A Systematic Review of Women Involved in the Criminal Justice System: Intersections with Intimate Partner Violence and the Child Welfare System

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Abstract

In 2017 there were approximately 1.3 million women in the United States involved in the criminal justice system (i.e., in jails, prisons, or on probation or parole). Many women who are in the correctional system have experienced high rates of trauma, such as child maltreatment, intimate partner violence, and mental illness. Such experiences contribute to higher rates of incarceration, as well as a higher likelihood of involvement with the child welfare system. To date, research has examined justice-involved women's own experiences with the child welfare system, finding women with early experiences in foster care had higher rates of re-incarceration. Additionally, justice-involved women may experience higher rates of child welfare involvement with their own children. An estimated 60 percent of women in prison have a child under the age of 18, and previous research has found incarceration increases the likelihood of mothers losing custody of their children.

In the current study, we will conduct a systematic review to examine how women's involvement in the criminal justice system intersects with the child welfare system. Additionally, we will examine programs designed to help stabilize the lives of justice-involved mothers and their children. We aim to synthesize the current literature of these intersecting systems and to illuminate ways the systems can become better coordinated. This review also could inform and guide the criminal justice system in strengthening supports to women offenders who are mothers, and who have had a history of child welfare involvement.
A Systematic Review of Widening the Scope of Partner Violence and the Child

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BACKGROUND

In the United States, approximately 219,000 women were incarcerated in 2012.

- Childhood victimization and intimate partner violence are predictors of being involved in the criminal justice system.
- Four out of five incarcerated women are mothers – two-thirds of the mothers in prison are young mothers, and 50% of incarcerated women have children under the age of 8. Mothers are often the primary caregiver to children prior to the mother’s incarceration. When mothers are incarcerated, children are forced into out-of-home care (foster care, kinship care, other residential care).
- According to the United States Government Accounting Office (2000), approximately 14,000 children entering out-of-home care as a result of their mother’s incarceration (Greene, Haney, Hurtado 2000).
always an individual is led into this cycle, the theory helps to understand the structural factors and social structures that facilitate these crimes, and violence against women.

Given demographics around incarceration, women and child welfare services are more likely for women, especially those incarcerated.

- Studies have primarily focused on the impact of maternal incarceration on children, but have largely ignored the impact on the mothers themselves.
- Maternal incarceration is associated with several negative outcomes, including depression, anxiety, delinquency, etc.
- Because of the disparate impact American policies have on African Americans, they perpetuate racial inequalities across generations.
- Far more African American women are incarcerated than white women.

In the current study, we conducted a systematic review to examine the research on the intimate partner violence and victimization in incarcerated women.


