

The literature scan on families of incarcerated individuals will be divided into two sections. The first will look into the services that families require when an accused member is being processed by the courts while the second will look into the services that prisons may provide for families to cope with the incarceration of a family member.

Part 1: Court Based Services for Families of First-Time Offenders

1. Introduction

When a family member is arrested, families usually lack the understanding and access to information about the criminal justice process which provides a challenge to normal family functioning. Unless they are regular visitors to a correctional institution or have an extensive connection with prison family support groups, their knowledge of the correctional system policies and procedures will not be all-encompassing. Information about prison operations is obtained primarily from other families and through experiences. The dissemination of formal policies and regulations to families is not a standard correctional practice in most countries. In addition, family members are generally not able to speak with anyone in authority who is either able or willing to provide information about the prisoner's status or to explain and provide a rationale for rules, their varying interpretations or the most recent changes in policy application. Families seeking benefits and services for children cite similar confusion and frustration in understanding child welfare rules and regulations and the eligibility requirements and operating procedures of other human service systems (Pearson, 1999).

This literature scan examines the literature and services available overseas for families of first-time offenders. This review aims to contribute to the development of a more proactive, systematic and sustained approach to children and families in contact with the criminal justice system. It establishes the case for intervening with families of offenders during the court process and examines the different models currently being practised in different countries. Available literature shows that the courts in Australia provide an exhaustive and thorough service to families of offenders to provide early support and assistance. This paper will examine how court based services for families are implemented in Australia and how feasible is the adoption of some of the services in the Singapore context. This review will also look into some of the initiatives taken by countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States in assisting families when their loved ones are arrested for the very first time.

2. Attaching Services to the Court

Families of offenders experience significant social disadvantage and exclusion. Children of offenders are at heightened risk of experiencing parental drug and alcohol abuse, family violence, mental illness, poverty, housing instability, child abuse and social isolation (Flango, 2000). Growing up in a family with parental offending and contact with criminal justice systems can have profound adverse effects on life chances of children, compromising their future health and development, disrupting education, family relationships, social

engagement and community cohesion. Children of convicted parents go on to offend at higher rates than their peers (Flynn, 2015).

Despite their complex and varied needs for information and support, there is a lack of assistance and support available to families of offenders at the initial stage when the accused has been arrested. Early intervention is important at the moment the families and the offenders come into contact with the criminal justice system as it would provide accessibility to support the families at a series of critical transition points. Coordinated action is required in the planning and delivery of justice and community service initiatives to address, “the antecedents of antisocial and criminal behaviour, to reduce the individual and social burdens of crime in the immediate and longer term” (Ward, 2009).

Research has shown that earlier intervention with the children of adult offenders provides an important opportunity to break the cycle of intergenerational offending and reduce the social burden of criminal activity in the longer term (Flango, 2000). According to the Social Exclusion Unit (2002), supporting family relationships from the beginning, in this case the moment the person is arrested can reduce recidivism and assist the family and offenders to adapt successfully to the community post-release. It is important that an individual’s connections with family and a supportive network should be maintained from an early point of the sentence as they can prove difficult to re-establish once severed. It is more effective to work with families of offenders early in their contact with the criminal justice system than to intervene for the first time immediately before the offender is released (ibid.).

A criminal conviction can worsen the situation as social networks deteriorate, and stigma and media attention may force families to retreat from community or school life. Incarceration of a family member can leave families with a reduced income and added financial stress of supporting a prisoner by financing phone calls, legal costs and visits to prison over long distances (ibid.). Families may have no choice but to relocate, unable to meet rental or mortgage repayments. Without support, a breakdown in relationships is common. Changes in children’s care can mean major life adjustments for other parents, grandparents or other family members, such as young carers. Each may experience feelings of inadequacy and grief about losing a family member and their own freedom.

It is important that the family service and criminal justice systems have a shared interest in improving services for families involved with both systems. Provision of service at the point of contact with the courts can be particularly beneficial. With cross-sector collaboration, the appearance of a vulnerable family in court can be taken as an opportunity to provide vital support and intervention. A literature search on international practice reveals a range of services provided in other countries in achieving a multifaceted approach to children and families that spans key phases in the criminal justice system. These services are briefly discussed below.

2.1. Child-specific support

Several courts in the United States and United Kingdom have invested in specialized child mentoring and support services to deal with the impacts of parental offending and

incarceration. These services are responding to the specific issues facing children of prisoners. A range of services exist to help children adjust to the grief and loss of parental separation and divorce. These services include time-limited educational and information-based programs for children and programs involving therapeutic emotional support aimed at helping children deal with their feelings (O'Connor, 2004).

2.2 Family-focused decision-making

In most criminal jurisdictions, current judicial procedures do not typically consider the needs of children or families. Family impact should be a specific consideration in the sentencing process of an accused. This could take the form of an expanded pre-sentence investigation of the family unit and the potential impact of a particular sentence on children and other family members (Nesmith and Ruhland, 2008). Care planning for children of primary carers should be introduced at sentencing to ensure that the care and protection needs of children are identified and that alternative care arrangements are properly assessed (Hannon, 2006). Within England and Wales, judges have a discretionary right to request pre-sentence reports on the likely impact of a prison sentence on children.

2.3 Childcare in Courts

Several courts in the United States have introduced childcare services at the court to enable defendants and other family members to participate in the court process without children present (Hudson and Williams, 1995). These initiatives are most common in community justice centres and problem-oriented courts where they form part of a broader network of services for children and families of defendants.

3. Court based Services in Australia

This section will look into the different services provided by the courts across Australia. Family support services have been established at the different courts across Australia to provide crisis intervention, material support, community based outreach and assisted referral to high risk families of accused. It also offers a range of indirect service such as professional education within the court, capacity building in family services and advocacy, networking and partnering activities. These functions are considered integral to the success of the initiative in a complex court environment. A key aim of the service is to link families particularly the vulnerable, reluctant or hard to engage families with relevant community based supports. Significantly, the court based family support service will not work with families of victims where the primary court matters involve family violence or sexual assault against family members (Flango, 2000). These families will be referred to specialist family violence, sexual assault and victim support services.

The court based family support service is not designed to deliver ongoing case management, counselling or support services. Instead, the service forges partnerships with existing community based support services to facilitate referrals and over time enhance the capacity

of mainstream services to respond effectively to the specific needs of families in contact with the criminal justice system.

3.1 General information, referral and support services

A number of court services operating in Australia offer general information and support to court users. These services offer emotional support, information about the court process and passive or assisted referrals to community agencies such as community health centres and counselling services. The services rely largely on volunteers who approach court users on an ad hoc basis. These volunteers will also give out leaflets and brochures on the things to expect in the criminal justice system. Volunteers may accompany clients into the courtroom but do not provide legal advice. All court users can access this service but those who are unaware of such services are unlikely to be assisted unless a volunteer approaches them. Contact is one-off service and there is no follow up. The services have limited capacity to work with children. One of the well-established voluntary organisations in Australia is the Court Network which has a pool of volunteers around Australia that offer free non-legal information, support and referral service to all individuals, families and friends going to court. Most of the information for family members is available on their website so that family members can be well-prepared when they attend court with the offender.

3.2 Targeted information, referral and support services

In Australia, there are a number of service providers that offer information, referral and support services to targeted groups of court users including victims and witnesses of crime, child defendants and indigenous defendants. These services often employ professional staff and provide services that are tailored to the needs of the target group. However, contact with clients' families is usually limited to gathering information or enlisting the family's assistance in supporting the client. In most cases, the families are identified randomly by the service providers as there is no formal protocol to follow in identifying these families.

3.3 Court advice and defendant support

Some Australian jurisdictions have formally sanctioned support services that assist eligible defendants and provide advice to the court. Professional staff will support defendants on a time-limited basis by offering assessment, assisted referrals and case management. The services aim to divert eligible accused from the criminal justice system and ensure the court is informed of the client's personal circumstances and capacities. Some programs rely on the court to refer clients while others target clients randomly.

3.4 Court outreach and support

In some jurisdictions, court support services offer community based outreach to eligible court users. These services provide ongoing assistance beyond the court building and some may directly support families.

In Western Australia, the Parent Drug Information Service provides information, support, referrals and telephone counselling to parents of drug-using offenders. Clients may be parents of adults applying to a Drug Court program or parents of children appearing in the Children's Court. The service offers information about drug withdrawal and treatment options. Clients may be referred to family support groups, counselling services, domestic violence services and other community agencies. Workers who are usually volunteers maintain weekly contact with clients for at least three weeks.

3.5 Pilot study on Court based Service for Families

Recently, an organisation in Australia started a three-year pilot program in one of the Country Courts to provide an all-encompassing service for families of offenders the moment a loved one has to attend court. The Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (VACRO) is an organisation that adopts a through care approach, working with individuals, families and communities at the time of arrest, through court, in the prison system and as they transition safely back into community life. VACRO works with prisoners and their families as soon as they come into contact with the criminal justice system. In February 2013, VACRO launched a three year pilot program at the Geelong Magistrates Court which provides time-limited crisis intervention, community based outreach and assisted referral to high risk families of accused facing incarceration for individuals who are attending the Geelong Magistrates' Court. This program is designed to assist families especially those with dependent children aged 0-17 years of age who have a family member attending court for the first time. It collaborates with another organisation Family Links which uses criminal court as a gateway to treatment and support, reconnecting families with local services, maintaining connections between prisoners and their families and minimising harm arising from the court process and outcome. Family Links supports family members, friends and even neighbours – all part of an offender's support network. The service provides crisis intervention, brokerage support, community based outreach and assisted referral to the high risk families of those attending the Geelong Magistrates' Court. The evaluation of the project will take place at the end of 2016 (Ward, 2009).

4. Discussion and Suggestions

A review on previous literature in relation to the successful court collaboration with the different stakeholders highlights the need for an acknowledged court role in service coordination, strong judicial leadership and sponsorship of cross-sector collaboration, an active steering committee of stakeholders, centralised access by the courts to a community based service network and training and education to overcome the barriers of cross-sector collaboration. It is important for organisations which are implementing a court based service to families to gain strong support from relevant stakeholders and the criminal justice system. A key aim of a court based service is to link families with relevant community based support to ensure that they are able to adapt to the new changes in their lives. Some services that organisations in Singapore can consider offering at the court are highlighted below.

4.1 Use the court as a gateway to treatment and support

The court based family support service uses the courts to reach families at a time of crisis. It seeks to provide an additional safety net in the system of care for families, encouraging traditionally adult-focused criminal courts to become more child-centred and family-friendly in their approach. The court based family support service can provide timely, flexible, short-term interventions to address immediate issues arising from the court process. This may include liaison with housing authorities to ensure primary leaseholder arrangements are amended following incarceration of a family member; addressing immediate financial concerns; location of respite or short-term childcare; and liaison with school and early childhood services to explain the potential impact and repercussions of parental incarceration.

4.2 Assist in maintaining connections between prisoners and their families where appropriate

Strong family relationships are an established protective factor for offenders, reducing the probability of subsequent criminal behaviour. It is in the best interests of the children and other family members to maintain contact with a family member in custody, as it is important that this process is facilitated early in the sentence, before ties are severed. The court based family support service can provide families with a range of information and support services to enhance their connections with incarcerated family members. When it is not in the best interests of the child and family to maintain contact with incarcerated family members, support and referral can be provided to assist family members to deal with the grief, loss and trauma associated with intra-familial victimisation and family breakdown. Many families experience significant social stigma as a result of one member's criminality. Practical, social and emotional assistance can be provided to families to minimise the harms arising from the court appearance and its outcome. Information and material support are effective tools to engage families and can alleviate immediate hardship. This will in turn assist in building the credibility of the court based family support service by signalling its understanding of the family's needs, its positive intent and its capacity to solve problems quickly.

4.3 Providing childcare services

It is important to link families with community based, child-centred support services that will increase the family's exposure to professional support and monitoring. Having a childcare arrangement in the court is important as it allows affected families to attend the court sessions and also to receive support and assistance from suitable parties.

4.4 Providing information required on the criminal justice system

Organisations could consider offering emotional support, information about the court process and passive or assisted referrals to community agencies such as community health centres and counselling services. This service can rely on volunteers who can approach court

users with brochures on the criminal justice system. Volunteers may accompany clients into the courtroom but do not provide legal advice.

5. Potential challenges

It is likely that a significant number of families would decline such assistance detailed above. According to Ward (2009), barriers to participation may include a fear of statutory child protection involvement, concerns with regards to stigmatisation and labelling, doubts on the usefulness of the programme and practical factors such as childcare arrangement and distance from home. Furthermore, some families struggle to accept the court as a source of help and support. Case workers attached to the court-based family support service may experience pressure to move beyond their stated role and adopt functions intended for other agencies. Clear role boundaries must be reflected in internal practice frameworks, operational procedures and inter-agency protocol practices and reinforced through regular professional supervision.

6. Conclusion

Introducing assistance and support to families at the beginning of their family member's conviction is important in order to break the cycle of intergenerational offending. The timely introduction of services to families such as information dissemination on the criminal justice system, providing emotional support to families and ensuring childcare arrangements to affected children allow family members to better cope with the changes that are thrust upon them. Providing court based services to families will be crucial as it aids in creating awareness of the needs of children and families of offenders from the early stages of a family member's journey within the criminal justice system. This would help minimize the impact on the family who are in effect the unintended victims of the crime and subsequent conviction. A range of stakeholders which includes the courts, family service centres, justice administration and legal services need to collaborate together to ensure that these services can be delivered to the families in a timely and coordinated manner.

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Part 2: Services Provided by Prisons for Families at Early Stage of Incarceration

1. Introduction

The needs of children of incarcerated parents are usually overlooked during the criminal justice process. The impact on children and other family members when a parent is incarcerated would cause economic instability, a sense of loss, social stigma regarding incarceration and separation anxiety (Gardner, 2015). Family systems theory and family stress models highlight how external stressors affect interactions among family members especially on children of incarcerated parents as any changes in the caregiving arrangement would cause a disruption to both the children and temporary caregiver (Conger et al., 2002). Research has shown that incarcerated parents have often experienced poor parenting patterns as children, rendering their knowledge of parenting styles to those that are ineffective and possibly hazardous (Byrnes, 2005). The difficulty for most services is the inability to engage with these parents and families within community settings, often due to associated stigma and fear of children being removed from the family (ibid.).

Even for a short prison stay, changes in caregiving arrangements can cause notable family-level disruption. Incarcerated parents and caregivers alike note parenting and family interactions as a source of stress (Gonzalez et. al, 2007). Several critical factors that affect children when a parent is incarcerated include the reduction or total loss of contact with the parent. This will affect the parent's functional role and threatens the development of parent-child attachments. The stress created by the unexpected and often sudden departure of the parent will be accompanied by a sharp reduction in income and possible housing problems. The lack of straightforward information with regards to the parent's whereabouts often causes the family to keep the truth from the children. This reduces that parent's ability to provide adequate support and attention to children who are already feeling neglected.

Children may feel abandoned and express anger toward the caregiver, and in turn, caregivers may be angry with the incarcerated parent and/or resent or punish a child who rejects help (ibid.). Caregivers may lack the skills to provide children with nurturing and stimulating environments and be overwhelmed by the responsibility of caring for a child who may be struggling at home and in school. Grandparents are the most common kin caregivers; their poor health due to old age and social isolation can make it challenging to care for young children.

This paper will review the services available in the prisons, particularly in the United States, for families to bond with the incarcerated family member and community-based programs that may be available to these families.

2. Services Provided by Prisons for Incarcerated Families

In the United States, there are some prisons that offer programmes for inmates who are parents to address their unique strengths, needs, and interactive skills directed toward their

families and communities once released. These prisons acknowledge the fact that incarcerated individuals who receive no services, have little contact with family/friends, and acquire no adaptive skills; they are likely to return to a community and, more specifically, a family only to continue to perpetuate the conditions that contributed to the behaviour that resulted in imprisonment. Further, if the new skills are not practised, supported, and reinforced once released it is likely old patterns of behaviour will re-emerge. Here, the focus is given to inmates' post incarceration environment, particularly the families of the incarcerated individual. Ecological perspectives recognize the impact of inmates' incarceration on their family members, particularly their children. Children of incarcerated parents are at-risk for a variety of emotional, social, and academic difficulties (Allard, 2012). Beyond the circumstances that resulted in their parents' incarceration, research has demonstrated that incarceration itself is an independent factor in children's poor outcomes (Aaron & Dallaire, 2010). Additionally, children of incarcerated parents are more likely than other children to engage in future crime and delinquency and to end up incarcerated themselves (ibid.).

Although programs for families and children are increasing, there is an ongoing need for outcome data on the efficacy of these programs for all who take part in them. Community-based services for the children of incarcerated parents provide one strategy to reduce the overwhelmingly negative impact of parental incarceration (Johnston, 2012). These programs vary depending on the age of the child and can continue through adolescence and into young adulthood. Johnston (2012) discusses many of the programs including support groups, after-school programs, mentoring, summer camps and recreational programs, teen leadership programs, and job skills training. The effectiveness of these programs varies greatly, and many have not been empirically validated (Johnston, 2012). Measurement of parental skills and attachment levels are also lacking, particularly when these skills are not practiced when a parent is incarcerated or in the case of non-custodial parents post-release. Bearing in mind that most of these programs are run by family service centres and voluntary organisations, funding for these programs is often difficult to obtain and to sustain.

Prison based programs for the children of incarcerated parents are another important component of a comprehensive approach to address the children's various needs. Moreover, these programs also are designed to directly benefit the incarcerated parents. Support programs which target prisoners and their families are a relatively new segment of the family support movement. Program models vary but all are driven by the underlying premise that a parent continues to be a parent even though he is in prison, regardless of the crime committed. Despite the stress produced by incarceration, parent-inmates are open to participation in programs that will enhance their relationships with their children. These programs can facilitate their involvement in their children's growth, even if someone else is parenting them on a daily basis, and mitigate the long-term destructive effects of imprisonment. Support programs give the parent-inmates an understanding of their children's development and an opportunity to observe and engage in positive interactions with their children. Peer support helps them to cope and strengthen their feelings of self-esteem to spend more time with their children. Family support programs in prison help parent-inmates continue to function as family members and learn new ways of coping with the stress and emotional issues that they will face when they are released from prison.

Recent research has demonstrated that imprisonment itself results in greater recidivism, resulting in an increasing emphasis for correctional facilities to develop and to provide cost-effective, efficacious programs, which will safely control and manage inmates; lower rates of recidivism; and provide for the needs of inmates' children. A large number of institutions in the United States provide parenting classes for their inmates with children. However, most of the parent education programs in prison do not directly involve the children (Hoffmann et al., 2010). Many factors can influence child involvement such as lack of transportation, funds and resources of institutions, and the families themselves. Although parent training is especially prevalent for incarcerated mothers (Hoffmann et al., 2010), Hairston (2001) wrote, "helping fathers maintain relationships with their children, however, is one of the least important considerations in policy directives and day-to-day operations" in correctional systems.

Nevertheless, positive results have been shown from parent education for incarcerated fathers (Harrison, 1997). However, it is noted that it can be difficult to measure the long-term effects of such parent training if the skills are not practiced, which will not happen when there is little to no contact between parent and child during the parent's incarceration. All indicators point to the widespread benefit of increasing contact between inmates and their children. Increasing contact between children and their incarcerated parents can include improving access to and procedures for telephone and mail correspondence. However, much of these efforts have centred on programs designed to increase face-to-face contact between parent and child (Hoffmann et al., 2010).

In the United States, three agencies which are located in Delaware, New York and South Dakota provide space designed for overnight visits. Basic parenting classes (classes without children) are offered in the women's facility. Fifty-one of the agencies provide this type of program for their women inmates and nearly as many as forty-six agencies offer these classes to men. For incarcerated women with infants, eight states in the United States provide a prison nursery, a special unit that allows eligible incarcerated women with infants to live together (Goshin & Byrne, 2009). This is in contrast to the more prevalent policy of removing infants from the mothers within 48 hours of birth. General eligibility criteria are that a woman has to be pregnant during her incarceration and have no history of crimes against children (Women's Prison Association's, 2009). Women convicted of violent offenses are automatically excluded. Lengths of stay range from 1 to 36 months, with most programs allowing 12–18 months. Current U.S. programs are described as enriched, developmentally appropriate environments staffed by corrections officers and civilian professionals, including nurses (Fearn & Parker, 2004). Group prenatal and parenting courses are required in most facilities (Goshin & Byrne, 2009). These may be delivered by fellow incarcerated mothers as peer facilitators, professional staff, or through collaborations with community-based organizations. Other resources include lactation support, a day-care centre allowing mothers to attend counselling, drug treatment, educational and vocational programs and advocates who facilitate contact with family members who do not reside in the nursery. Longitudinal research in the oldest U.S. prison nursery showed positive child outcomes during the nursery and after release. Development during infancy and toddlerhood was within normal limits across domains (Byrne, 2010). Attachment was more likely to be secure

than what would be expected by the high proportion of insecurity and unresolved trauma in the mothers' backgrounds (ibid.). During the preschool period, children who had lived with their mothers in the prison nursery had lower anxious-depressed behaviour problem scores than a comparison group of children who were separated from their mothers in infancy or toddlerhood because of incarceration.

Parenting programs have aimed, in addition to improving parenting skills, to promote healthy child–parent relationships whilst in custody through increased contact and facilitation of family interactions, and to ease re-entry of the incarcerated parent into a parental role on release (Hairston, 1998). This may be of paramount importance to incarcerated mothers who are most likely to return to a primary caregiver role (ibid.). Maintaining family and community ties during and after incarceration, as promoted in parenting programs, may also decrease the possibility of recidivism (Hairston, 1998). Social support theories explain a potential reduction in recidivism rates posit that strong primary relationships contribute to self-worth and provide motivation for treatment for drug and alcohol misuse (ibid.). A search of the literature revealed studies that have evaluated parenting programs for prisoners. These studies suggest that parenting programs within prisons vary greatly in their delivery approaches and evaluation methods. The duration of programs ranged from 1 to 24 weeks, and varied from 1 session per week to entire days, with complete programs ranging from 5 to 72 hours. Programs were educational based, with topics focusing on child development, communication and play skills, child safety, and effective discipline.

3. Community based programs

In the United States, most of the community based programs are linked with the prisons. For the past five decades, the Minnesota Citizens Council on Crime and Justice has developed services for families of inmates. The Family Services program is designed to address the needs of inmates' families. This program provides low-cost transportation for prison visits and the staff will assist families with personal and practical needs. Designed to strengthen the families' abilities to cope with emotional, financial and physical stress, Family Services provides basic services to families of inmates which includes, weekly transportation to several correctional facilities and provides intensive parenting education for both incarcerated family member and the family members who are outside. Classes for children of parents in the program help to develop personal skills and learn to cope with stressful situations. Support group sessions are also made available for these families. Family Services has had great success with family education for incarcerated fathers and many participants request longer class periods or the opportunity to take the classes a second time (Deane, 2000). The development of programs for mothers has allowed Family Services to reach a larger segment of the prison population. All classes are aimed at building self-esteem and encouraging self-discovery.

Another program that looks into the direct-service component is the Centre for Children of Incarcerated Parents in California. While scans of the centre's programs serve parent-inmates, the overall program philosophy reflects a belief that programming works best

when parents have not been released. The goal is to prevent recidivism and second generation incarceration. The program provides support groups for incarcerated mothers in which it is aimed to improve the women's ability to make the transition from incarceration to stable family life. It also provides support groups for children, aimed at improving self-esteem, documenting the development of children of offenders and addressing the problems of these high-risk children.

4. Previous Evaluation on Parenting Programs in Prisons

Thompson and Harm (2000) evaluated a 15 week parenting program in a women's prison. This program was designed to enhance mother-child interactions during the mothers' incarceration. The topics that were addressed included child development, communication, guidance, and self-esteem. It was discovered that mothers who reported no contact with their children were found to have lower self-esteem than mothers who did have contact with their children (Thompson & Harm, 2000). It was also discovered among the women participating in the study that their attitudes regarding their expectations of their children, their attitudes regarding corporal punishment and family roles, as well as their overall self-esteem improved significantly. At the conclusion of the program many women indicated a desire for future, continued parenting education. These results suggest that parent education can indeed be an extremely effective means of improving interactions among incarcerated mothers and their children.

In another parent study, Showers (1993) evaluated the effectiveness of a parenting education curriculum on cognitive performance against a baseline level of knowledge. The purpose of this study was to assess the level of knowledge among female inmates concerning child development and child behaviour management. The study was to thereby evaluate the effectiveness of a parenting education curriculum based on inmates' knowledge of child development and child behaviour management. It was found that women in this study did not possess sufficient knowledge regarding child development, nor did they possess adequate knowledge pertaining to non-violent approaches in managing child behaviour. It was further found that women who participated in the parent program displayed significant gains in knowledge concerning child development and non-violent behaviour management.

These subsequent findings do indeed suggest that parenting programs can absolutely be an effective tool for improving parenting knowledge which in turn can also improve parenting behaviours. Parents are often unprepared to cope with managing negative child behaviours which can trigger frustration. This may help explain child abuse episodes. Imprisoned women usually come from extremely troubled homes where positive parenting models may have not been present, resulting in a home environment which was unlikely to have prepared them in being effective parents. This provides further support as to the importance of implementing parenting education programs in correctional facilities. The work done by educators in correctional settings is often invisible (Linton, 2004). This may be one reason educational programs tend to be easy targets for cuts during budget reductions. However, there are several important factors that illustrate why implementing educational

programs to incarcerated parents is so essential. For example, providing these parents with parenting education would allow the incarcerated parents to become full participants in the lives of their children. This would increase their sense being empowered, thereby promoting a sense of well-being and belonging which would in turn decrease their probability of reoffending. In addition, research suggests that those individuals with the lowest levels of education can benefit the most from educational programs including parenting education. Therefore, every effort should be made to identify parents who have low levels of education and provide them with the opportunity to take part in parental education initiatives. In addition to parenting education programs, it is very important that correctional institutions create a more conducive environment for family visits. For example, appropriate family visiting rooms can be made available, allowing for relaxed social interactions and consisting of child oriented activities. In addition, severely restricted visiting schedules should be relooked, allowing children to visit around their school hours.

5. Conclusion

Having prison based programs for incarcerated inmates who are parents and supporting families especially the children is important in order to break the cycle of intergenerational offending. Introducing services early to families such as providing parenting education, programs that encourage family bonding, providing emotional support to families and ensuring childcare arrangements to affected children allow family members to better cope with the disruptive changes that they experience. Maintaining family and community ties during and after incarceration, as promoted in parenting programs, may decrease the probability of recidivism. Providing prison based services to families will be useful especially for families with dependent children as it would prepare the affected families and inmates to cope with the re-entry of the parent into the family settings with fewer disruptions. This would allow caregivers, incarcerated parents, and their children to achieve better long-term outcomes when they are encouraged to develop healthy family and parenting relationships. The relevant stakeholders which include the prisons, family service centres, and community organisations need to work together to ensure that these services can be delivered to the families in a timely and coordinated manner.

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