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Beliefs About Children Who Have Been Incarcerated: What Do Parents Know?

Aryriana Alexander
California State University - San Bernardino

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BELIEFS ABOUT CHILDREN WHO HAVE BEEN
INCARCERATED: WHAT DO PARENTS KNOW?

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Aryriana Jokell Alexander

June 2015

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Approved by:

Dr. Laurie Smith, Faculty Supervisor, Social Work
Dr. Rosemary McCaslin, M.S.W. Research Coordinator

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between traditional African-American American parenting and the overrepresentation of African-Americans in America's jails and prisons. This qualitative study utilized semi-structured interviews of twelve parents who have had a child incarcerated in their adult life to gather data. Study participants were asked their experiences with several traditional happenings, supported by research, in some traditional African-American households. Topics discussed included religion, spanking, and single parenthood. The study found that many of the traditional happenings of African-American parenting occurred within the homes of parents with children who were incarcerated, which supports previous research. Additionally, the study found that negative views of law enforcement officers were held by several participants and passed down to their children. Moreover, the majority of participants believed that race had some bearing on the treatment of their child by law enforcement and the legal system. The findings of the study suggest that there is room for social workers to be more aware of the unique needs of the African-American community and advocacy is necessary for programs and resources to reach this special population. Furthermore, social workers should continue to seek cultural competence and demonstrate racial awareness when working with clients.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2013), there are roughly 6,937,600 offenders under the supervision of adult correctional systems (this includes jails, prisons, probation, and parole), with an estimated 2.2 million people who are actively incarcerated, making the United States the country with the highest number of incarcerated persons in the world. Based on a report published by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (2013), the state of California has about 127,584 inmates. Nearly 9,000 of those inmates have been sent to other states to do their time due to the overcrowding of California's prisons. In San Bernardino County, according to a yearly report released by the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department (2013), there were over 30,000 people arrested in 2013. On the national, state, and local levels, there are an overwhelming number of Americans being arrested and spending time in jails and prisons.

It would appear from the above-mentioned statistics that the United States' correctional system is getting larger and more powerful with the incarceration population steadily rising. Within those same statistics, even more powerful trends can be observed. According to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) (2014), African-Americans are getting incarcerated at nearly six times the rate of Whites. When

disparities exist, such as this racial disparity within our legal system, there is a problem within the institution and society that warrants a deeper, scientific inspection.

While there is a discernible problem with the number of people getting arrested in general, the overrepresentation of African-Americans in the jail and prison systems is an issue in its own right. An overrepresentation occurs when the percentage of African-Americans in the jail and prison population is higher than the percentage of the African-American population in society. NAACP (2014) states that together, African-Americans and Hispanics comprised 58% of all prisoners in 2008, even though African-Americans and Hispanics made up approximately only one quarter of the US population.

Acknowledging this disproportion and making efforts to try and abolish it is our mandate as social workers. Social workers need to understand the problem of overrepresentation to be culturally competent and to be able to look at the effects of overrepresentation on this community holistically. For example, according to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics (2014), as of September 2014, African-Americans have an unemployment rate of 11%. This number is incredibly high, especially in comparison to the White unemployment rate of 4.9% and the Asian rate of 4.3%.

Once a person is convicted, their conviction follows them, even once they are released. Having convictions, in turn, makes it more difficult, sometimes almost impossible, to obtain employment. Not having income then

forces people to have to utilize government aid, such as Section 8 or WIC to provide for themselves and their children. If basic needs still cannot be met to a certain standard, this can lead to child welfare issues, such as neglect allegations or substantiations. When all the resources designed to help the disenfranchised are being utilized or unknown to them, many offenders return to their life of crime as a means of survival or simply out of habit, and return to jail or prison, creating a vicious cycle. Overrepresentation is not a problem that merely affects forensic social work (social work specifically related to the law and legal systems); it affects all areas of social work. As the Systems Theory reminds us, there are many systems working together to perpetuate this problem, conversely, there are also many systems in place that can help eliminate the problem.

Purpose of the Study

While the overrepresentation of incarcerated African-Americans is a phenomenon that is clear and supported by numbers, the reasons why there is such a disparity is not so clear. In this particular study, the areas for exploration are parenting and its relation to incarcerated children. This study takes a particular interest in the parenting styles, habits, and norms often times associated with African-American parents and parenting. It is the purpose of this study to explore the overrepresentation of incarcerated African-Americans in by looking at the parents of the individuals who have been incarcerated.

The predominant issue to be studied is how, if at all, traditional African-American parenting norms may contribute to the overrepresentation. The cultural norms within African-American parenting that will be addressed were found through literature and personal experience. For example, the study will ask specific questions regarding spanking. Spanking is a choice of discipline that is extremely common in the African-American community. While spanking continues to be a fairly controversial issue, it needs to be examined. In addition to spanking, single motherhood will also be studied. It is an unfortunate reality, but the high number of single mothers in the African-American community cannot be overlooked.

This research topic is being studied as it is of great interest. As an African-American female, it is incredibly disheartening to see so many of my fellow African-Americans in jail or prison. While keeping in mind racism, institutionalized racism, and free will, there is still something happening within the African-American community that is producing deviant behavior. Parenting plays a crucial role in how children behave, so perhaps the parenting is a contributing factor in incarceration rates. As an intern at West Valley Detention Center, it is assumed the agency would be interested in possibly hearing any findings as they, in conjunction with the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department, have a program to help at-risk youth before they have the opportunity to become inmates.

The findings of this study might change social work practice within the agency and in general. The agency may be able to incorporate culturally respectful and effective parenting classes to the parents of the youth in their outreach program with the Sheriff's Department. If there are clear connections between certain parenting norms and incarceration rates, the classes may be able to reduce the likelihood of the youth being arrested and incarcerated. With these findings, social work in general can also be affected. This information can lead to more social supports for African-American parents and youth.

To garner the best possible findings for this particular study, utilizing the qualitative study design of interviews is the best option. It is imperative to have set questions with some availability for other relevant conversation. With conversation on a topic that may bring about emotional responses, interviews are more personal and necessitate more genuine answers than with a survey or other means of data collection.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

Providing service to clients is only a fraction of the professional responsibility of social workers, it is also the responsibility of the social worker to advocate for, understand, and defend the disenfranchised. In the context of this study, the disenfranchised are not only those who are incarcerated, but also the parents of the incarcerated. Society tends to view the incarcerated through a very judgmental lens, assuming they are all bad people who seek

out deviant behavior. Most do not view this population with a “bio-psycho-social-spiritual” perspective, which would encompass an inmate’s parents and childhood. The way in which a child is raised has a profound impact on the person one becomes in adulthood.

This study is needed for two main clinical reasons and two main societal reasons. Clinically speaking, this study would allow a greater understanding of what parenting factors may lead to incarceration in African-Americans, a subject that is grossly understudied. Secondly, it would provide information that could easily be used to further evidence-based cultural competency with the African-American community. This knowledge has potential to assist in all areas of social work. This type of study has not been conducted before and may allow for other researchers to continue studying the effects of parenting on incarceration. The findings may also provide evidence that “at-risk” children may need more governmentally funded resources and may serve as a platform for advocacy for policy or grants. In practice, the knowledge of how African-Americans fare on certain topics may allow for some understanding and empathetic skills to be utilized by practitioners and clinicians. This study has the capacity to impact all seven stages of the generalist intervention process, but primarily the assessing stage. The information may allow social work professionals to assess with a different mindset on not only the incarcerated, but also those who raised them.

Society in general may also benefit from the findings of this study. First, and probably most importantly, is a safer, more productive society. If there is a link between parenting and deviance, knowing the link can possibly prevent some deviance. Secondly, it helps the community financially. It is expensive to house inmates at a correctional facility and to monitor them on probation or parole. Having fewer offenders would mean less taxpayer money being allocated to the prison system, thus freeing it to be spent in other areas such as after-school programs or community centers. Ultimately, the research question to be answered is what beliefs about parenting and incarceration are among parents whose child has been incarcerated.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this chapter, several topics will be covered with supporting data from empirical, relevant literature. The first topic to be discussed is the topic of overrepresentation of African-Americans in United States' jails and prisons. The parenting and childhood norms of many African-Americans will also be looked at in their relation to the social problem of over-incarceration. This chapter will also address gaps in the existing literature, methodological limitations, and conflicting findings. The theoretical perspectives that will serve as a guide in this study will also be discussed.

Overrepresentation Trends and Theories

The motivating factor behind this entire study is to further understand the overrepresentation of African-Americans, primarily African-American males, within the jail and prison population. As previously mentioned, overrepresentation is not a myth or an opinion; it is a reality that is supported by statistical information. Coker (2003) states that nearly one in three African-American males between the ages of twenty and twenty-nine is under the supervision of the criminal justice system on any given day. Coker (2003) believes this number is so inflated because of the unfair practices of law enforcement. She contends that the racial disparities in incarceration likely

reflect differential enforcement. Police officers are more likely to stop African-Americans for traffic stops and, once stopped, they are more likely to search the vehicles of African-Americans (Coker, 2003). This is an excellent example of institutionalized racism.

O’Conner (2001) sees overrepresentation as less due to moral flaws than to political or economic forces. O’Conner (2001) believes America is in a “race to incarcerate” that “perpetuate[s] a societal commitment to imprisonment through the expansion of vested economic interests. That economic interest includes many profit-making companies that build and run prisons in the United States” (p. 75). The African-American inmates she interviewed put their views in more simplistic terms, stating they are being “warehoused,” and it is a warehouse with a definite color line (O’Conner, 2001).

Mooradian (2012) noticed that the overrepresentation of African-Americans is not simply affecting adults, but it is affecting juveniles and juvenile correction facilities as well. Mooradian (2012) found that from data provided from 49 states indicate a disproportionate level of incarceration of youth classified as African-American in juvenile justice facilities. This is still occurring even though the United States federal government enacted policy reforms in 1988 that require states that receive federal funds to decrease the proportion of minority youth who are incarcerated in secure facilities, few improvements have been made (Mooradian, 2012). The effects of

overrepresentation as child offenders may be connected to the overrepresentation that is also plaguing the adult prisons and jails in the United States.

Parenting Factors

There is a lot of research available on the effects of incarceration on a child with an incarcerated parent, however, the effects on the parents with an incarcerated child is less studied. Both situations are stressful and life altering, but the literature has a clear bias towards studying children and adolescents. There is a plethora of research available on African-American parenting in general, but none specifically pertaining to a connection between parenting and incarceration. This section will focus on the few known parenting issues related to incarceration or other parenting issues that may be relevant.

Spirituality is fairly common in many African-American homes and communities. Parson and Mikawa (1991) conducted a study of sixty African-American men aged 20-35 who had spent 8 of their first 15 years of life in a Black Christian church. They split the men into two groups: those who are incarcerated and those who have never been in trouble with the law. The results rendered showed that the men who were incarcerated perceived themselves as receiving more authoritarian punishment from their mothers, receiving less affection from their fathers, and feeling more equal to their fathers. The incarcerated group was also sexually active earlier, were more often suspended and expelled from school, skipped classes, and were given

detention more than the non-incarcerated group. The non-incarcerated group participated in more church activities in general and continued to practice religious activities past childhood. This study shows a link between spirituality/religious activity and incarceration among African-American men. It showed that young men who participated in church activities were less likely to be incarcerated. It also shows that perceived authoritarian parenting may also have a connection to incarceration.

Having positive male role models is another aspect of parenting that may be lacking in the African-American community. Richardson (2012) noticed that in many urban communities, unemployment, substance abuse, violence, and mass incarceration among African-American males has reduced the number of positive adult male role models for kids, especially the many African-American males growing up without a father. Richardson (2012) states that African-American male coaches have played a significant role in reducing crime and delinquency among at-risk youth as well as influencing positive youth outcomes, yet they receive little attention or research on the topic. This study shows a positive correlation between youth having a combination of extra-curricular activities and positive male role models as a means of keeping African-American children from turning to a life of crime.

A child's academic performance during childhood has proven to be a determinant for deviant behavior. Barbarin (2010) finds:

The major academic problems seen in high school actually begin with low levels of skills that facilitate adaptation to school—specifically, early and persistent deficits in literacy and language, in combination with minor behavior problems. Early signs of the troubles awaiting African American boys are apparent when they enter kindergarten with respect to academic achievement and socioemotional adjustment. (p. 82)

African-American boys also begin school less prepared and ending up with bad behavior as a result. The learning gap between the races begins as early as kindergarten (Barbarin, 2010).

Other relevant research to this study is usually presented in studies regarding African-American parenting. For example, Barnett and Scaramella (2013) and Gaylord-Harden and Elmore (2013) both conducted studies on the differences in how African-American mothers parent each gender. Both studies findings concluded that there were very clear differences in how the different genders are parented. Young boys are being raised less stringently than young girls are. This is important to acknowledge because there are more African-American men being incarcerated than African-American women. Perhaps a portion of the problem is the difference in the parenting of the genders that is leading to this issue an overrepresentation of African-American males behind bars, although this is seen in other cultural groups as well, not exclusively to the African-American culture.

Watkins-Lewis and Hamre (2012) completed another useful study that is somewhat related. In their study, they examined African-American parenting in relation to academic performance in children. They found that “maternal confidence” and warmth were predictive of cognitive development and achievement. Elmore and Gaylord-Harden (2013) also completed a study finding that supportive and warm parenting was associated with fewer “maladaptive child behaviors.” This is important, as cognitive development, childhood behaviors, and achievement are important to look at in relation to those who end up incarcerated. These studies imply that certain parenting norms can lead to certain child outcomes.

As previously stated the effect of fathers (or a lack thereof) will also be examined. This is important as men tend to dominate the correctional facilities and having a strong, male role model can make a substantial difference in the life of an African-American male. Kern (2014) conducted a study on the fathering styles of African-American and Latino boys. The study results stress the importance of the father being a “protector” and “mediator” to the negative influences in their child’s life. Those without a father to play those roles in life are more susceptible to negative outcomes, such as joining a gang and criminal activity. Richardson (2012) echoes these studies in stressing the importance of the African-American father in the home and positive male role models in the development of a child.

Lastly, Westbrook, Harden, Holmes, Meisch, and Whittaker (2012), Simons, Simons, and Su (2013), and Coley, Kull, and Carrano (2014) all have studies on the effects of spanking on African-American children. While these articles and studies discuss spanking norms, they do not mention anything regarding the child's future incarceration.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

There are two major theories that come to mind for the guidance of this study, the first being Social Learning Theory. The main idea of this theory is that people learn through observation. This is of grave importance when looking at the parents of incarcerated children; we all learn our behavior from somewhere. The other equally important theory is Social Control Theory. The main idea of this theory is that people's commitments, norms, and beliefs encourage them not to break the law. This theory may help guide the study as I will be looking at the parenting norms of African-American parents, and seeing if there are any common themes to law breaking.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

In this chapter, the study design, sampling, data collection and instrument, procedures, protection of confidentiality, and data analysis will be discussed. Some of the strengths and limitations of the methodology will also be examined.

Study Design

The purpose of this study is to examine the beliefs about parenting and incarceration among parents whose child has been incarcerated. The research method that was utilized was a qualitative method. The researcher believes this method is most effective for two main reasons. The most important reason being the somewhat sensitive subject matter being studied. Surveys might be too impersonal for this population, it is important to not lose the significance of what empathetic listening and an appropriate touch can provide to participants, especially those discussing difficult subjects. The other reason being the availability and freeness of conversation while conducting interviews. With the openness of interviews, the participants are free to answer the questions, without the constraint of writing, running out of room on a survey, and other limitations surveys may present.

While many of the strengths of using this particular study design are listed above, there are others to consider. Interviews provide the researcher with an in-depth look at not only the words used, but also inflection of voice, stuttering, hesitation, and other vocal happenings that may provide additional information relevant for the study. Along these lines, the researcher also will have the opportunity to observe and analyze participant's body language, which can also provide insight for the study. Conversely, there are also some limitations with this design. With the open nature of interviews, it is possible for the conversation to stray from the topic at hand to other, less relevant topics. Another limitation is that findings may lack congruency due to the delivery style of the researcher may inadvertently vary participant to participant. Lastly, there is always an element of untruthfulness that can be expected when self-reporting is a form of data collection and social desirability bias.

Sampling

The sample utilized in this study were African-American parents who either currently have or have had a child who was in jail or prison as an adult. To be considered for this sample, the participant must meet the above-mentioned qualifications. If they did not meet said qualifications, they were not used in this particular study. Excluded were other relatives of offenders (siblings, spouses, etc.), parents whose child was a minor during incarceration, or parents who meet the criteria above, with the exception of ethnic background. This specific sample was chosen for this study because

they are the target of the topic being researched, beliefs about parenting and incarceration among parents whose child has been incarcerated. Twelve parents were actually interviewed.

The researcher had access to people who meet these qualifications through social outlets in the community such as church and social clubs. Participants were acquaintances of the researcher, not friends, but not quite strangers. The researcher is familiar enough with participants to know they had a child who has been incarcerated. The researcher did not have any difficulties finding the participants for this study. As the research took place in the community, the study did not require access from an agency. However, all participants were given informed consent forms to provide the researcher with access to use their testimonies for research purposes only.

Data Collection and Instruments

The data that was collected were the answers to the questions posed to participants during the qualitative interviews. To assist the researcher, the data was tape recorded during the interviews to be transcribed and analyzed at a later time. Being that the study is qualitative in design, there was no independent or dependent variable used. To collect the data, the researcher created an instrument of questions used as a guide during the interviews. The instrument was designed to measure the beliefs of the participants regarding their parenting and their child's incarceration. The instrument was created after

a detailed review of the literature found certain commonalities and gaps that warranted the researcher's attention.

To test the reliability of the instrument, the researcher conducted a pilot test of the instrument on a volunteer who was not an actual participant in the study, but similar in age and ethnicity to the actual sample. The pilot was successful, the volunteer provided feedback on wording concerns with some questions on the instrument. The researcher corrected the wording concerns for the final instrument utilized with actual participants. Although this instrument has not been supported, it still possesses some strengths. The fact that the questions are founded in research is incredibly important and a major strength of the instrument. The instrument was also made specifically for this study, meaning all of the points and criteria the researcher would like to cover in the interviews were covered. However, there are also some limitations with this instrument. It is a limitation that the instrument is somewhat long; it was not overlooked that participants may feel fatigued, emotionally and physically, answering all of the questions. Lastly, the wording for the instrument may be a limitation, as some of the language may be offensive to some. Examples of questions that were asked of participants:

“What were your main forms of disciplining your child?”

“Do you feel any guilt regarding you child's incarceration?”

“What ideals about law enforcement were enforced during your child's upbringing?”

Procedures

As mentioned above, the data was gathered through interviews. The researcher met the participants at agreed upon locations and asked the questions on the instrument. The interviews took place at a public library of the participant's choosing. The library was utilized; as it is a public domain that is quiet enough to minimize distractions and to limit the background noise while interviews are being tape-recorded and unpopulated enough to maintain the confidentiality of the participants. To solicit participation, the researcher personally handed out a flyer requesting involvement. The flyer provided an overview of the study and their incentive for participating (\$5 Starbucks gift card). Once the initial solicitation was made and a meeting time set, the researcher placed a courtesy reminder call to the participant reminding them of the meeting a few days before it took place. The researcher gathered and analyzed the data in roughly a four-month window.

Protection of Human Subjects

Protecting the identity of the participants of this study is of the utmost importance to the researcher. That being said, the precautions implemented to protect the identity and confidentiality of the study's participants were taken seriously. Firstly, there were only two pieces of potentially identifying information gathered from participants, their age and gender. No names, addresses, or phone numbers were on any document at any time. To keep the data organized, each participant was assigned a participant number that

coincides with the order the researcher saw them (ex. Participant one is who was interviewed first). Again, there were no names used at any point in this study, only numbers. There is no key with names and corresponding participant numbers.

To further protect the participants, the researcher provided informed consent contracts and debriefing statements for participant's review and signature. There was also a separate form for participants to consent to be tape-recorded. Once the data was collected, it was taken straight to the researcher's private home and kept in a locked box for safekeeping. This included any and all notes the researcher took, informed consent documents, and the tapes of the recorded interviews. As the data was transcribed, it was secured in the researcher's personal, password protected computer.

Data Analysis

To obtain data for this study, as mentioned above, qualitative interviews were conducted. The interviews were between 25-45 minutes in length and covered a list of pre-written questions. Each question on the instrument was designed to answer a specific question the researcher had regarding the beliefs about parenting and incarceration held by parents of children who have been incarcerated. The researcher paid close attention to verbal and non-verbal behavior of the participants and noted these subtleties in researcher notes. The tape recordings served as the main avenue for remembering what each participant stated, however the researcher also wrote

down things of most importance or items that merit a deeper look once analysis began.

Once the data was collected, the researcher transcribed the audiotapes onto a personal, password-protected computer. Once the interviews were transcribed, the written material and tapes still remained kept in a locked box to protect participants. Once the interviews were all transcribed, the researcher used Dedoose, a computer software program that assisted in coding and analyzing the data. Once the transcribed interview material was uploaded to Dedoose, the researcher began to code the data. Coding was done by Dedoose identifying reoccurring words and phrases from the transcribed data, creating themes and sub-themes.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter is a showing of the results of this study. The demographics of the sample utilized in this study will first be described. The remaining results displayed in this section were garnered using the audio recordings of the participant's responses transcribed verbatim. The transcribed interviews allowed the researcher to analyze data and observe trends and themes in the answers provided. This chapter will conclude with a summary.

Presentation of the Findings

The sample of this study consisted of twelve parents. Out of the twelve parents, ten participants were mothers (female) and two participants were fathers (males). All of the participants identified culturally as African-American or Black. The ages ranged from 48 years old to 66 years. Out of the twelve participants, none of them had a child who was currently incarcerated: eleven had children who were incarcerated in the past and are now living back in society and one participant's formerly incarcerated child is deceased.

Religious Upbringing

A theme that presented itself very early on was religion being a factor in the home of the incarcerated individual's childhood. Out of the twelve participants interviewed, all of them stated that religion and spirituality was important when raising their children. Of the twelve, ten stated that they

attended church on a weekly basis and eight said that their children were actively involved in church activities (i.e. Bible Study, choir, usher board, etc.). Find below quotes regarding religion in the eyes of the parents of incarcerated children.

Table 1. Direct Quote Regarding Religion

Participant #	Direct Quote Regarding Religion
2	“We went to church every Sunday and the kids did everything at some point (chuckles). I’m talking choir, Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, anything! If they offered it, my kids did it!” (Survey Interview, April 2015)
4	“Every Sunday you could find us in church, sitting together as a family. But, to me, religion was more than just going to church, Christianity has values that I wanted my kids to pick up on and carry with them into adulthood. I prayed for my son to be a Christ-filled young man.” (Survey Interview, April 2015)
8	“I was actually raised in a strict religious home in the South during Jim Crow, so religion is all I knew growing up. It was God that brought us [African-Americans] out of those terrible times, so when I settled down and started having children, I made sure they knew about the God that saved us from those dark times.” (Survey Interview, April 2015)
9	“Me and all my children attended church about four times a week when they were younger. The church was one of the only safe places in my old neighborhood where they grew up.” (Survey Interview, April 2015)

Spanking

The controversial topic of spanking also presented some themes amongst the participants. When asked about their methods of discipline, ten of the twelve participants mentioned spanking was a common or main form of

discipline used in their households. The two participants who did not spank their children expressed that there was no form of structured discipline utilized at all in the rearing of their children. The table below displays parental thoughts regarding spanking.

Table 2. Direct Quote Regarding Spanking

Participant #	Direct Quote Regarding Spanking
3	"I was the disciplinarian in my house and I was tough on them growing up. I wanted my girl to be a lady and my son to be a man. I'm not even going to lie to ya, my son got it [spanked] a lot, especially in middle school." (Survey Interview, April 2015)
6	"I disciplined my kids differently depending on what they did. Talking back is not going to get you the same punishment as stealing, right? If they deserved it, they got spanked." (Survey Interview, April 2015)
8	"[Name of formerly incarcerated child] get whooped everyday in the eighth grade because he was constantly acting a fool at school." (Survey Interview, April 2015)
12	"The Bible says spare the rod, spoil the child, and that is what I did." (Survey Interview, April 2015)

Absence of Father/Male Role Model

When participants were asked about single parenthood and positive male role models, eight of the twelve parents stated that their child did not have an involved father or what they deemed a positive same-gendered role model. The four participants who stated that their children had a present father were participants three and five, who are fathers and two other participants

who raised their children in two parent homes. Quotes from participants regarding single parenthood are below.

Table 3. Direct Quote Regarding Single Parenthood

Participant #	Direct Quote Regarding Single Parenthood
1	“There were not two parents in the household. It was just me. I had a lot of help from my mother when the kids were younger, because I just could not handle it. I had to raise these babies all while wondering where their father was, I was dealing with my own problems.” (Survey Interview, April 2015)
2	“Being a single mom was not easy, but I managed. My husband, their dad, was in the Army and lost his life serving this country. Though I did not have the help other people did, I know he would be proud of them and me.” (Survey Interview, April 2015)
10	“I wanted a role model for my sons. I tried to do the best I could as a woman to teach them things, but sometimes boys just need a man. I’m ashamed to say it, but the streets were the father to my sons”. (Survey Interview, April 2015)
12	“Single mothers have a tough job. I had to do it all for them, give them everything they wanted to make up for the fact that their dad did not want to be in their lives. Looking back, I think I overcompensated and for that, I regret.” (Survey Interview, April 2015)

Behavioral Issues in Childhood

When asked about their child’s behavior growing up, eight of the twelve participants stated that their child had behavioral issues. Of the eight, only two participants stated that their child had ever been in serious legal trouble requiring incarceration before the age of 18. However, of the eight, six participants stated that their child struggled academically and/or behaviorally

at some point during their K-12 education. Below is what participants stated regarding their child's behavioral history.

Table 4. Direct Quote Regarding Childhood Behavior

Participant #	Direct Quote Regarding Childhood Behavior
3	"My son was a pretty difficult child (laughs). There were times when he would have decent grades, then there were times when he brought home D's and F's. There were times I had to go to the school and take him home for something he did and beg the school not to expel my child". (Survey Interview, April 2015)
5	"He never started getting into trouble with the law until he was an adult and on his own, but even from about fifteen years old, my wife and I noticed a defiance about him, a disregard for rules, and for the life of me, I do not know where he got that from." (Survey Interview, April 2015)
9	"My kids were raised in a pretty rough side of town, I didn't want that for them, but it was what I could afford at the time. There was crime everywhere I looked, I prayed my kids weren't involved in any of that mess, but I know they were." (Survey Interview, April 2015)
11	"Grades were important in my home, I wanted them to have a better life, an easier life than what I had, so I pushed them to get good grades and be good students. They still did whatever they wanted too, it isn't cool to get good grades, its cool to fight and barely pass. My oldest is so smart, he could be anything, but he decided to flunk out." (Survey Interview, April 2015)

Distrust of the Police

When participants were asked what ideals regarding law enforcement were predominant in their child's upbringing, the majority, nine out of twelve participants revealed negative perceptions regarding law enforcement. Of

those nine, six participants used the word “racist” to describe law enforcement and three used the word “crooked” to describe law enforcement. Below are quotes detailing the views of law enforcement during participant child rearing.

Table 5. Direct Quote Regarding Law Enforcement

Participant #	Direct Quote Regarding Law Enforcement
2	“I know all police are not bad, but I do think that a lot of them are.” (Survey Interview, April 2015)
6	“Cops have a job to do, just like the rest of us. But I would be a bad mother if I did not tell my children about the crooked cops out there. Cops that look at my kids and don’t see worth in their lives, look what is going on right now with all of the killings of Black men, you are young, but let me tell you, this is not new.” (Survey Interview, April 2015)
9	“I think a lot of cops are racist. I think they are taught to don’t trust Blacks and I think Blacks are taught to not trust the police.” (Survey Interview, April 2015)
11	“When I was growing up, police were the enemy. They were racists and bigots with authority. I saw my brothers harassed for no reason other than being Black men. My kids learned early on that life isn’t fair and that you cant always trust people that say they are there to protect you.” (Survey Interview, April 2015)
12	“[Name of formerly incarcerated child] was eight when Rodney King happened and it was then that I told him that you can do everything the police tell you to do and still end up in a world of trouble. He was young, but he understood.” (Survey Interview, April 2015)

Lower Socio-Economic Status

Participants were asked to identify their socio-economic status for the majority of their child’s upbringing. Of the twelve participants, eight stated that

they were in a lower socio-economic status. The four participants that did not identify their households in a low socio-economic status were the same four participants who raised their children in a two-parent home. Of those four participants, two stated their socio-economic status would be “middle” and two identified their socio-economic status to be “upper-middle class”. Outlined below are the participant quotes on their socio-economic status.

Table 6. Direct Quote Regarding Socio-economic Status

Participant #	Direct Quote Regarding Socio-economic Status
2	“Having one income and three children was hard, we had very little. Honestly, looking back, we were poor. Just above poverty. I worked as a secretary at a law firm barely making anything and I received some money from the Government from my husband’s death.” (Survey Interview, April 2015)
6	“We were poor! (laughs) I mean sometimes the lights would get cut off poor!” (Survey Interview, April 2015)
10	“Poverty. We lived in poverty. There were times when I didn’t know where their next meal was coming from.” (Survey Interview, April 2015)
12	“We didn’t have much. But I never let them know that. As far as they knew, we were rich, but in reality I was struggling to keep food on the table.” (Survey Interview, April 2015)

Parental Attitudes

Participants were asked their views on some topics related to race, incarceration and parenting. When participants were asked if they believed their child’s ethnicity played any role in their incarceration, seven of the twelve participants believed race did have some bearing on incarceration.

Table 7. Direct Quote Regarding Race on Incarceration

Participant #	Direct Quote Regarding Race on Incarceration
6	"I'm not saying my child is a perfect angel, but he was given felony charges for a misdemeanor crime. I don't believe that would have happened if he were White." (Survey Interview, April 2015)
10	"I'd be foolish to think race doesn't play a part in all this. How many times have you heard about cops pulling over Blacks for no other reason than being Black? Searching Black men for no reason? My son was racially profiled." (Survey Interview, April 2015)

When participants were asked if they believe anything they did (or did not do) as parents may have led to their child's incarceration, six of the twelve participants stated they do believe their parenting had some influence on their child's incarceration. Of those six, four stated they had "regrets" about certain parenting decisions they made.

Table 8. Direct Quote Regarding Parenting

Participant #	Direct Quote Regarding Parenting
3	"My biggest regret was being too hard on him. I tried to make him who I wanted him to be instead of letting him be who he was. He was a good kid and I should have accepted him." (Survey Interview, April 2015)
11	"I wasn't there. I worked so much I missed out on a lot of their lives. If I could go back, I would work less and be more present." (Survey Interview, April 2015)
12	"I could have done more, a lot more, I could have given them more attention. I should have taken his behavior as a cry for help, not disobedience." (Survey Interview, April 2015)

Lastly, participants were asked if they believe there are flaws in the ways that African Americans traditionally parent. Of the twelve participants, seven stated that they believe there are flaws in traditional African-American parenting.

Table 9. Direct Quote Regarding Parental Flaws

Participant #	Direct Quote Regarding Parental Flaws
8	“We have to do better as a people. We have to speak life into our children. We have to encourage, nurture, and love them. Most importantly, we need to show them what we expect. As parents, if we want our children to grow up and respect women, the parents have to show them how.” (Survey Interview, April 2015)
12	“We are flawed in our thoughts, I’d say. We like to blame our short comings on everything and everyone else: the man, Whites, slavery, anything! (laughs) But, seriously, what accountability are we taking for what happens? Why is it so easy to blame everyone else for our own shortcomings?” (Survey Interview, April 2015)

Summary

Chapter four presented the findings from this study. Basic demographic information on research participants was also outlined. Data was organized by themes drawn from the qualitative interviews of participants.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This study explored cultural influences in African-American parenting that may lead to the overrepresentation of African-Americans in the jail and prison systems. In this chapter, the key findings of the study will be discussed. Also discussed are the limitations of the study and recommendations for social work practice, policy, and future research.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the cultural norms and beliefs in African-American parenting that might be related to incarceration through qualitative interviews. The study found that religious activities were very prominent in the lives of all of the interviewed participants. Religion and religious practices tend to be part of African-American culture and this study found that being raised in a religious home did not prevent future incarcerations. This finding directly contradicts the literature (Parson & Mikawa, 1991) that states that individuals who are involved in religious activities are less likely to be incarcerated.

Many of the participants stated that their children did not have a father or a positive same-sex role model while growing up. This finding confirms the unfortunate trend of single parenthood in African-American families. Despite

many of the participants stating their children did not have positive male role models, the researcher does not believe that it means there is a lack of positive male African-American role models, it shows that there may not be knowledge on adequate ways of attaining one. However, this finding is consistent with the literature, (Richardson, 2012; Kern, 2014) which posits that the absence of a father or positive role model can lead to increased rates of incarceration.

Low academic performance in school and other academic related behavior problems were common occurrences participants faced while raising their children. The reasons as to why this is so prevalent are probably endless. However, this particular finding is specifically odd to the researcher because the majority of the participants stated that they utilize a consistent form of discipline with their children. If their children are being disciplined, the question can be posed as to why the children still having behavior issues in school. Perhaps this finding speaks to the effectiveness of certain types of discipline or perhaps to the structure of our education system in meeting the needs of African-American children. This finding, again, is consistent with what previous literature states regarding academic performance in school and deviance (Barbarin, 2010).

Spanking was reported as the main form of discipline for the majority of the participants in this study. Just as with religion, spanking is also cultural for African-Americans. Spanking is usually generational and other forms of

discipline may not be researched or utilized. Despite its cultural roots, this finding may show that spanking is not the most effective way of disciplining African-American children. Perhaps there is another “piece” or element missing from the way African-Americans traditionally discipline that is needed. The researcher believes that the strong religiosity found in this population is related to the high prevalence of spanking. Spanking is seen as teaching their children morality, a religious act, making spanking virtually religious.

The finding of most interest to the researcher was the majority of participants had a negative opinion regarding law enforcement officers. Many believed law enforcement officers tended to be racist, crooked, or dishonest in some way. These opinions regarding law enforcement held by the participants were instilled in their children as well. It is possible that being raised to believe that law enforcement is inherently “the enemy” is why the law is not respected. If the people enforcing the laws cannot be trusted, why should they trust the laws? While the researcher understands where this mindset comes from, it may be detrimental to have and may influence the encounters African-Americans have with law enforcement.

Many of the participants in this study reported that they would classify their socio-economic status while raising their children as low. Many regarded themselves as poor. While it is unfair to assume that a low socio-economic status can cause incarceration, it is fair to assume that having a lower socio-economic status can produce a unique set of challenges that others may

not have to encounter. Living in low-income, high crime areas, attending subpar schools, and fewer opportunities can all be the realities for children growing up in lower income families. While children from all socio-economic statuses are incarcerated, there seems to be a connection between lower socio-economic statuses and incarceration.

Many participants stated that they believed that their child's African-American heritage had an impact on their arrest and incarceration. This is fairly consistent with the answers received from participants regarding their views of law enforcement being overwhelmingly racist and crooked. From racial profiling to harsher punishments, participants believe that race was taken into consideration in their children's legal encounters. These beliefs continue to fuel the negative views African-Americans tend to already have about law enforcement and the generations of distrust in law enforcement continues.

Half of the participants interviewed believe that their parenting had some influence on their child's incarceration, the other half of participants believed that their parenting had no influence on the incarceration of their child. The researcher found this divide quite interesting. It seems as though parents who believe their parenting played a factor in their child's incarceration blamed themselves entirely, not mentioning the responsibility their child's actions had in their situation. Conversely, the parents who do not believe their

parenting contributed to incarceration feel they had no influence and their child acted without their parental influence.

The majority of the participants revealed that they believe that there are flaws in the ways that African-Americans traditionally parent their children. Free will, the influence of friends and the media, and institutionalized racism cannot be overlooked when discussing the social problem of the overrepresentation of incarcerated African-Americans, however, neither can the effects of parenting and events that are prevalent in the rearing of African-American children.

Limitations

This study intended to explore African-American parenting in relation to the social problem of overrepresentation of African-Americans in jail and prison. Though many useful data were collected, there are still several limitations to this study. The study utilized a rather small sample size of twelve participants. All of the twelve participants were residents of San Bernardino County, creating a geographical limitation. The majority of the participants identified as women, with only a few men, which creates a gender limitation and bias.

The instrument used in this study is also a limitation. Though the instrument was founded in research, it has not been empirically tested or used in any other research. As a result of the researcher writing the instrument, the wording used may also present as a limitation of this study. The

semi-structured nature of the interviews is also a limitation to this study. Participants were asked the same questions, however semi-structured interviews, by design, allow for additional conversation not specified in the instrument.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

Social Work is a profession that greatly emphasizes the importance of cultural awareness and competence. The findings of this study will allow social workers to better understand the unique struggles African-American parents face and to recognize the worldviews held by parents who have had an incarcerated child, such as their views on the fairness of law enforcement. There are many assumptions and stereotypes regarding the parents of incarcerated individuals, such as assumptions that they are unfit parents, this study humanizes these distinctive parents and allows for some stereotypes to be rehabilitated.

Social Workers need to be cognizant of the challenges that face African-American children, primarily the challenges that seem to show association with future incarceration, such as poor academic performance, single parenthood, and a shortage of positive role models. Social workers should be aware of agencies, programs, and resources that promote mentorship, academic support, and financial independence. With the findings of this study, social workers can also advocate for more resources and policies

that will continue to help, such as after-school programs and financial assistance for parents. It is recommended for future research to interview the children who have been incarcerated and obtain their opinion on their upbringing for further implications.

The African-American church and its influence on the African-American culture is a theme that has arisen from this research. The findings of this study could also hold implications for the religious community. Being that church is cultural for African-Americans, the church may be a great platform to educate this community on other forms of discipline and resources specifically for this population. The church is also an ideal entity to provide direct resources (financial classes, parenting classes, etc.) to this population considering the deep trust, reverence, and belief this population has in the church.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore African-American parenting to see if there might be an association with the overrepresentation of African-Americans in America's jails and prisons. Some of the components of African-American parenting explored in this study did appear to be associated: spanking, single-parenthood, troubled academic performance, and low socio-economic status. The purposive sample of twelve participants included two fathers and ten mothers of individuals who have been incarcerated as adults. The qualitative interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed by the researcher.

The study found that many of the cultural norms of African-American parenting found in research were supported by the reports of the participants. Many participants reported having a low socio-economic status while raising their children, being single mothers, and their child having academic and behavioral problems growing up. The study also found that many participants believed law enforcement officers are racist and crooked, leading them to have a distrust of law enforcement, that was taught to their children.

The significance of this study on social work comes from the specialized information gathered from this under-researched population. Social work prides itself on being culturally aware and sensitive of the unique needs of specific people groups. The findings of this study can further this area of social work and can provide areas of advocacy. Future research is recommended with a focus shift from the parent's perspective to the child's perspective on their upbringing.

APPENDIX A
SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Instrument
Beliefs About Incarceration Among Parents
Who's Child Has Been Incarcerated

1. What factors do you believe may have contributed to your child's incarceration?'
2. What kind of student would you say your child was growing up?
3. Did your child participate in any extra-curricular activities as a child? (sports, scouts, etc.)
4. How would you describe your child's group of friends growing up?
5. What were your main forms of disciplining your child?
6. Do you believe any of your parenting decisions led to your child's incarceration?
7. Did your child have any juvenile correctional experiences?
8. Do you feel any guilt regarding your child's incarceration?
9. Were there two parents in the home during your child's upbringing?
10. What ideals about law enforcement were being enforced during your child's upbringing?
11. Do you believe your child's racial background or gender played any role in their incarceration?
12. Looking back, if you could change one thing about how you raised your child, what would it be?
13. How would you categorize your socio-economic status during your child's upbringing?
14. Did you raise your child in a religious household?
15. Did your child have any non-parental positive role models growing up? (Pastors, Mentor, etc.)
16. Do you believe that there may be some flaws in the way African Americans traditionally parent their children?
17. Do you have any other information that you would deem useful for this study?

Developed by: Aryriana Alexander

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

Beliefs About Children Who Have Been Incarcerated: What Do Parents Know?

Investigator: Aryriana Alexander

The study in which you are being asked to participate in is designed to investigate the overrepresentation of African-Americans in jail/prison by looking at the beliefs and norms of the parents of those individuals. This study is being conducted by Aryriana Alexander, under the supervision of Dr. Ray E. Liles, Professor of Social Work, California State University, San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board, California State University, San Bernardino.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this research is to find possible connections between the social problem of overrepresentation of African-Americans in America's jails and prisons and some of the norms in African-American parenting. With this information, it is the goal that implications can be made for future research and to try and combat overrepresentation. The purpose is *not* to accuse, condemn, or judge any participant, only to gain perspective that will assist in the growth of the African-American community.

DESCRIPTION: Participation in this study will include a tape-recorded interview. There will be a total of seventeen (17) questions asked. As your time is valuable, the interview will not exceed 25-30 minutes in length. Once the consent forms are signed, the time will begin. Upon the conclusion of the interview, you will receive your compensation for your participation in this study.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation is completely voluntary and you do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. You may skip or not answer any questions and can freely withdraw from participation at any time.

CONFIDENTIAL: Your confidentiality is of most importance. Your name or any identifying information will never be documented at anytime. This document, Researcher's notes, and audiotapes will be kept in a locked box until they are destroyed at the conclusion of their necessity to this study.

DURATION: The interview that will take place today is a one-time, non-recurring interview. As stated, the interview will not exceed 25-30 minutes of your time.

RISKS: There are no physical risks to participating in this study. Due to the personal and somewhat sensitive matter of some of the questions, there may be an emotional response. Beyond the possible risk of emotional discomfort, there are no other risks to participation.

BENEFITS: The primary benefit of this research is the knowledge that will be gained on this under-researched topic. With the knowledge gained, it is the Researcher's goal to share it and make an impact on society.

VIDEO/AUDIO/PHOTOGRAPH: The interviews that will be conducted will be audio recorded. I understand that this research will be audio recorded. Initials_____.

CONTACT: If any pertinent questions about the research or research subjects' rights arise, please contact Dr. Ray Liles, Professor of Social Work. He can be reached by phone, 909-537-5557, or e-mail, Reliles@csusb.edu.

RESULTS: If you wish to see the results of this study, a copy can be obtained from:
California State University, San Bernardino- Office SB 405
5500 University Pkwy.
San Bernardino, CA 92407

CONFIRMATION STATEMENT:

I have read and understand the consent document and agree to participate in your study.

SIGNATURE:

Mark: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

Debriefing Statement

Beliefs About Children Who Have Been Incarcerated: What Do Parents Know?

This study you have just completed was designed to investigate possible connections between the of overrepresentation of African-Americans in America's jails and prisons and some of the norms in African-American parenting. With the help you provided by participating today, implications can be made to try and combat overrepresentation and assist in the growth of the African-American community.

Thank you for your participation and please enjoy your Starbucks gift card. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Aryriana Alexander or Professor Ray Liles at 909-537-5557. If you would like to obtain a copy of the group results of this study, please contact Professor Ray Liles at 909-537-5557 at the end of Spring Quarter of 2015.

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