



Parenting and the association between maternal criminal justice involvement and adolescent delinquency[☆]

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ABSTRACT

The high rate of adult criminal justice involvement in the United States has resulted in many unintended consequences for families of offenders. Families involved with the criminal justice system are disproportionately involved with the child welfare system, and adolescents involved in both systems (i.e., dual system involvement) exhibit higher levels of delinquency. Yet, a lack of research exists on dual system involvement and the effects on youth. The current study leveraged nationally representative and longitudinal data of families involved in the child welfare system to examine whether maternal criminal justice involvement predicted increases in youth delinquency. An ecological model tested the effects of maternal justice involvement beyond cumulative risks as well as the potential buffer of parental monitoring and non-violent discipline on system involvement. Results suggested child welfare-involved youth exhibited similar levels of delinquency over time, regardless of maternal justice involvement. Although youth with maternal justice involvement reported more parental monitoring, the level of monitoring mattered more for youth without maternal justice involvement who exhibited decreased delinquency in the presence of high parental monitoring compared to low monitoring. The differential pattern of association between parental monitoring and youth delinquency for dual-system involved families suggests they are distinct and may carry implications for treatment response aimed at delinquency reduction through parent training. These findings underscore the importance of interagency coordination around policy and interventions to identify these high risk families at risk of slipping through the cracks of multiple service involvement.

1. Introduction

The prison population in the United States is the largest in the world and continues to grow at the highest rate compared to other countries (Walmsley, 2013). Reforms in US criminal justice policies in the 1980s and 1990s, including mandatory sentencing laws, have increased the number of people coming into contact with the criminal justice system and lengthened prison sentences (Phillips, Dettlaff, & Baldwin, 2010). Approximately one in thirty-two adults in the United States is under some form of correctional supervision, including parole (Glaze, 2010). This expansion of the criminal justice system has been associated with unintended consequences for youth and families (Travis & Waul, 2003). The most recent survey on parental incarceration among state and federal inmates found that 809,800 had minor children, an increase of 79% between 1991 and 2007 (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). It is estimated that 2.3% of American youth have been affected by the

incarceration of a parent (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). The growing trend of parental involvement within the criminal justice system poses a serious public problem, especially given evidence of intergenerational transmission of crime and incarceration (Dallaire, 2007; Huebner & Gustafson, 2007; Murray & Farrington, 2005).

A link between parental incarceration and antisocial and delinquent behavior in youth is well established in the literature (Giordano, 2010; Swisher & Roettger, 2011). When interpreting and comparing the results of these studies it is important to note that there are differences in the operationalization and use of these key terms. The term parental incarceration can range across the spectrum of criminal justice involvement from the detainment by law enforcement authorities in a local jail to the serving of extended sentences in state or federal penitentiaries. The use of antisocial, delinquent, or deviant behaviors generally refers to problem externalizing behaviors that violate established social norms or laws (e.g., persistent lying, criminal behavior) (Murray,

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Farrington, & Sekol, 2012; Rutter, Giller, & Hagell, 1998). The choice of term, operationalization, and measurement varies across studies but nonetheless captures the underlying construct of social norm violation. For the sake of clarity, the term delinquency will be used in this article. A meta-analysis of 40 studies including nearly 45,000 youth found direct effects of parental incarceration on youth delinquency behaviors and no significant influence on other mental health problems, substance abuse, or academic outcomes (Murray et al., 2012). The effect on behavioral problems remained despite the inclusion of key covariates, which confirmed prior research that showed a unique influence of parental incarceration and arrest (Huebner & Gustafson, 2007; Murray & Farrington, 2005). The unique relation between parental incarceration and delinquency in adulthood also emerged in a longitudinal study of mothers and their children in the US (Huebner & Gustafson, 2007). Using prospective assessments of justice involvement in a representative sample, incarcerated mothers were identified within a cohort of adolescents and young adults in 1979 and followed over 15 years, and the children's justice involvement in adulthood was assessed 21 years after the baseline assessment. Adult children of incarcerated mothers were significantly more likely to have been convicted of a crime or been on probation than the adult children of mothers who were not incarcerated. Results showed maternal absence increased the chance of conviction by 75% and that males were 3.5 times more likely to have been convicted of a crime or served time on probation.

A number of theories on the relation between parental incarceration and youth delinquency exist. Some have emphasized the direct experience of parental incarceration, such as attachment disruptions, family strain related to lost income and time spent caregiving, and the modeling of delinquent behaviors (Murray, Bijleveld, Farrington, & Loeber, 2014). Other theories focused on parental incarceration as an indicator of risk that existed prior to the event of incarceration, including shared genetic risk for delinquent behaviors, limited capacity for quality parenting, and shared exposure of neighborhood conditions that promote delinquent behavior (Arditti, 2005; Murray & Farrington, 2005). Cumulative risks models have suggested adversity experienced across multiple developmental domains overwhelms individual and environmental capacities for healthy adaptation (Rutter, 1987; Sameroff, Bartko, Baldwin, Baldwin, & Seifer, 1998). Many factors that co-occur with parental incarceration, including poverty, family disruptions, caregiver mental health, and substance abuse, are also associated with youth delinquency (Phillips et al., 2010; Seymour, 1998); thus, elevated delinquency may reflect the accumulation of these life stressors rather than parental incarceration, per se.

Although few empirical studies have compared theories, one longitudinal study of boys (Murray & Farrington, 2005) living in a working class neighborhood of London examined whether the effects of parental incarceration were explained by the associated parent-child separation. Boys whose parents were incarcerated at different times in childhood were compared to boys separated for other reasons and boys never separated from their parents. Parental incarceration predicted delinquent problems in adulthood beyond other separations and other individual-, parenting-, and family-risk factors; effects were similar whether the event occurred before birth or during childhood. Findings supported theories emphasizing the event of incarceration, as well as preexisting risks. More recent theoretical conceptualizations have adapted the ecological systems theory to explain direct and indirect effects of parental incarceration on delinquency (Arditti, 2005; Murray et al., 2012; Murray et al., 2014). Ecological factors prior to parental incarceration have been theorized to combine with the event to determine propensity for maladaptive behavioral outcomes. Models have emphasized the presence of risks and supports occurring across bidirectional, interdependent developmental contexts in determining behavioral adaptation (Arditti, 2012; Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The proximal influence of family relationships suggests parental functioning plays a critical role in youth maladjustment (Arditti, 2005). In a meta-analysis

of 161 published and unpublished manuscripts, negative aspects of parenting (e.g., neglect, hostility, and rejection) and poor supervision (low levels of active parental monitoring, parental knowledge, and child disclosure) were strongly linked to delinquency (Hoeve et al., 2009). This is in accordance with the results of a previous meta-analysis which found parental rejection and poor supervision as being among the best predictors of delinquency (Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986). Conversely, positive parenting behaviors (i.e., nonviolent alternatives to corporal punishment such as active parental monitoring, explanation, and consistent discipline) have been associated with lower levels of delinquency (Forehand, Miller, Dutra, & Chance, 1997; Griffin, Botvin, Scheier, Diaz, & Miller, 2000; Simons, Chao, Conger, & Elder, 2001). For example, in a study examining a sample of families referred to treatment for antisocial boys, Forgatch (1988; as cited in Patterson, DeBaryshe, & Ramsey, 1989) found that changes in parental discipline and monitoring significantly reduced delinquency in the boys compared to families who did not change these parenting dimensions.

Research on incarceration and parenting has focused on parenting disruptions as a risk factor related to delinquency. Parents with criminal histories have exhibited lower levels of effective parenting and higher rates of child maltreatment and neglect (Kjellstrand & Eddy, 2011; Phillips et al., 2010; Seymour, 1998). One-third of the families investigated for child maltreatment have had a primary caregiver arrested at least once (Phillips & Dettlaff, 2007), and one in eight had been arrested in the past 12 months (Phillips, Burns, Wagner, & Barth, 2004). Extensive literature has demonstrated associations among youth behavioral problems, ineffective parenting, and child welfare involvement (Burns et al., 2004; Dishion & McMahon, 1998; Hoeve et al., 2009; Patterson et al., 1989). Additionally, research has demonstrated that maltreated youth have been shown to be at increased risk of adverse outcomes, including internalizing and externalizing symptoms in adolescence and alcoholism and depression in adulthood (Anda et al., 2002; Moylan et al., 2010). However, less is known about the association between parental incarceration and parenting among child welfare-involved families (Lee, Fang, & Luo, 2013).

A policy relevant question remains whether youth delinquency associated with parental incarceration functions through deficits in parenting or accumulation of other multilevel risks. Significant overlap between families involved in the criminal justice and child welfare systems suggests potential for intervention. Families in contact with the child welfare system might benefit from tailored screening and intervention. The presence of evidence-based policy and interventions to promote positive parenting practices emphasizes the importance of the question. However, empirical investigation needs to probe the nature of the relationship.

The present study takes advantage of longitudinal data available on a nationally representative sample of families investigated for child abuse and neglect. The data provide an opportunity to examine the extent to which caregivers in the child welfare system report previous justice involvement, as well as change in youth delinquency over time. Using ecological systems theory, models investigate whether maternal justice involvement represents a unique threat for delinquent behavior in the context of accumulated risk at multiple levels and developmental domains. Maternal justice involvement included families with a history of maternal arrest rather than incarceration because they represent a larger at-risk group compared to the small subset of families having had mothers in prison. Empirical evidence has consistently demonstrated that parental arrest is associated with increased exposure to risk factors compared to youth in the general and high risk populations, including parental substance abuse, parental mental health problems, and domestic violence (Dannerbeck, 2005; Farrington, Jolliffe, Loeber, Stouthamer-Loeber, & Kalb, 2001; Murray & Farrington, 2005; Phillips et al., 2004; Phillips, Burns, Wagner, Kramer, & Robbins, 2002; Phillips, Erkanli, Keeler, Costello, & Angold, 2006). Additionally, the role of parenting is investigated; ecological theory suggests positive parenting could buffer the effects of maternal justice involvement, however, this

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