

## **Parenting Perception of Incarcerated Mothers**

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Raising children has always been a challenging experience, but for women who are incarcerated there are additional challenges. While they are in prison, incarcerated mothers miss the opportunity to be involved in the day-to-day lives of their children. The consequences of their illegal activities have taken them out of society into the criminal justice system. Since 2000, the female jail, prison, and probation population has grown faster than the male correctional population (Glaze & Kaeble, 2014). According to Bloom, Owen, and Covington (2005) the average female offender is under the age of 35 years, a member of an ethnic minority, divorced or never married, poorly educated, unemployed or underemployed, and on welfare prior to incarceration. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the effectiveness of a parenting class that teaches incarcerated females autonomy, social competence, interdependence, problem solving, and resiliency. The goals of the intervention for incarcerated mothers were to enhance their parenting skills so that when they leave prison they can share what they learn with their children and apply those skills to their own recovery. The focus of the study was to determine if a parenting class taught to incarcerated mothers would improve the constructs of expectations, empathy, corporal punishment, role responsibilities, and development of children's value and independence and how they relate to effective parenting.

### **Participants and Methods**

The prison where this research was conducted houses 1000 prisoners, 500 men and 500 women. Approximately 350 of the female offenders have children. Of the 350 female offenders with children, 90 participants were randomly selected to participate in the study. Thirty participants each were assigned to the intervention group (parenting class), the life skills class, and the control group (no parenting class or life skills class). The Adult Adolescent Parenting Inventory (AAPI - 2) was used to study the impact of the parenting curriculum on the offending mothers who took the class. A control group and offenders in the Life Skills program also completed the AAPI - 2 and their pre and post scores were compared to those of the offenders who participated in the parenting project. Offenders in the control group and Life Skills class were offered the opportunity to participate in the parenting classes, but the class was delayed until the data for this research had been collected.

### **Treatment Groups**

Parenting Intervention Program: Designed to help the offender focus their attention on the needs of their children. Taught resourcefulness, initiative, planning skills, and how to ask for and receive help. Involved at least one face to face visitation with the child.

Life Skills Class: Intended to help the offender learn how to become competent adults and better prepare them to return to society.

Control Group: Offenders who have children and have not participated in any parenting classes or Life Skills classes at this facility.

### **Outcomes**

Multivariate analysis of variance used numerical values collected for all three groups to generate a test of within-subjects contrast in each of the five constructs of expectations, empathy, corporal punishment, role responsibilities, and development of children's value. Results indicated a significant improvement (0.05 level or higher) for all constructs with the exception of corporal punishment. In the years prior to being incarcerated, many of the offenders in this study neglected or rejected their children.

Now, many of the offender mothers are frightened at the prospect of going back to their role as a parent to their children. They are apprehensive about their ability to perform that role and do not want to fall back into the ineffective parenting practices of the past. This research was conducted to determine the effectiveness of this training and to see if it could serve as a model for similar programs in female prisons elsewhere. Findings suggest that a parenting class offered to offender mothers would be beneficial in helping them be prepared to reenter society as a mother to their child.

### **References**

- Bloom, B., Owen, B. & Covington, S. (2005). *Gender-responsive strategies*. Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Corrections, U.S. Department of Justice.
- Glaze, L.E., & Kaeble, D. (2014). *Correctional populations in the United States*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics.