote to mothering while they are incarcerated.

The ideas listed above are so pervasive in our culture that it dictates the public's expectations of what mothering should look like and how one should go about doing it. Enos (2001) identifies elements of the dominant family ideology in the United States (p.22):

- "All family members co-reside in a single unit."

- "The family is headed by a male who provides essential economic support to the conjugal unit."

- "Socialization of family members into appropriate gender roles is essential…"

- "The interests of all family members are unitary and relations within the family are harmonious."

- "Families are economically self-sufficient, take care of their members, and are not dependent on the state or on extended family members…"

As discussed in chapter one, most families experiencing incarceration deviate from many of these ideals even prior to incarceration of a parent. Furthermore, the incarceration of a parent makes some of the ideas that Enos (2001) discusses impossible. Often times, discussions of motherhood focus on a single group of women—economically secured white women. These discussions fail to include the voices and experiences of other groups—economically unsecured women, minorities, and incarcerated women. Incarcerated mothers are amongst those most often ignored because they offend society's idealized vision of women as nurturing, caring, and attentive to children (Beckerman, 1991). Incarceration separates mothers from their

children, making them unable to nurture and care for them. Thus, their inability to live up to these societal expectations make them doomed to being designated as unfit mothers by society (Morash & Schram, 2002). The stigma that comes with being an incarcerated mother serves as justification for others to look down upon these women and ignore their needs both during and after their incarceration.

Mothering Behind Bars

As mentioned in chapter 1, many incarcerated women are the primary caregivers for their children prior to incarceration. Meaning that of all of the problems incarcerated women face, the loss of their loved ones, particularly their children, are one of the most significant ones. Based on interviews with incarcerated women, Baunach (1985) wrote (p.1):

> "Whatever else they had, imprisoned mothers had one thing to hang onto before their incarceration: their children. Whether the relationship was healthy or otherwise for mother and child, when a woman goes to prison she takes with her the good memories of that relationship and cherishes the times spent in sharing joy and love with her children. Perhaps she truly loved and cared for her children in a positive and healthy relationship; perhaps she reversed roles with her children and they primarily nurtured her; perhaps she paid little or no attention to her children at all. In any case, imprisonment engenders the feelings of loss and failure. Not only has she been ostracized by society for her criminal behavior, she demonstrated a seeming failure as a mother. Whatever else prison does to or for a woman, it enables her to reflect for hours on end

about herself and the consequences of her behavior on both herself and her children."

While a limited body of research examines the experiences of incarcerated mothers, there are a few studies that support Baunach's (1985) findings. One researcher who researched incarcerated mothers in Minnesota found that incarcerated mothers are intensely aware of their children's suffering as a result of their mother's incarceration. Mothers in this study experienced extreme guilt, anxiety, and sadness because of this (Luke, 2002). Loper et al. (2009) found that incarcerated mothers who had less frequent contact with their children experienced increased stress concerning their competence as a parent. Incarcerated mothers fear that they are inadequate as mothers and are concerned about their ability to both sustain their relationships with their children during their time behind bars and regain or continue it after their release (Enos, 2001).

There is clearly no doubt that most, if not all, incarcerated mothers experience concern, worry, frustration, and guilt when they are separated from their children—and that women want and attempt to maintain contact with and ensure the safety of their children. Many researchers believe that children's visit, phone calls, and letters assist in sustaining a mother-child relationship, lessen the harmful impact of separation, and help mothers adjust to confinement (Loper et al., 2009; Poehlmann, 2005). However, some skeptical researchers argue that visitation imposes a very restricted experience of motherhood and, as a result, does little, if anything, to lessen the pains of imprisonment. These researchers argue that even when mothers receive

visits from their children, the visits are usually irregular and of poor quality (Bloom &

Steinhart, 1993; Mumola, 2000). Some facilities have full contact visits, which allows

physical contact; barrier contact, which occurs through Plexiglas; or open contact,

which involves no barrier, does not allow physical contact. The policy chosen by a

facility is typically based on its security and safety concerns, but in general, jails are

less likely to offer opportunities for physical contact for children and their incarcerated

parent than prisons.

In response to the increased needs of incarcerated parents and their children

to build parenting skills and maintain parent-child relationships during incarceration,

parenting programs were developed. The purpose of these programs is to teach

incarcerated parents new skills that can reduce the negative impact the incarceration

has had on their children. However, according to Morash and Schram (2002),

parenting programs, which may be attached to life-skills programs or mother-child

visitation programs, are based on the assumption that incarcerated mothers lack basic

knowledge about how to care for and discipline their children. Morash and Scharm

(2002) build on this notion by stating that "…it is misleading to conclude that all

incarcerated mothers are deficient in parenting skills or are unaware of their

responsibilities as mothers" (p.76). Most of the mothers in this study were already

aware of what they should be doing to support and nurture their children.

Whether or not they have strong parenting skills, incarcerated mothers do

confront some special problems in regard to the custody of their children. Reed and

Reed (1997) suggest that mothers are more likely than fathers to experience

involuntary termination of their parental rights. According to the federal regulations

mandated by the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997, when a child has

been in foster care under the responsibility of a state for 15 of the 22 previous months,

the state is required to petition for termination of parental rights (Adoption and Safe

Families Act, 1997). This policy adds to the difficulties of parenting both during and

after incarceration, particularly if the children are not residing with relatives, as gaining

one's parental rights after termination is often extremely difficult. Thus, once

incarcerated, mothers are subject to additional legal considerations that have the

potential to lead to termination of parental rights, which has the potential to affect the

family well beyond the incarceration period.

Reentry and Stigma

Mothers who enter jail or prisons are often struggling with a wide range of

problems. Depending on how they spend their time on the inside, these problems may

be better once they are released. For example, mothers that engage in pre-release

planning may leave jail or prison with an established place to live, have referrals for

mental health care, enrolment in education and employment programs, and have

good relationships with friends, family, and children that have been maintained

through visits, letters, or phone calls during her time on the inside (Michalsen, 2019).

Unfortunately, oftentimes the problems experienced on the outside are made even

worse by time inside and the stigma that mothers experience from their incarceration

and deviation from roles as traditional mothers.

Offenders who return to the community from prison or jail must often simultaneously comply with conditions of probation or parole, achieve financial stability, find housing, obtain health care, and begin the often lengthy process of reuniting with their children (Mapson, 2013). According to Mapson (2013), incarcerated mothers often face unique problems once released and usually need more support than their male counterparts for several reasons. As mentioned before, they are more likely to return home to responsibilities of caretaking as a single parent. Furthermore, their earning abilities tend to be far lower than those of their male counterparts, yet they face the same financial obligations such as court costs, costs for programs and counseling, and parole fees in addition to often being the sole provider for their minor children (Mapson, 2013). Without adequate support, the likelihood of successful reentry is very low, and the likelihood of recidivism is very high, making it extraordinarily difficult for them to succeed in caring for their children once they are released.

Summary

This chapter has summarized the literature on the societal expectations of motherhood in the United States, mothering while incarcerated, and the stigma that incarcerated mothers face once they reenter into society. Even prior to incarceration, mothers are held to a set of motherhood standards that are almost impossible to attain by much of the population, particularly those who are most likely to be incarcerated. Once mothers enter the structural confines of jails and prisons, their abilities to actively parent are greatly diminished. However, as incarcerated mothers

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are still mothers, they are still expected, by society and by themselves, to perform as mothers, despite the difficulties of doing so behind bars.

The current study aims to add to the existing literature on this topic. The current body of literature would benefit from more specific examination of how the unrealistic expectations society has of mothers are exacerbated through the incarceration process from the mothers' perspective. In the next chapter, I detail my methods used for this study.

III. Research Methods

Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology used for my thesis research. This study is from the first phase of a larger longitudinal study of women's desistance from crime. Phase one of the study was conducted in local jails. The remaining phases involve follow-up interviews in the community at twelve and eighteen months after release from jail. Phase one participants included 80 women who were serving State time in local jails and soon to be released to the community. During this phase, participants reviewed and signed consent to participate forms, completed a self-administered survey that includes psychological and social factors associated with desistance, and engaged in a semi-structured interview. This paper represents just one component of the larger study: It examines how confinement affects motherhood and incarcerated mothers' perception of mother-child relationships. Qualitative research methods are optimal when researching sensitive topics of family life and were actor's own perspectives are sought. Such methodology allows the researcher to become intimately involved in her research and "give a 'voice' to those they are 'studying', which is seen as particularly important when conducting research with marginalized groups" (Wincup, 2017). Below, I describe my research questions, sample, and how I gathered and analyzed the data for this project.

Research Purpose

As mentioned before, my research goals for this project were to explore how confinement affects motherhood and incarcerated mothers' perception of the mother-child relationship.

Sample

The current study took place in four local jails in central and Eastern Kentucky. The jails (Table 1) were selected based on the number of women incarcerated in the facilities and the willingness of administrators to give us access to the women for interviews. The study sample consisted of 38 women who 1) had one or more children, 2) were convicted of a felony offense and doing state time within the local jail, 3) were serving at least one year but less than five years in the institution for that conviction, 4) have one or more prior offenses on their record, and 4) were returning within six months to a community in Kentucky.

Table 1: Sample Size by Jail

County	Number of participants (%)
Bourbon	6 (15.8%)
Campbell	18 (47.4%)
Jefferson	12 (31.6%)
Manson	2 (5.3%)
Total	38 (100%)

As shown in Table 2, the majority of women who participated in this study were white (81.6%) with an average age of 37 ($\bar{x}$=37.24). The number of children among the sample ranged from 1-9 with a mean of 3 children ($\bar{x}$=3.29).

Table 2: Sample Demographics

Variable	N (%)
Race	
Nonwhite	7 (18.4%)
White	31 (81.6%)
Number of Children	
1	4 (10.5%)
2	7 (18.4%)
3	15 (39.5%)
4	6 (15.8%)
5	3 (7.9%)
6	1 (2.6%)
8	1 (2.6%)
9	1 (2.6%)

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Age	24	59	37.24	7.96
Number of Children	1	9	3.29	1.71

The majority of women who participated in this study had a moderate risk level (60.5%), as determined by DOC, were incarcerated for drug crimes (39.5%), and were sentenced for 3-4 years (42.1%) (Table 3).

Table 3: Risk Levels, Offense Type, and Sentence Length for Sample Members

Variable	N (%)
Risk Category	
Missing	1 (2.6%)
Low	1 (2.6%)
Low/Moderate	7 (18.4%)
Moderate	23 (60.5%)
High	6 (15.8%)
Type of Offense	
Drug	15 (39.5%)
Other	6 (15.8%)
Person	4 (10.5%)
Property	13 (34.2%)
Sentence Length	
Missing	1 (2.6%)
1-2	3 (7.9%)
3-4	16 (42.1%)
5-6	9 (23.7%)
7 or more	9 (23.7%)
Total	38 (100%)

Data Collection

Prior to the interviews, participants of the study were asked to review and sign a consent to participate form approved by Eastern Kentucky University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and a consent to participate form for Kentucky Department of Corrections (KDOC).

There were 18 questions in total, 4 of which pertaining to the motherhood component of the study:

1. What was your relationship with your children prior to coming to jail?

2. How has coming to jail changed that relationship and your role in their lives?

3. How are you coping with being separated from your children?

4. When you think about returning home, what is your biggest worry about your relationship with your children?

Individual interviews with the participants lasted an average of 30 minutes but ranged between 15 minutes to 1 hour. The length of the interview largely depended on the participant's willingness to talk. Case IDs were assigned in ascending order as the participants were interviewed. The interviews took place in empty classrooms or empty visitation rooms. All participants gave permission for their interviews to be recorded.

<center>Analysis</center>

The recorded interviews were transcribed using Trint audio transcription software. Afterwards, I spent a considerable amount of time reading and re-reading the transcripts, in order to immerse myself in the material. When I felt that I had a good enough sense of the results from the interviews, I began the formal analysis. The data were analyzed with NVivo qualitative analysis software. An integrated approach was used to analyze the data that involved both inductive and deductive methods for organizing and developing codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Keeping my initial research question in mind, preliminary codes were used to categorize the data broadly (e.g., children, motherhood, abuse, pains of imprisonment, etc.). Then subcodes were

assigned to more refined concepts that emerged in the data (e.g., perception of self,

relationship with caregivers, visitation, parental rights, etc.). Interviews were then

recoded to include the newly developed subcodes. Additionally, during the coding

process, I selected quotes that explicated specific concepts, language, or themes that

emerged in the data. The results of my analysis are presented in the next chapter.

IV. Findings

Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the various ways in which incarcerated mothers in my sample navigate motherhood and how confinement affects incarcerated mothers' perception of the mother-child relationship. Analysis of the interviews yielded four major themes commonly encountered and expressed within the sample: (a) motherhood and self-perception, (b) mothering from jail, (c) motherhood and selflessness, and (e) motherhood, reentry, and reunification. Each of these themes is discussed and summarized below. Several of these themes and experiences are consistent with previous research on maternal incarceration. Yet, the findings also indicate that the women's perception of themselves and their emphasis on selflessness contributes to a unique perspective on how they navigate motherhood and how they view the mother-child relationship, in ways that have received less attention in prior work.

Motherhood and Self-Perception

The women in this study had two opposing perceptions of themselves as mothers. Some of the women in this study attempted to describe their intentions and behaviors in ways that are more consistent with cultural expectations associated with being a good mother. Other women, however, expressed guilt and shame about what their incarceration has done, and continue to do, to their relationships with their children.

To maintain identity as a mother, specifically a good mother, a generally positive and socially sanctioned status, women in this study employed strategies to protect that identity. These women spoke of themselves as good mothers and focused on their relationships with their children prior to incarceration. By doing this, they seemed to think less about their current negative status and instead focus on a time where they held a more positive social status. For instance:

Participant 26 "…I chose motherhood first, and I didn't rely on a lot of people to take care of my kids. Me being a mother is my biggest job. That's my most important job."

Participant 51 "I've had a baby since I was 14 years old, my first one. And you would think that statistics would say, you know, you won't graduate or, you know, you won't really be anything, amount to anything. But, you know, I got my GED and I got it a whole year before my peers. I took care of him [her son]. I didn't really need any help… You know what I mean, so I was proud of myself." "…I was a stay at home mom until I was 28 years old. You know, the soccer mom deal, vacations twice a year. Wasn't a drinker, didn't mess around with drugs or any of that."

According to Enos (2001), for women dealing with incarceration, addiction, and trauma, mothering can feel like "an all or nothing ultimatum (p.59)." Mothers may feel the need to prove to themselves, their children, as well as society that they are still "good" mothers. Incarcerated mothers may make comparisons between themselves

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and others as a means of preserving their maternal identity. Some of the mothers in this study occasionally compared themselves to their children's caregivers, as a strategy to preserve their maternal identity. For instance, Participant 41 concedes that her husband is a good provider for their children, but she also judges him as deficient in his paternal role. She explains,

"My husband divorced me and he filed for sole custody. I didn't even know. My mom and them didn't tell me, you know. …he tried to say I was unfit, you know, stuff like that. He never spent more than a couple hours a day with them. I was a good mom."

By stating that her now ex-husband does not spend enough time with their children, Participant 41 seemed to be trying to demonstrate to her social audience that she is a good mother because unlike him, she actually dedicated time to her children.

Enos (2001) found that incarcerated mothers tell stories of mothering experiences to suggest they fit the standards of a "good mother" by hegemonic standards. In this case, several of the women attempted to prove that they are "good mothers" by expressing pride in their children by recalling birthdays, accomplishments at school, and the like.

Participant 26 "He's [her son] a tough cookie, a football player and he is really extremely good. But he's also a jokester. He's like his mom. Class clown--center of attention. My daughter, she is twelve and her birthday is August 28th. And she is my star child. …She's a people pleaser. She gets that from me as well. But

instead of letting her parents be away from her create a downfall in her life, she

uses it...because of her strength, so she's always trying to please us. So, she's

really good; she makes her grades are right on point. They are like really good.

She's in band; she cheerleads, and she likes to dance. She's outgoing as well, but

she's also shy. And I'm her mama bear. She's really, really sheltered like I was.

She's really naive and gullible, but she's a really really good kid."

In contrast to the women who tried to preserve their identity as a good

mother, other women expressed great remorse about their situation. As Participants

7, 14, and 15 explain:

Participant 14 "I've missed a lot because of some stupid things I've done, and I

have nobody to blame for that but myself"

Participant 15 "You never know if you go to jail or something or go somewhere

one day and you come back and your kids are…your kids are dead. And there is

nothing you can do at that time that you lost. You can't get it back. You could

have been there maybe to protect them or to change the events that it

happened, but you wasn't because you was being selfish and somewhere else."

Participant 7 "You got women in here, the more so we put ourselves down for

the mothers we are supposed to be. That's everybody in the cell puts themselves

down. Cause I don't think there is one person who doesn't have kids, so

everybody puts themselves down. There is somebody else taking care of our kids."

Being incarcerated seemed to have given these women a different perspective on their past behaviors, leading to the need to cope with feelings of guilt and shame about their past actions that led them there. Some might view this way of thinking as a destructive strategy; however, it plays an important role in these women's self-transformation. According to Celinska and Siegel (2010), the guilt, shame, and self-blame might be harmful, especially when no help or assistance is offered to help them counteract them. On the other hand, however, if these feelings of guilt, shame, and self-blame are followed by opportunities for self-transformation, this might be a step toward positive reinterpretation (Celinska & Siegel, 2010).

Barriers to Successful Mother-Child Relationships

Bonds of affection are not necessarily severed when women go to jail, despite the difficulties that separation poses for relationships. Reestablishing a parental relationship that has been damaged by years of separation and residual conflicts can be very overwhelming. Data from the interviews revealed that even when incarcerated mothers want their ties of affection to remain strong, problems with children and caregivers pose a series of challenges to the maintenance of a positive mother-child relationship.

Consistent with previous research (Mumola, 2000; Enos, 2001; Morash & Schram, 2002), prior to incarceration, a large number of women were the primary caregivers of their children prior to their incarceration. Although incarcerated fathers

also have needs related to separation from their children, more incarcerated men than women have a situation in which the children's other parent is maintaining the family and bringing the children for visits. Many of the women in this study brought up the loss of custody or parental rights due to their incarceration.

Participant 25 "Well, my daughter, she doesn't really know who I am. She was 6 months old when they [Child Protective Services] took her away. My cousin got her. She thinks that that's her mom and dad. My son, he still knows me. He was 2 when they took him away and my mom has him."

Participant 54 "…my 7-year old, his dad's mom adopted him because while we [her and her now ex-boyfriend] were locked up, our rights got terminated and she adopted him. Now, I haven't seen him since his first birthday because I'm no longer with him anymore and I've been locked up."

Participant 26 "They [her children] just recently moved to Texas in October. It's a big deal for me because after raising my kids to the age they—I've been out of their life for a year because I've been incarcerated. I had to give full custody to my mom. That's a bitter pill to swallow."

Despite the pain associated with the separation from their children, majority of the mothers in this study seldom saw their children. The majority of these mothers said that they did not want their children to visit them in jail. The mothers were not asked directly why they didn't want their children to visit them in jail. Some mothers

volunteered, however that they were embarrassed about being in jail and didn't want their children to be exposed to the jail environment. Participant 24 stated:

"I don't want them to come. Plus, I don't want my kids to ever see the inside of a jail; like that is not where no kids should be. I don't. I want them to stay as far away from jail unless they come into work and want to study it. But other than that, no."

Another reason that mothers provided for not wanting their children to visit them was that visits were too emotionally upsetting for their children (and them). Participant 14 remarked:

"…It bothers them a lot more to come and have to leave, so I don't force it. …I will never force it on them because I know that when they leave here, they're going to have to deal with having to walk away, knowing that they still don't quite understand why I just can't come home.".

For the mothers who did want mother-child visitation, geographical distance, time constraints, or lack of money necessary for visits precluded visitation. Some mothers indicated that their children lived too far away from the jail or did not have reliable transportation to make it to the jail for visitation. Participant 2 remarked, "I haven't had any visitations; haven't seen them since April. When I go to prison, I won't see him [because] she won't be able to drive up there. But I'm used to that.". Another mother reported that her children live 2 hours away from the jail, making the trip for visitation unfeasible.

The challenge is even more severe when children are residing with non-relative caregivers or when the bond between incarcerated mother and the caregiver have been severed. Upon assuming the responsibility of caring for children, caregivers gain influence in the mother-child relationship and can determine the type, quality, and frequency of interaction between mothers and their children. Essentially, caregivers become gatekeepers of mother-child relationships and become one of the primary influencers in how incarcerated mothers perform their role. Some mothers indicated, when asked directly, that their children's caregivers were opposed to the children visiting. Participants 8, 38, and 66 explained how their troubled relationships with their children's caregivers affects their ability to maintain a mother-child relationship with their children:

> Participant 8 "Oh, I'd like to start seeing them, but my ex-mother-in-law keeps me away from them. I don't even go on her property cause she gets finger happy and calls the police and says I'm trespassing. She don't want me there. And the kids get to see the cops escort me off."

> Participant 38 "She won't let me see him because she says that I'm nothing but trouble, staying in trouble. She puts me down like she wants him to hate me…"

> Participant 66 "My 7-year-old, his dad's mom adopted him because while we were locked up, our rights got terminated and she adopted him. Now, I haven't seen him since his first birthday because I'm not with him anymore and I've been

locked up. So, I really haven't been able to. Every time I show up, when I am out,

she wants to call the police and I get just stupid stuff. So, I've had to learn how

to just bottle that up and stick it down in there and wait till I get done with all

this crap."

Here, these women's narratives suggest that children's caregivers don't always

support incarcerated mothers in maintaining a mother-child relationship. Participants

often reported perceptions that their children's paternal grandmother are the least

supportive caregivers. These women's narrative accounts of their frustration and

sadness regarding a lack of support from their children's caregivers make it clear that

these experiences are a barrier to maintaining a mother-child relationship and thus

damaging to a mother's role-identity.

Furthermore, the jail environment itself serves as a barrier to successful

mother-child relationships. The structure and availability of mother-child visits vary

considerably between jails and prisons. Prisons typically offer more opportunities for

in-person visitation than jails, partly because of the different populations that are

housed in jails versus prisons. Since jails tend to have more transient populations of

people serving short sentences, long-term services like visitation and family-

strengthening programs are not prioritized.

Motherhood, Reentry, and Reunification

Compared to their frame of mind prior to imprisonment, majority of the

incarcerated mothers believed that they had a different mentality, which led them to

hold optimistic views about their subsequent release. For many of them, this change in

mindset was directly linked to the concern they had for their children and their desire to be present in their children's lives. In particular, some women have been incarcerated for most of their children's lives, causing their children to not know them, and stressed the need to be present in their children's lives in order to rebuild a relationship with them. Participant 3 stated she plans on repairing those relationships or die trying— "I won't quit until I do". She continued:

"You know, their dad's gone and then their mom's in jail, and you know, they are trying to become men and they need their mom. They are a little angry, but they didn't get me here so I can't be upset with them about that. I just look forward to rebuilding those relationships, which are rebuildable."

Similarly, Participant 7 explained,

"I can work toward getting my kids back. I've got to relearn how to take care of them. I was doing this meth and one shot could've killed me. I was a mom that was always on the go. I was never…I'd like to relearn how to be mom".

Participant 52 also explained,

"I plan to go to the Freedom House; it is for pregnant women. Plus, it'll be a really great program. I plan to get help with my addiction and parenting classes to become a better mother because I have an 11-year-old that I'm concerned with that I've never been a mother to. I plan to do any and everything I can to raise this baby properly. I need to change my life".

It appears that the concern that Participants 3, 7, and 52 had for their children and their desire to be present in their children's lives facilitated their positive outlook

regarding their subsequent release and their decision to either stop or reduce the frequency in which they engage in criminal activity. Consistent with prior research, children can have a positive effect on women and can facilitate the development of a prosocial self-image and desistance from criminal activity (Giordano et al., 2002; Kreager et al., 2010).

While most of the mothers were optimistic about their post-release, not every mother held a positive outlook regarding their release. In fact, a minority of mothers remained uncertain about their ability to rebuild a relationship with their children and have a successful post-release. In particular, the risk of recidivating was tied to the universality of challenges—homelessness, unemployment, addiction, stigma, etc.—faced by incarcerated mothers in reentry.

As mentioned in chapter 2, mothers who enter incarceration are usually struggling with a wide range of problems, and depending on how they spend their time inside, these issues may sometimes be made better once they are released. For example, with pensive work done to prepare for release while a mother is incarcerated, mothers can leave with appropriate identification, enrollment in education and employment programs, referrals for mental healthcare, a place to live, and relationships with their families and children that have been maintained through regular contact during her time inside. Unfortunately, the problems mothers bring with them are often exacerbated by the time spent inside, and the stigma of incarceration.

For example, when talking about her plans for after she is released from jail, Participant 15 said: "I just don't know how to really go about going from being

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homeless and having nothing over here to moving to Ohio and being homeless and

having nothing over there". This illustrates some of the concerns incarcerated women

have when thinking about their subsequent post-release.

No matter how profound the love a mother has for their children, the stressful

realities of parenting may get in the way, especially when added to the difficulties of

incarceration and reentering the community after a long period of incarceration.

Previous research suggests that mothering after incarceration is both desired and a

source of stress (O'Brien, 2001). For example, Participant 47 explained how the

challenges and expectations of mothering were too overwhelming for her:

"I had my first kid at 14, had my second kid at 15 and I had my third kid at 16.

So, by the time I was 16, I had three kids. I wasn't married yet, but I was living

with him and his mom and dad. His mom and dad worked, and he worked, so I

was at home with the kids. I dropped out of school. So, I had been a wife, a

mother, and a caretaker since 14. So, when I turned 21, I started getting into

trouble. It was like a vacation for me because at 21, I had four kids at home, a

husband, and taking care of his mom and dad. So, it was like a vacation from it

all. But then I got out and was thrown back in the midst of it and it ends up

being too much. And I'm like, "fuck this; I need a vacation". So, I end up doing

something stupid and coming back to jail for three months up to six months.

Then I get out thinking, "ok, I'm going to do better", but I go right back into

being a mom, a wife, and a caretaker instead of just taking slow baby steps. Oh

my God, this is too overwhelming, and I end up getting high and coming back to jail."

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges to a successful post-release and rebuilding a connection with one's children involved the issue of addiction. Majority of the incarcerated mothers admitted to having a substance abuse problem. Participant 18 explained how her addiction has interfered with her relationship with her child since before she gave birth:

"My girl, she was 10 months old when my parents got permanency over. I was on methadone with her. Back in 2006 when I had a boy, I mean, there wasn't much options for women hooked on drugs. My gynecologist looked at me and said, you have two options. I'm like, alright, you know, because, I mean, I was scared to death, I ain't gonna lie about it. I was so strung out… But he told me, he said, you keep doing what you're doing, and you are going to kill your kid".

When asked about her plans for when she gets released as it pertains to her children, she responded with:

"So, they are at an age now where they could come to me. And as long as I'm doing good my mom and dad wouldn't have no problem with that. But I mean all I can do is try to get them. I mean, I can't guarantee you and say that…all I can do is try".

Although many participants indicated that their children were a motivation for them to desist from criminal activity, mothers like Participant 18, expressed uncertainty about their ability to make the changes needed to reunite with and care

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for their children. Participant 18's uncertainty indicates that she feels somewhat of a tug of war between being a "good mother" moving forward or repeating past behaviors.

Incarcerated mothers with serious drug problems and sometimes those with minor criminal offenses face overwhelming odds in reuniting with their children. According to Enos (2001), because of low social margin, failure in one area is sometimes deemed as failure in attempts to reengage mothering. For example, if the mother is interested in going into a drug-treatment program after they have been released, they may feel pressured to live with their children in order to demonstrate their desire to reclaim the responsibilities of "good mothering". However, not going into a drug-treatment program may also be interpreted as them not being committed enough to change the lifestyle that hinders them from being a "good mother". These dilemmas confront incarcerated mothers who have multiple problems and very few resources to deal with them.

Motherhood and Selflessness

My interviews with these women revealed that their children are beloved to them, and more important to their desire to desist from crime. These mothers want their children to see them in a positive light and want to be there for their children. Participant 66 explained, "I want them to be my new best friends. For them to stay with me; do everything with them. Put all my attention towards my family and my kids. And that's my main focus".

However, the practicalities of reentry mean that loving one's children and wanting to live to do better for one's children is not enough when it comes to desistance and improving their relationships with their children. Some of the women have recognized that, in addition to wanting to live for their children, they must pay attention to their own needs before they are able to do anything for anyone else.

Participant 10 "...So, I'm not going home to them, which gives me even more opportunity to get to more meetings, to do more in recovery, to do more therapy, and to work more."

Participant 14 "Well, I'm hoping, and I want to go to rehab. I mean, the only thing is they send everybody so far away to Louisville or Lexington. You know, my kids are five minutes away here. Three of them are here...so I'm kind of on the fence about it but I would really like to get treatment just to kind of work on myself first..."

However, sometimes mothers recognize that reunification with their children to be a bad idea for everyone involved, because of their love for their children. Mothers may not want to disrupt living situations that have been in place for several months or several years. Mothers may also be considering practical concerns such as not wanting to disrupt children's schooling, not being financially stable enough to provide for their children, or substance abuse concerns.

Participant 13 "I'm ok with the way they are at. And if I could get out tomorrow and take them back, I wouldn't. I was raised by two heroin addicts. I know the

offs of something going wrong, whether it is a relapse or so, you know. You can

be violated on MRS and parole or probation for as much as not having a

sufficient home placement. My daughters are with a wonderful person, living a

wonderful life. For me to step out of jail and yank them out of that to put them

in a halfway house, sober living house, to pray that I get it right this time. My

parents did that to me my whole life."

Participant 14 "I refuse to go and remove my kids from my brother's house

unless I can provide for them the way that he is. I will not take them from

something if I can't give them what they're already getting there, you know? I

won't do that. That's selfish of me as a mother to do that to them. I could

never do that."

The narratives above demonstrate that these women are not romanticizing

motherhood and their return to their children. For each of these women, their

decision not to be there immediately after their release afforded them a positive sense

of self. This choice, although difficult, was viewed as them doing the right thing, thus

reaffirms their mothering identity, rather than being viewed as an element of bad

mothering. These mothers' narratives highlight that it is important for society not to

romanticize mothering after incarceration (according to hegemonic ideals of

mothering) and ignore the reality that some mothers are not capable of being present

for their children immediately after incarceration

V. Discussion

Summary of Findings

The primary goal of this study was to explore how confinement affects motherhood and incarcerated mothers' perception of the mother-child relationship. To do this, I interviewed 38 mothers at four local jails in central and eastern Kentucky. I conducted individual interviews with the mothers, where I asked a variety of open-ended questions and provided prompt to encourage the mothers to tell me their experiences behind bars. Incarceration presented mothers with the difficult task of maintaining their identities and roles as mothers. This research has examined how incarcerated mothers viewed and attempted to maintain their identities as mothers; demonstrated fitness as mothers; navigated the strain that incarceration puts on mother-child relationships; planned for reunification; and balanced their criminality, addiction, and motherhood while attempting to rebuild positive mother-child relationships. Below I will outline the major findings of this research study.

- Demonstrating fitness to themselves and to others was accomplished through identity talk. To maintain identities as "good mothers"—a socially sanctioned status—incarcerated mothers employed a variety of strategies, including focusing on their relationship with their children prior to their incarceration, expressing pride in their children and their accomplishments, and distancing self from others and from "bad parents".

- Incarceration has given mothers a different perspective on their past behaviors, forcing them to face feelings of guilt and shame about their past actions that led to their incarceration.

- Feelings of embarrassment, shame, and guilt restrain incarcerated mothers from allowing their children to visit. Furthermore, incarcerated mothers face many barriers when it comes to arranging visitation, including geographical distance, time constraints, and lack of money— all of which can preclude visitation.

- The quality of relationships between incarcerated mothers and caregivers determined the mothers' roles and relationship with respect to their children. The position and roles of those who had a strained relationship with caregivers were jeopardized as others with interest in the children (fathers, grandparents, etc.) attempted to undermine the mother's place with respect to her children.

- Although children are a motivation for incarcerated mothers to desist from criminal activity, mothers remain uncertain that they will be able to make the changes needed to reunite and care for their children permanently.

- As women faced the thought of being mothers, criminals, addicts, and the universality of challenges they were most likely going to face once released, mothers recognized that assuming the role of primary caregivers for their children would be a bad idea for everyone involved.

"Good mothering" also involved knowing when one was not able or ready to be a "good mother".

Policy Implications

Similar to previous research, results of this study have shown that the mother identity creates a unique experience for incarcerated women. Ranging from additional difficulties arranging visitation; the loss of parental rights; deteriorating relationships with children; dealing with hostile caregivers; and managing feelings of guilt, shame, and embarrassment, maternal incarceration is a stressful and traumatic process for all involved. As a result, jail administrators should not ignore these women's status as mothers. Incarcerated mothers relationships with their children should be facilitated in order to maintain and develop strong bonds of attachments that will improve outcomes for both mothers and their children.

The findings of this study also show that although children play an important role in maternal desistance, reunification with children are also dependent on the relationship with caregivers. Jails should facilitate planning between mothers and their children's caregivers as part of their pre-release programming. Results indicate that incarcerated mothers think about their impending reunification and their plans to resume caretaking. Including this type of planning between caregivers and mothers may reduce stress for returning mothers by determining what reunification and resuming caregiver role will potentially look like.

Although incarcerated mothers have unique needs, they also require other types of programming beyond visitation and mother-child relationships. The women in

this study have demonstrated feelings of guilt, shame, and self-blame; all of which are harmful for these women in their current state. However, providing them with assistance and programs that will help them counteract these feelings is crucial in these women's journey to self-transformation. They require gender-specific programs that addresses the myriad of challenges they face, including, substance abuse, mental health, and education and job training (Crittenden & Koons-Witt, 2017). Incarcerated mothers participating in this study are concerned with their abilities to provide for themselves and their children once released. Additionally, some are also insecure about their ability to refrain from drug use when faced with difficult times. While these are issues that all incarcerated women face once they return to the community, they are intensified for mothers because they are connected to their ability to return to their children.

It is well known that financial concerns are a major barrier to parenting services, however, the opposition of the administration and the institution of corrections may be an even bigger obstacle. The institution of corrections' emphasis on confinement and control leaves little room for sentiment about incarcerated mothers and their relationship with their children. Therefore, there needs to be a focus on educating and re-socializing the institution of correction and society at large in order to give these mothers a fighting chance of rehabilitating. So much of the harm captured in this research might be avoided by actually redirecting funds and resources to support women and mothers in communities and potentially in other kinds of institutions if need be (for example, rehab).

Limitations

The 38 mothers interviewed in this study lasted an average of only 30 minutes. The mothers were asked questions about their experiences, however the mothers' desires to discuss a specific topic determined how much information was gained about a specific issue. Consequently, some aspects of their experiences were not obtained in detail. One example of this is how the mothers cope with the effects of incarceration on their mother identity.

While it is usually assumed that the typical image of an incarcerated mother is a minority mother, the population from the jails and of my research participants painted a different picture. Thirty-one of the mothers in the sample were white and only 7 were non-white. Enos (2001) found that race plays a large role in the prison experience for mothers and their families. Thus, the homogeneous racial sample is a potential limitation as it underrepresents the experiences of non-white mothers.

It is important to note though, that Kentucky's racial composition differs greatly from that of the nation. In 2019, Kentucky's white population was 87.5% and their black population was 8.5% (United States Census Bureau, 2019). Another important aspect is that jail growth is on the rise nationally—especially so in Kentucky—fueled in large part by rural communities. This includes growing numbers of white women.

While the homogeneous sample is definitely a limitation, it is worthy to mention, though, that it is very unique to have a predominately white sample, as most of this kind of research has been conducted with Black populations. White mothers, especially those from rural areas, have been an understudied population in this

specific area of criminological research. Therefore, although not intentional, the results from this study explore a group of incarcerated mothers that is not widely studied. I now turn to some suggestions for future research.

<center>Directions for Future Research</center>

This exploratory study has resulted in implications for future research. As discussed in the previous section, the small sample size and time constraints hindered the collection of more detailed experiences from more members of the target population. Thus, future studies would benefit from larger samples, longer interviews, and possibly additional follow-up conversations. It would also be useful to include items to explore how incarcerated mothers cope with the negative effects of incarceration on their mother identity and whether their experiences and perceptions vary by characteristics such as race.

Additionally, given the need to improve supports to incarcerated mothers, there needs to be more knowledge about access to existing programs, as well as how beneficial these mothers find current applicable programs that are offered. Tying this into incarcerated mothers' self-perception, the connections between women's self-conceptions about motherhood and their exposure to certain kinds of treatment and programming should also be further explored. We know considerable in-prison programming approaches parenting, drug abuse, etc. from a fairly conservative, moralizing and responsibilizing position, eschewing any kind of political or structural analysis for a narrower self-help and individualized approach. In that sense, it would be worthy to try and track the ways that women are "taught" not just how to be

mothers but how to think about motherhood or themselves as mothers, i.e., not just

receive parenting classes but actually the ideological training in what makes a "good

mother" and why they aren't one.

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