PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTING PRACTICES OF INCARCERATED FATHERS WHO HAVE RECEIVED PARENT TRAINING AND THOSE WHO HAVE NOT IN A FEDERAL PRISON IN A NORTHEASTERN URBAN COMMUNITY IN THE USA.

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In the USA federal prison system there are thousands of incarcerated fathers. The impact of incarceration on the parent-child relationship could have devastating effects (behavioral, social, and psychological) for a lifetime for both the parent and the child. The federal prison system in the USA mandates parenting programs for inmates and many incarcerated fathers struggle to develop or maintain positive relationships with their children during and after incarceration. Many incarcerated fathers have limited parenting skills and others may not know how to actively parent from prison to maintain or develop a positive relationship with their child.

This study compared the perceptions of parenting practices of incarcerated fathers who have received parent training to those who have not in a federal prison in a northeastern urban community in the USA. Further, this study investigated the relationship of the parenting practices to ethnicity, educational attainment, and fathers relationship with the child/children’s’ mother(s).

The inmates were housed in a dormitory or in prison cells with two bunk beds. Each housing unit housed up to 122 inmates. The prison population consisted of male and female offenders. Male and female offenders were not housed on the same units and they were not permitted to participate in programs together. This study included White, Black, Asian and Hispanic descent inmates. The study focused on male parents. The parenting training was held in a room decorated with pictures relative to the topic. The parenting training program included topics from “The Role of a Father” curriculum, which focused on five dimensions; discipline, communication, financial literacy, respect and the effects of incarceration.

There were 60 respondents in the study, 30 participants and 30 non participants. The study consisted of two groups, one treatment group and one control group. All of the groups were administered a pre test and post test survey. There was a five week period between the pre and post tests. A mixed methodology was employed. To garner quantitative data a pre and post test survey using a five point Likert Scale was administered to assess how incarcerated fathers rated specific parenting practices using, strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat agree, agree, or strongly agree. Specific parenting practices were assessed by identifying how they were rated by incarcerated males using a 43 item Likert Scale survey.
After receiving responses from the survey, a factor analysis was performed to obtain a clearer distinction among the initial dimensions. The refined dimensions in this study were parent-child interactions, discipline and financial literacy. Analysis of the data was presented through reliability analysis, descriptive statistics, t tests and match pair.

The findings in this study indicated that the respondents had high levels of education; thirty-seven percent of the participants and sixty-three percent of the non participants attended or graduated from college. A pre test, post test comparison showed a significant gain in the mean scores of participants in the dimensions of parent-child interactions and financial literacy. The results of the match pair showed a statistically significant gain on the participants mean scores for the parent-child interactions and discipline dimension when comparing the pre test and the post test. To garner qualitative data a panel of four participants who successfully completed the program were interviewed. Participants responded to two open-ended questions. Analysis of the qualitative questions indicated it may be beneficial for prison based parenting programs to include topics such as intergenerational incarceration, children of inmates, parenting during reentry, and the pain of an incarcerated parent.

Educators and members of the community need to understand the impact incarceration has on the family. With over 700,000 fathers in prison, research is needed to assist these men with parenting skills so they can actively parent while incarcerated and through the reentry phase and back into the community. This study provided incarcerated fathers with parenting skills that could be utilized during incarceration and during the reentry back into the community.

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