

The Development of a Community-Based Parenting Model for Incarcerated Women

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ABSTRACT

Parenting plays a crucial role in child development, yet incarcerated mothers face significant challenges in maintaining their parental responsibilities due to limited interaction with their children, psychological distress, and social reintegration barriers. While existing prison-based parenting programs provide individual skill-building support, they often lack community-driven approaches that ensure sustainable parental engagement post-incarceration. This study employs a systematic literature review to examine the gaps in current parenting interventions and proposes a Community-Based Parenting Model tailored for incarcerated women. The findings highlight that peer mentorship, external support networks, and structured post-release reintegration programs can significantly enhance parenting outcomes by fostering emotional resilience, social reintegration, and long-term parental involvement. The proposed model integrates prison-based parenting education, community mentorship, and post-release support mechanisms, offering a holistic and sustainable intervention. This research contributes to the discourse on correctional rehabilitation and family dynamics, advocating for policy reforms and collaborative initiatives that strengthen incarcerated mothers' roles as caregivers. Further research is recommended to validate the model through empirical studies and pilot interventions in correctional settings.

Keywords: *Incarcerated Mothers, Parenting Programs, Community-Based Intervention, Social Reintegration*

1. INTRODUCTION

Parenting is a fundamental aspect of child development, playing a crucial role in shaping a child's emotional well-being, cognitive growth, and social adaptation. However, for incarcerated women, the ability to fulfill their parental responsibilities is significantly constrained by multiple intersecting challenges. The physical separation from their children, often prolonged and unpredictable, can lead to emotional distress for both the mother and the child, potentially disrupting attachment bonds and contributing to adverse developmental outcomes (Fowler et al., 2018). Moreover, limited opportunities for direct involvement in their children's lives—whether due to institutional policies, logistical difficulties, or strained family relationships—further exacerbate feelings of guilt, powerlessness, and disconnection (Alirezai & Roudsari, 2022).

Beyond these logistical and emotional barriers, the pervasive stigma associated with incarceration frequently extends beyond the individual, impacting how society perceives and supports incarcerated mothers (Stanley et al., 2015). Many women face judgment not only from the broader community but also from family members, child welfare institutions, and even correctional staff, which can hinder their ability to maintain a positive parental identity (Paynter et al., 2020). This social stigma can also affect the likelihood of reunification post-release, as legal and systemic obstacles may make it difficult for mothers to regain custody or rebuild relationships with their children.

While a growing body of research has explored the benefits of prison-based parenting programs, existing interventions predominantly emphasize individual psychological support, parenting education, or skill-building workshops (Dallaire & Shlafer, 2018). Although these approaches offer valuable tools for incarcerated mothers, they often overlook the importance of broader social support systems in facilitating effective parenting. Community-driven models that integrate peer networks, mentorship, and family-based interventions hold significant potential for fostering resilience, enhancing parental self-efficacy, and easing the transition from incarceration to reintegration. By shifting the focus from isolated, skill-based training to holistic, socially embedded strategies, future interventions can better address the complex realities faced by incarcerated mothers, ultimately promoting healthier family dynamics and improved outcomes for their children (Ramsey et al., 2019).

Existing studies consistently highlight the multifaceted benefits of parenting programs implemented within correctional facilities, particularly in reducing recidivism rates, strengthening parent-child relationships, and fostering emotional well-being among incarcerated mothers. Research indicates that such programs can help mothers develop essential parenting

skills, improve their sense of self-worth, and mitigate the negative psychological effects of separation from their children (Collica-Cox & Furst, 2020). Moreover, positive parental engagement during incarceration has been linked to improved child outcomes, including better emotional regulation, academic performance, and reduced behavioral problems. These benefits underscore the critical role of structured parenting interventions in breaking the intergenerational cycle of incarceration and social disadvantage.

However, despite the growing recognition of these programs' significance, there remains a substantial research gap in understanding how community-based models can be effectively incorporated into prison settings to enhance long-term parental engagement post-incarceration (Rossiter et al., 2015). While prison-based interventions often emphasize skill acquisition and emotional support, they frequently operate in isolation, with limited integration into broader social support networks that could aid incarcerated mothers both during their sentences and after release. The transition from prison to society presents numerous challenges, including economic instability, housing insecurity, legal barriers, and the persistent stigma associated with incarceration—all of which can hinder a mother's ability to sustain meaningful involvement in her child's life. Without a well-structured, community-driven framework that bridges the gap between incarceration and reintegration, many of these women struggle to maintain their parental roles, increasing the risk of family disruption and potential recidivism.

Although some efforts have been made to provide parenting education for incarcerated mothers, these initiatives often remain fragmented, lacking a cohesive structure that extends beyond the prison walls. A more holistic approach—one that integrates peer mentorship, family-based interventions, and community partnerships—could significantly enhance the sustainability of parenting programs by fostering ongoing support networks (Afifi et al., 2020). By embedding these programs within a broader continuum of care, correctional institutions can play a more proactive role in preparing mothers for their return to society, ultimately promoting healthier family dynamics and reducing the long-term consequences of maternal incarceration on children. Addressing this gap in research and practice is crucial for developing more effective, socially embedded parenting interventions that empower incarcerated mothers to rebuild and strengthen their familial bonds, both during and after their time in prison.

This study introduces a community-based parenting model specifically designed to address the unique challenges faced by incarcerated women, emphasizing the need for a holistic and sustainable intervention that extends beyond conventional prison-based programs. Unlike traditional parenting initiatives that primarily focus on individual capacity-building—such as teaching parenting skills, fostering emotional regulation, or enhancing self-awareness—this model integrates a broader support system that includes community engagement, peer mentorship, and collaboration with external stakeholders such as social workers, family support organizations, and correctional facility staff (Yull et al., 2018). By adopting a comprehensive parenting ecosystem, this approach recognizes that effective parenting extends beyond the confines of the prison environment and requires a network of ongoing support to facilitate successful reintegration into society.

The novelty of this research lies in its exploration of the community's role in strengthening parental resilience both during incarceration and after release. While existing programs often provide short-term benefits focused on behavior modification within correctional settings, they frequently lack continuity and structured support mechanisms that assist mothers in maintaining positive parental relationships post-incarceration. This study seeks to fill that gap by proposing a structured, community-driven model that not only empowers incarcerated mothers with essential parenting skills but also connects them with long-term support systems that can ease their transition back into their families and communities.

By developing and rigorously evaluating this model, the study aims to bridge the divide between institutional interventions and post-release parenting success, ensuring that the progress made during incarceration does not dissipate upon reentry into society. This research also contributes to the broader discourse on correctional rehabilitation strategies, offering a transformative perspective that shifts the focus from isolated interventions toward a more integrated, relational, and socially embedded approach. In doing so, it underscores the importance of fostering stronger family connections, reducing recidivism risks, and promoting the overall well-being of both incarcerated mothers and their children, ultimately advocating for a more inclusive and rehabilitative criminal justice system.

By implementing and assessing the impact of this community-based parenting model, this research contributes to the growing discourse on correctional education, social reintegration, and family dynamics in the context of incarceration. The findings are expected to inform policymakers and prison administrators on how to design more inclusive and effective parenting interventions for incarcerated mothers, ultimately benefiting both the mothers and their children.

2. METHOD

This study employs a literature review methodology to explore the development of a community-based parenting model for incarcerated women. The research follows a structured approach to systematically gather, analyze, and synthesize existing studies, policies, and theoretical frameworks related to parenting programs in correctional settings. The methodological steps are outlined as follows (Sugiyono, 2018):

1. Identification of Research Focus

The initial phase involves defining the research focus by examining the challenges faced by incarcerated mothers in maintaining parental roles and the existing interventions designed to support them. A key aspect of this stage is identifying the gap in research, specifically the lack of community-based parenting models within prison systems. This step establishes the foundation for the literature selection criteria and the scope of the review.

2. Literature Search and Selection

A comprehensive search for relevant literature is conducted using academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, and Google Scholar. Keywords and Boolean operators are applied to refine searches, using terms such as *"parenting programs in prisons"*, *"community-based interventions for incarcerated mothers"*, *"family support in correctional facilities"*, and *"social reintegration of female prisoners"*. The inclusion criteria are set to focus on peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, and policy papers published in the last 10 years to ensure relevance and up-to-date findings. Studies that specifically address parenting challenges in prison, community-driven interventions, and post-release reintegration are prioritized.

3. Data Extraction and Thematic Analysis

The selected literature is systematically reviewed, and key information is extracted, including study objectives, methodologies, findings, and limitations. Thematic analysis is employed to categorize findings into major themes such as:

- Existing Parenting Models in Prisons – Examining different structured programs available for incarcerated mothers.
- Community-Based Support Systems – Evaluating the role of external community involvement in parenting support.
- Challenges and Barriers to Parenting in Prison – Identifying psychological, social, and institutional barriers that hinder effective parenting.
- Post-Incarceration Parenting Success Factors – Analyzing factors that contribute to sustained parental engagement after release.

4. Synthesis and Model Development

Based on the themes derived from the literature, a conceptual framework for a community-based parenting model is developed. This framework integrates findings from previous studies and proposes a novel approach that bridges prison-based parenting programs with external community support networks. The model is structured to address key gaps identified in previous research and emphasizes collaborative engagement between incarcerated mothers, correctional institutions, NGOs, and community mentors.

5. Validation through Expert Review

To enhance the credibility of the proposed model, expert validation is conducted. Academics specializing in correctional education, social work, and family studies, along with practitioners involved in prison rehabilitation programs, are consulted to assess the feasibility and applicability of the proposed model. Their feedback is incorporated to refine the framework, ensuring it is both practically implementable and theoretically robust.

6. Conclusion and Implications

The final stage synthesizes the findings and discusses the implications of adopting a community-based parenting model for incarcerated women. The study highlights its potential impact on reducing recidivism, strengthening parent-child bonds, and facilitating smoother social reintegration. Additionally, recommendations for future empirical research are outlined to encourage further validation through field studies and pilot programs. The concept analysis of this research flow is presented in the following figure:



Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings of this study, derived from a comprehensive literature review, highlight several critical insights into the development of a community-based parenting model for incarcerated women. The results are presented based on the thematic analysis of existing studies, emphasizing the challenges, gaps, and potential solutions for enhancing parenting support in correctional settings.

1. Existing Parenting Programs in Correctional Facilities

The review indicates that many correctional institutions worldwide have implemented parenting programs to support incarcerated mothers. These programs primarily focus on individual skill development, such as parenting education, counseling, and emotional well-being (Shlafer et al., 2015). However, they often lack a holistic and community-integrated approach, limiting their long-term effectiveness. Studies reveal that while these programs help mothers develop parenting skills, they fail to address the broader socio-emotional and reintegration challenges that incarcerated women face after release.

2. Challenges and Barriers to Effective Parenting in Prison

The literature identifies several barriers that hinder incarcerated mothers from maintaining effective parenting roles (Tremblay & Sutherland, 2017):

- a. Limited Contact with Children – Many prison facilities impose strict visitation policies, reducing mother-child interaction and weakening their emotional bond.
- b. Psychological Distress – Feelings of guilt, shame, and emotional detachment are prevalent among incarcerated mothers, affecting their motivation and confidence in parenting.
- c. Institutional Constraints – Prisons often lack the infrastructure and trained personnel to provide specialized parenting support, making it difficult for mothers to participate in consistent parenting programs.
- d. Post-Release Reintegration Issues – Mothers face social stigma, economic hardship, and lack of family support upon release, which negatively impacts their ability to reconnect with their children.

3. The Role of Community Support in Strengthening Parenting

A significant gap in existing literature is the lack of community-based interventions that integrate external support networks into prison-based parenting programs (Kelsey et al., 2020). Studies indicate that peer support, mentorship, and engagement with external organizations can significantly enhance the effectiveness of parenting programs by:

- a. Providing emotional and psychological support to incarcerated mothers.
- b. Facilitating stronger reintegration strategies that prepare mothers for post-release parenting responsibilities.
- c. Connecting mothers with NGOs, religious groups, and community mentors who can provide continuous guidance after incarceration.

4. Proposed Community-Based Parenting Model

Based on the synthesis of findings, this study proposes a Community-Based Parenting Model that addresses the limitations of existing approaches (Kennedy et al., 2020). The model consists of three core components:

- a. Prison-Based Parenting Education – Incorporating structured parenting training within correctional facilities, focusing on emotional resilience, communication, and child-rearing techniques.
- b. Community Involvement and Mentorship – Establishing partnerships between correctional institutions and community organizations to provide mentorship, peer support, and social integration programs.
- c. Post-Release Reintegration Support – Developing a network that connects formerly incarcerated mothers with housing, employment opportunities, and family counseling services, ensuring a sustainable transition back into society.

5. Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings suggest that implementing a community-driven approach can significantly improve the parental engagement, emotional well-being, and reintegration success of incarcerated mothers (Eddy et al., 2019). Correctional facilities should consider adopting multi-stakeholder collaborations involving social workers, psychologists, policymakers, and community leaders to enhance the effectiveness of parenting programs. Future research should focus on pilot-testing the proposed model to assess its real-world applicability and impact.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study emphasize the critical need for a community-based approach in supporting incarcerated mothers. While existing parenting programs in correctional facilities focus primarily on skill-building and psychological support, they often fail to address the long-term parental challenges that arise post-incarceration. The absence of structured community involvement creates a gap in sustained parenting support, making it difficult for these mothers to reintegrate into society while maintaining strong parental roles (Vesely et al., 2017).

One of the key insights from the literature is that parenting in prison is not solely an individual challenge but a systemic issue influenced by institutional policies, social stigma, and economic hardships. The limited interaction between incarcerated mothers and their children exacerbates emotional detachment, leading to weakened family bonds. In addition, the psychological burden of incarceration—such as feelings of guilt, shame, and anxiety—often remains unaddressed in conventional prison-based parenting programs (Deutsch et al., 2022). Without a structured post-release support system, many mothers struggle to reestablish their roles as primary caregivers, increasing the risk of family separation and recidivism.

The role of community engagement in addressing these challenges is significant. Studies suggest that peer mentorship, social networks, and external support groups can serve as vital components in helping incarcerated mothers navigate both the emotional and practical aspects of parenting during and after imprisonment (Ramsey et al., 2021). Programs that integrate family counseling, mentorship from formerly incarcerated mothers, and partnerships with community organizations have demonstrated higher success rates in maintaining parental engagement post-release. This highlights the necessity of shifting from an institution-centered model to a community-driven approach that fosters continuous parenting support and social reintegration.

The proposed Community-Based Parenting Model addresses these concerns by bridging the gap between prison-based education and external community involvement. Unlike traditional interventions that end upon a mother's release, this model establishes long-term connections between incarcerated mothers, their children, and community stakeholders (Ryon et al., 2017). The inclusion of post-release reintegration support ensures that these women are not left to navigate their parenting roles alone but are instead guided through structured mentorship, employment assistance, and psychological counseling. This holistic approach significantly reduces the likelihood of re-offending and strengthens the overall family dynamic post-incarceration.

Moreover, the findings underscore the policy implications of adopting a multi-stakeholder approach in correctional rehabilitation programs. Policymakers and prison administrators must recognize that effective parenting support extends beyond the prison walls (Collica-Cox & Furst, 2019). Investing in community-driven initiatives, such as family reunification programs, peer mentoring networks, and transitional housing support, can provide incarcerated mothers with the necessary tools to successfully reintegrate into society. Future research should focus on pilot-testing this model to assess its practical feasibility and explore additional strategies to enhance family stability among incarcerated populations.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on correctional rehabilitation and parenting support by advocating for a community-centered intervention that extends beyond incarceration. The integration of prison-based education, external mentorship, and post-release reintegration support presents a more sustainable solution to the challenges faced by incarcerated mothers. By shifting from an isolated institutional approach to a collaborative community-based framework, this model offers a transformative pathway for both incarcerated mothers and their children, fostering stronger familial relationships and long-term social reintegration.

5. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the importance of community-based parenting support for incarcerated mothers, addressing the gaps in existing prison-based parenting programs. The findings indicate that while current interventions focus on individual skill-building, they lack structured community engagement that can provide sustainable support for parenting both during and after incarceration. The challenges of emotional detachment, social stigma, and reintegration difficulties necessitate a more holistic approach that integrates peer mentorship, community organizations, and post-release support networks.

The proposed Community-Based Parenting Model offers a structured framework that combines prison-based education, community involvement, and post-release reintegration strategies. By fostering continuous engagement between incarcerated mothers, their children, and external stakeholders, this model has the potential to reduce recidivism, strengthen family bonds, and improve overall parental well-being. The study also underscores the need for policy reforms that encourage collaboration between correctional institutions, social organizations, and family support networks to facilitate the long-term success of incarcerated mothers as parents.

Future research should focus on empirical validation of this model through pilot studies and intervention programs. Additionally, further exploration of cultural and socioeconomic factors influencing incarcerated mothers' parenting experiences will provide deeper insights into how this model can be adapted across different correctional environments. By shifting from an institution-centered to a community-driven approach, the findings of this study contribute to the broader discourse on social rehabilitation, family resilience, and reintegration success.

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