

SEVEN OUT OF TEN? NOT EVEN CLOSE.



CENTRAL CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY

A REVIEW OF RESEARCH ON THE LIKELIHOOD
OF CHILDREN WITH INCARCERATED PARENTS
BECOMING JUSTICE-INVOLVED

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COLLABORATORS

The National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated



The mission of the National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated at Rutgers Camden is to raise awareness about the needs and concerns of the children of the incarcerated and their families by:

- Disseminating accurate and relevant information and research
- Guide the development of family strengthening policy and practice
- Train, prepare, and inspire those working in the field and
- Include the families in defining the issues and designing solutions

Institute for Municipal & Regional Policy

Children with Incarcerated Parents (CIP) Initiative

The mission for the CIP Initiative is to improve the quality of supports for children with incarcerated parents by using the various data and knowledge it gains to inform public policy and practice.

CIP Initiative's Guiding Principles:

- I. Practices should be designed specifically with CIP needs in mind
- II. Include CIP and their families in the process of program development, implementation, and evaluation
- III. The relationship between the child and the incarcerated parent should be supported
- IV. Programs should reach children and families to get "self-referrals"
- V. Stigma and isolation associated with incarceration should be reduced
- VI. Emphasis on connections, collaborations and coordination among agencies and community partners
- VII. Evaluation and accurate data are critical for identifying evidence-supported practices

Institute for Municipal & Regional Policy (IMRP)

The IMRP is a non-partisan, University-based organization dedicated to enriching the quality of local, state and national public policy. The IMRP tackles critical and often under addressed issues with the intent of ensuring the most positive outcomes for affected individuals and entities. In doing so, the IMRP bridges the divide between academia, policymakers, practitioners and the community.



SEVEN OUT OF TEN? NOT EVEN CLOSE. A REVIEW OF RESEARCH ON THE LIKELIHOOD OF CHILDREN WITH INCARCERATED PARENTS BECOMING JUSTICE-INVOLVED

It has been widely claimed without documentary evidence that children with incarcerated parents (CIP) are six times more likely than other children to become justice-involved, and that seven out of ten CIP will become justice-involved. These undocumented claims are important because (a) they have been used to justify public policy and (b) they are potentially stigmatizing to CIP. We reviewed six sources using representative sampling methods in a variety of countries and providing eight estimates of the likelihood of CIP justice involvement. Our first conclusion was that no estimate from any country even approached the “seven out of ten” claim, and the mean across estimates was slightly more than three out of ten (32.8%). Our second conclusion was that CIP were more likely than non-CIP to become justice-involved, but not nearly six times as likely – on average CIP were about three times as likely as non-CIP to become justice-involved. Third, of the three studies employing control variables, in only one of them were the results consistent with the idea that parental incarceration may be the cause of elevated justice-involvement in CIP. Because the “six times more likely” and “seven out of ten” claims are unsupported by the data and potentially stigmatizing, these claims must be abandoned.

There has been a worldwide increase in prison populations in recent years (Walmsley, 2011), and a corresponding increase in the number of children with a parent in prison (Dawson, Jackson, & Nyamathi, 2012). For example, in 2010 there were over 1.5 million U.S. adults in prison and almost 750,000 in jail (Glaze, 2011), far more than in 1980. Another example is the substantial increase in the Australian prison population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). It is therefore critical for service providers and policy makers to understand the potential effects of parental incarceration on children.

Unsubstantiated Claims About the Likelihood of CIP Justice-Involvement

Much of the public policy attention regarding children with incarcerated parents (CIP) has focused on an issue that is important but also potentially stigmatizing – the possibility that CIP will themselves become incarcerated (“intergenerational incarceration;” Flynn, 2013; Johnston, 2012; Siegel, 2011). Within the last decade the U.S. federal government has provided substantial funding for mentoring programs targeting CIP to reduce their risk of justice-involvement (Social Security Agency, 2011). It has been reported that the British Policing Minister proposed an even more direct intervention - that England track and target CIP to prevent criminal behavior (Woolf, 2004).

The rallying cry to address outcomes of CIP includes two related and frequently cited, but potentially problematic, figures that CIP are six times more likely than other children to eventually become incarcerated themselves (Siegel, 2011), and that seven out of ten CIP will someday become incarcerated (or 65%, in the case of England’s proposal to track CIP; Woolf, 2004). These claims are dramatic and capture one’s attention. They are also common on the internet, for example on websites of mentoring organizations intending to build support for resources to serve CIP. The figures are problematic because it is not at all clear that they are accurate.

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Siegel (2011) dubbed the first of these claims the “six times more likely” phenomenon” (p. 6) and noted that exhaustive searches have not found scholarly sources documenting that level of risk. If any citation is given on websites for either figure, it is often to U.S. Senate Report 106-404 (2000) which stated:

Statistics show that children of prisoners are six times more likely than other children to be incarcerated at some point in their lives. The Department of Justice has ignored the fact that 70 percent of children of prisoners will become involved with the nation’s prison system (p. 56).

The senate report provided no supporting evidence or citation for these figures, yet has itself been cited as an authoritative source. Two other government reports have made the “six times more likely” claim: Moses’ (1995) report for the U.S. National Institute of Justice and a report by the Florida House of Representatives (1998). Both reports cited Barnhill and Dressel (1991) as their source (which, as Flynn, 2013 noted, is also cited as Dressel & Barnhill, 1992), but Barnhill and Dressel did not actually study the justice-involvement rates of CIP (Flynn, 2013). Therefore, there is no basis in evidence for the dramatic figures cited to draw attention to CIP.

There are, however, several longitudinal studies with representative samples from a variety of countries that can be used to assess the likelihood of CIP justice-involvement. The purpose of the present review was to evaluate the “six times more likely” and “seven out of ten” claims by reviewing existing evidence. If the claims are incorrect and overstate the risk of intergenerational incarceration, it is important that they stop being used. In addition to being potentially misleading, the claims may also be stigmatizing to CIP.

Stigma and the Effect of Claims About CIP

There is a substantial stigma associated with having an incarcerated parent (Dawson, Brookes, Carter, Larman, & Jackson, 2013; Phillips & Gates, 2011). We argue that the stigma derives in part from a belief that CIP are likely to become justice-involved, and that the “six times more likely” and “seven out of ten” claims about CIP exacerbate the stigma. Phillips and Gates (2011) provided a theoretical description of how stigma could attach to CIP, stating that:

Stigmatization has been described as a process consisting of five key elements... Those elements are: (1) distinguishing and labeling differences, (2) associating labeled differences with negative attributes, (3) differentiating between “us” and “them” based on labeled differences, and (4) the devaluation and discriminatory treatment of labeled individuals, all of which (5) occur within the context of and serve to perpetuate differences in social, cultural, political, and economic power. (p. 286)

Research illustrates several of these elements in the lives of CIP. For example, two recent qualitative studies showed that CIP do feel a stigma from their peers (Allard & Greene, 2001; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). The CIP interviewed made it clear that they did not want peers to know about their incarcerated parent, believing that negative assumptions would be made about them. Dallaire, Ciccone, and Wilson (2010) interviewed teachers about children with an incarcerated mother, finding that the teachers believed that some of their colleagues stigmatized these children, were unsupportive, and expected little from the children. In a follow-up study teachers evaluated scenarios about a hypothetical child’s mother; results showed that children with a mother away at prison were rated as less competent than children with a mother in rehab, away at school, or just “away.”

Rodriguez, Smith, and Zatz (2009) provided indirect evidence that stigma may affect decisions made about CIP in the justice system. Records of juvenile court cases allowed a comparison of CIP with other children, and Rodriguez et al. found that children with an incarcerated father were more likely to receive an out-of-home placement than were other children, even when other variables such as family dysfunction and the child's prior referrals to juvenile court were taken into account.

These studies indicate that stigmatization of CIP occurs, i.e., that CIP are labeled, associated with negative attributes, and devalued. Another important issue is understanding exactly what negative attributes are ascribed to CIP. Qualitative research suggests a belief that CIP will themselves become criminals. According to Braman (2004), one family member of an incarcerated person described others' perceptions this way: "basically...that if there's one criminal, there's another, and another...a consistency within every family" (p. 174). We believe the assumption of intergenerational incarceration is a major factor in stigmatization of CIP. (It is worth noting that the family member quoted by Braman, 2004, believed that the assumption of consistency within families was a misconception.)

If there is a tendency to assume that CIP are likely to become incarcerated, it is important that researchers and those working with CIP do not inadvertently promote an inaccurate belief. According to Adalist-Estrin (2009) this is exactly what the "seven out of ten" claim has done. While the "seven out of ten" and "six times more likely" claims have been intended to draw attention to the plight of CIP and to advocate for resources and services, they may in fact be promoting stigmatization. The fact that the claims are made publicly without documentary evidence is disturbing; there is a need to provide accurate information and that requires a review of existing evidence.

Purpose of the Present Review and Research Questions

Our purpose was to examine studies from a variety of countries providing systematic evidence on the likelihood of CIP becoming justice-involved. We had three research questions:

- (1) What is the likelihood (i.e., the percentage) of CIP becoming justice-involved?
- (2) How much higher (if at all) is the likelihood of CIP vs. other children becoming justice-involved?
- (3) If there is a difference in the likelihood of justice-involvement for CIP vs. other children, does evidence suggest that the parental incarceration is potentially the cause of the difference? In answering this question we considered whether controlling for other factors that may correlate with parental incarceration, such as socio-economic status, could explain the difference in justice-involvement.

METHOD

Literature Search

We used a number of methods to identify studies on the likelihood of CIP becoming justice-involved. First we searched a suite of 40 EBSCOhost databases (e.g., Criminal Justice Abstracts; PsycINFO) using a variety of keywords in various combinations, including “incarcerated parent,” “child*,” “outcomes,” “effects,” and “delinquency.” Second, once we identified articles through the keyword search we examined their literature reviews to find additional relevant articles. Third, we examined articles cited in narrative reviews on CIP by Murray and Farrington (2008) and Murray and Murray (2010); and articles cited in Wildeman’s (2014) annotated bibliography. Most importantly, we drew from Murray, Farrington, and Sekol’s (2012) meta-analysis of studies comparing CIP with non-CIP groups on a variety of outcome measures. Specifically, we examined studies described in Murray et al.’s (2012) appendix as having justice involvement as an outcome measure.

Inclusion Criteria

Criteria for inclusion in our review were that a study (a) included a sample of children who had a parent incarcerated during the child’s lifetime (we excluded studies in which incarceration occurred before the child was born, or which were unclear about the timing of parental incarceration), (b) examined the likelihood (i.e., the percentage) of the children becoming justice-involved (arrest, conviction, or incarceration), and (c) used a representative sampling strategy (e.g., including all children born in a particular city during a particular time period). We excluded, as being non-representative of the general population, studies which specifically sampled children targeted as in need of services or at risk for justice involvement for reasons other than parental incarceration. While including a comparison group was not a requirement, all studies we located did include one. Having a parent who was arrested or convicted of an offense, but not necessarily incarcerated, was not sufficient to be included in our review. It is arguable that being present for a parent’s arrest is traumatic for a child. But our goal was to address the issue of parental incarceration. Further, some studies explicitly controlled for the effects of parental conviction when assessing the effect of parental incarceration (e.g., Besemer et al., 2011) which emphasizes the distinction between parental conviction vs. incarceration.

We excluded otherwise appropriate studies (e.g., Murray, Janson, & Farrington’s 2007 English sample) because of overlap with Besemer et al.’s (2011) sample which we included. Two studies (Besemer et al., 2011; van de Rakt, 2010) did not publish exactly the type of data we needed (e.g., Besemer et al., 2011, provided the “conviction rate,” or mean number of convictions, for CIP and non-CIP, rather than percentages). We were able to include the two studies because the first authors provided us with the necessary percentages.

Description of Sources Included

The search yielded six sources for inclusion, described in Table 1 and included in the reference list, which provided eight estimates of the likelihood of CIP justice involvement. Table 1 provides a summary of each source and estimate, including the sampling method and ages over which children were tracked, sizes and descriptions of CIP and non-CIP samples, ages of CIP during parents’ incarceration, measure of parent incarceration, the measure of youth justice-involvement (i.e., arrest,

conviction, or incarceration), and the percentages of CIP and non-CIP samples who became justice-involved.

The studies were conducted in a variety of countries including the United States (e.g., Huebner & Gustafson, 2007), England (Besemer et al., 2011), the Netherlands (van de Rakt, 2010), New Zealand (Gordon, 2009), and Sweden (Murray et al., 2007). Sampling methods were all intended to provide representative samples (e.g., probability sample; all births in a particular area during a particular time frame).

Five of the six studies were longitudinal, tracking the sample for periods of time up to 40 years (Besemer et al., 2011). Trice and Brewster (2004) used a retrospective design, surveying incarcerated mothers about their children's arrests over the previous year. The studies' starting points were as early as 1953 (Murray et al., 2007).

Measures of youth justice-involvement included arrest (Trice & Brewster, 2004), conviction (e.g., Huebner & Gustafson, 2007), or incarceration (e.g., Gordon, 2009). If a study provided multiple measures of justice-involvement (e.g., Gordon, 2009), we included only the most serious measure. Note that two estimates from Murray et al. (2007) were for overlapping samples and thus were not independent. Data collection methods included police or court records (e.g., van de Rakt, 2010) and self-reports (e.g., Huebner & Gustafson, 2007).

RESULTS

Likelihood of CIP Becoming Justice-Involved

Our research question regarded the likelihood of CIP becoming justice-involved. Percentages are summarized in the second-to-last column in Table 1. It is clear that not one of the estimates even approached 70 percent (the “7 out of 10” claim). The highest was 43.1 from Besemer et al. (2011). All other estimates were below 35 percent. To summarize the estimates we calculated the mean of the percentages, weighted by the sample size (weighting puts more emphasis on more accurate estimates from larger samples). Note: For Murray et al. (2007) we first combined the two estimates from the exact same sample (CIP with a parent incarcerated during age 0-6; the estimates are shown separately in Table 1). The weighted mean of the eight estimates in Table 1 was 32.8 (SD = 5.7; the 95% CI ranged from 27.5 to 38.2). Our best estimate is therefore that slightly more than three out of ten CIP may become justice-involved, much lower than the common “seven out of ten” claim.

Comparing CIP and Non-CIP on the Likelihood of Becoming Justice-Involved

Our second research question regarded how much higher the likelihood was of CIP vs. non-CIP becoming justice-involved. Table 1 shows that each study found a lower rate of justice-involvement for non-CIP than for CIP, with most of the non-CIP percentages ranging from the high single digits to the low 20’s; the exception was Besemer et al. (2011), whose non-CIP group had a likelihood of 32.9 percent. In six of the eight cases the authors tested for a statistically significant difference between CIP and non-CIP groups, and for each of the tests CIPs’ justice-involvement was significantly higher ($p < .05$).

To address the “six times more likely” claim about CIP we calculated the ratio of the weighted mean percentages of justice-involvement for CIP (weighted mean = 32.8 as noted earlier when addressing our first research question) and non-CIP. For non-CIP we calculated the mean, with cases weighted by sample sizes, and found a value of 10.6 (SD = 2.5; 95% CI ranging from 8.0 to 13.2). The ratio of the two mean values is $32.8/10.6 = 3.1$. We take this value as our best estimate, and it indicates that CIP are about three times as likely to become justice-involved as non-CIP. Our estimate does not even approach the “six times more likely” claim, though it does indicate an elevated level of justice-involvement for CIP.

Table 1**Descriptions of Studies Providing Estimates of the Likelihood of CIP Justice-Involvement**

First Author (Year) and Country	Sampling and Tracking (Ages) of Sample	N and Description of CIP Group	Description of Non-CIP Group	Age of CIP During Parent's Incarceration	Measure of Parent Incarceration	Measure of Youth Justice-Involvement	% of CIP Justice Involved	% of Non-CIP Justice Involved
Besemer (2011); England	All boys ages 8-9 at 6 schools in South London, England, and their siblings in 1961-63; Tracked until age 40	143 children, 92 boys and 51 girls	185 children, 126 boys and 59 girls, with a parent convicted of a crime/not imprisoned	Birth to age 19	Imprisoned at least once (based on police records)	Conviction between ages 19 and 40 (based on police records)	43.1	32.9 ^a
Gordon (2009); New Zealand	Birth cohort in Christchurch, New Zealand in mid-1977; Tracked to age 25	33 children with parent incarcerated prior to child's age 15	935 children without history of parental incarceration prior to age 15	Prior to age 15	Parent incarcerated prior to child being age 15 (based on parent self-reports)	Incarcerated up to age 25 (based on court records)	15.6	1.6 [*]
Huebner (2007); United States	National Longitudinal Survey of Youth - Probability sample, females ages 14-21 in 1979 tracked until 2000	31 youths with an incarcerated mother	1,666 youths without an incarcerated mother	Not clear but occurred between 1980 and 2000	Maternal incarceration (based on parent self-reports)	Conviction and probation between ages 18-24 (based on child self-reports)	26.0	10.0 ^b
Murray (2007); Sweden	Project Metropolitan; all children born in 1953 in Stockholm, still living there in 1963; Tracked until 1972	137 youths ages 0-6	14,757	Birth to age 19	Mother or father incarcerated (based on police records)	Criminal conviction (a) up to age 19 and (b) age 19-30 (based on police records)	18.2 (offense up to age 19) 24.8 (offense age 19-30)	7.2 (offense up to age 19) 12.2 (offense age 19-30) [*]

First Author (Year) and Country	Sampling and Tracking (Ages) of Sample	N and Description of CIP Group	N and Description of Non-CIP Group	Age of CIP During Parent's Incarceration	Measure of Parent Incarceration	Measure of Youth Justice- Involvement	% of CIP Justice Involved	% of Non-CIP Justice Involved
Murray (2007); Sweden (Note: overlaps with the 0-6 age group above)	Same as above	208 youths ages 7-19	14,516 41 Best friends of the children with incarcerated mothers	Same as above	Same as above	Criminal conviction ages 19-30	26.0	12.0 ^c
Trice (2004); United States	Women in a Virginia prison surveyed retrospectively about children's arrests in the previous year	47 children of currently incarcerated mothers	4,830 children of convicted/not incarcerated fathers;	Between ages of 13-20 at the time of the study	Mother currently incarcerated (women in prison were the research participants)	Arrest within the last year (based on mother's self-report)	34	15 ^d
van de Rakt (2010); The Netherlands	Criminal Careers and Life Course Study provided a "representative sample of men tried in the Netherlands in 1977" (p. 35; men only)	1,151 children of incarcerated fathers	482 children from never-convicted fathers	Birth to age 18	Incarceration (based on government records)	Criminal conviction by age 18-30 (age of youths at end of tracking varied) (based on government records)	34.9%	22.9% for children of convicted fathers ^d 9.9% for children of never-convicted fathers ^d

* Authors reported a statistically significant ($p < .05$) difference between CIP and non-CIP samples.

^a Besemer et al. actually conducted significance tests for subsamples by CIP gender and incarcerated parent gender (e.g., separate tests for boys with an incarcerated father, girls with an incarcerated father, etc.; we collapsed estimates across subgroups); all tests showed a significant difference between the CIP and non-CIP samples.

^b Difference was still significant after controlling for a variety of child characteristics (e.g., delinquency; absence of mother), maternal characteristics (e.g., education), and "correlates of criminal behavior" (p. 290) (e.g., parental supervision; peer pressure).

^c Difference between CIP and non-CIP samples became nonsignificant when parent criminality was controlled for.

^d No significance test was reported comparing CIP and non-CIP samples.

Parental Incarceration as a Potential Cause of CIP Justice-Involvement

Our third question was whether, given the fairly consistent (though smaller than frequently claimed) difference in justice-involvement between CIP and non-CIP, parental incarceration might be the cause. We cannot be certain about cause-and-effect given the correlational nature of the research reviewed here, but a reasonable analysis is to control for other factors that may affect youth justice-involvement (e.g., parental convictions rather than incarceration; Murray et al., 2007). If parental incarceration is a cause of youth justice-involvement, then it should still be a significant predictor even when controlling for other factors. On the other hand, if controlling for other factors renders parental incarceration non-significant, this would suggest that parental incarceration is not a cause of youth justice-involvement. Note that this approach assumes measurement of the important control factors. In reality a limited number of variables have been assessed, such as parent criminality and socio-economic status. Later we discuss other arguably important factors at the community level such as over-policing. Because of the failure in prior research to control for community-level factors, findings in this section could be considered very tentative.

Only three of the studies we reviewed used control variables. First, Huebner and Gustafson (2007) controlled for a variety of child characteristics (e.g., delinquency; absence of mother), maternal characteristics (e.g., education), and “correlates of criminal behavior” (p. 290) such as parental supervision and peer pressure. The difference in justice-involvement was still significant when controlling for these factors, which means it is possible that parental incarceration was a cause of increased risk. Second, Murray et al. (2007) controlled for parent criminality (having a parent who had committed a crime, regardless of whether the parent was incarcerated); controlling for parent criminality rendered the difference between CIP and non-CIP samples nonsignificant. This finding is consistent with the idea that parental incarceration was not a cause of increased risk for justice-involvement.

The third study using control variables was by Besemer et al. (2001) who controlled for parental violence and parental convictions, and in a separate analysis controlled for eight “risk factors” including family income and whether the mother was a teen when the first child was born. Controlling only for parental conviction rendered the CIP-non CIP difference nonsignificant. In a separate analysis, controlling for the eight risk factors also made the difference nonsignificant. Note that a variation on this analysis, using number of parental imprisonments (rather than simply distinguishing between children whose parent had vs. had not been incarcerated) as the predictor of youth justice-involvement, found that controlling for the various risk factors left the relationship significant (consistent with the idea that parental incarceration may be a cause of youth justice-involvement). Besemer et al.’s results are therefore ambiguous about causation. Taking all three studies into account, evidence is mixed with about half the evidence suggesting no cause-effect relationship and the other half of the evidence suggesting that cause-and-effect is plausible. However, as we noted earlier, a fully adequate test would require consideration of other control variables including those at the community level as well as the individual child level.

DISCUSSION

Our review of six sources (providing eight estimates) assessing the likelihood of justice-involvement for CIP in multiple countries provided several findings based on the best available evidence. First, there was no support in any country for the claim that seven out of ten CIP will become justice-involved; our best estimate is that the figure is slightly above three out of ten. Second, there was no support for the related claim that CIP are six times more likely than non-CIP to become justice-involved; in the studies we reviewed, the likelihood was higher for CIP than non-CIP but the ratio was about three to one. Third, the evidence was mixed on whether parental incarceration is a plausible cause of increased risk of justice-involvement; in some studies, controlling for other factors erased the difference between CIP and non-CIP.

The present study contributes to the existing literature as the only attempt to provide a quantitative review of the likelihood of CIP justice-involvement. The questionable nature of claims made about CIP has been noted in previous work (e.g., Flynn 2013; Siegel, 2011) but there has not until now been a comprehensive attempt to review the existing evidence. Past reviews have documented elevated rates of psychopathology (Murray & Murray, 2010) and antisocial behavior (Murray et al., 2012), and our review adds to that literature by quantifying the likelihood of justice-involvement. A related contribution is the evidence undercutting commonly made claims about CIP. Our findings suggest that while CIP may have a somewhat higher likelihood than non-CIP, a large majority of CIP do not become justice-involved – a conclusion that flies in the face of the commonly made “seven out of ten” claim.

Implications

The most obvious implication of our findings is that the “seven out of ten” and “six times more likely” claims should not be used, even in efforts to secure funding for services to CIP. The use of unfounded claims may have the unintentional effect of further stigmatizing an already stigmatized group (Adalist-Estrin, 2009).

A related implication is that accurate information about CIP should be disseminated as a way to potentially reduce stigma and advocate for resources. Adalist-Estrin (2009) argued for a public awareness campaign regarding CIP – but also noted the challenge of increasing support for CIP without using harmful messages (e.g., demonizing the incarcerated parents).

A different way to argue for the urgency of attention to CIP is to focus on emerging research indicating other potential negative outcomes. One outcome involves mental health - two recent studies provided evidence that witnessing a parent’s arrest is associated with trauma symptoms (Phillips & Zhao, 2010; Roberts et al., 2013). Having a multiple-justice-involved mother has been shown to be associated with higher internalizing and externalizing behaviors (though the association held for non-black, but not black children; Miller & Bank, 2013). Another outcome is physical health - Lee, Fang, and Luo’s (2013) study showed increased levels of health problems among CIP such as asthma and migraines. These outcomes are problematic both in terms of suffering for CIP and financial costs of treatment, and justify a sustained attention to CIP by policy makers and researchers. These findings could be included in a public information campaign, and if successful, the “devaluing and discrimination” discussed by Phillips and Gates (2010) could be reduced.

A third implication involves training for service providers and other professionals who come into contact with CIP. According to Adalist-Estrin (2009), services to CIP may be provided by those inadequately trained – e.g., with a belief in the “six times more likely” claim. Service providers may unintentionally convey their negative expectations to CIP, increasing feelings of stigmatization. Phillips and Gates (2010) noted the possibility that CIP might even internalize the negative attitudes about themselves. We therefore believe it is important for all those who provide services to CIP be educated about the likelihood of their justice-involvement as well as other outcomes. Providers could then be more sensitive to the needs and issues specific to CIP, and could avoid conveying negative expectations or judgments of the child’s family. We also believe that other professionals such as teachers and those working in the justice system should be educated to be aware of how parental incarceration affects children. Vacca (2008) provided several ideas for how schools can support CIP, such as helping staff understand CIPs’ needs, working to change other children’s attitudes, and establishing partnerships with agencies that serve CIP.

Limitations and Future Research

One limitation of the present review is that the findings are ambiguous with regard to cause and effect. The correlational nature of the research we reviewed means we cannot know for sure what caused the somewhat increased likelihood of justice-involvement for CIP. Results from some (though not all) studies controlling for other factors suggested that the cause may not be parental incarceration itself. An important topic for future research is to examine potential causes. Other potential causes may be things correlated with parental incarceration. For example, CIP may tend to live in neighborhoods that are heavily policed, and the heavy police presence may account for the elevated level of justice involvement. In other words, it may not be that CIP are more likely to commit crimes, but rather that they are more likely than other youths to be arrested, convicted, and/or incarcerated for crimes.

A second limitation is that the data examined here come from a variety of nations with different criminal justice policies, and these differences surely affect the estimates of the likelihood of justice-involvement.

A third limitation is the relatively small number of studies, some with small samples. There is a need for additional research on this topic with large samples.

A related issue for future research is to understand exactly what CIP’s needs are, and what types of interventions may best meet their needs. Murray and Murray (2010) reviewed evidence that CIP may tend to have elevated levels of psychopathology due to several factors. These factors may include disrupted attachment with the incarcerated parent and the stigma associated with parental incarceration. It may therefore be that interventions should focus on strengthening a child’s relationship with the incarcerated parent (e.g., through communication and/or visitation).

Another important factor may be helping children to overcome “the conspiracy of silence” (Kampfner, 1995). The conspiracy of silence can involve keeping children unaware of the parent’s actual whereabouts in a misguided attempt to protect the child, but Murray and Murray (2010) noted the damaging effects on attachment if children are confused about the reason for a parent’s absence. A second form the conspiracy of silence can take is not allowing the child to tell others about the parent’s incarceration to avoid damaging the family’s reputation. According to Kampfner (1995), children need to talk about their traumatic experiences and are further isolated by silence; effective interventions may therefore be ones that make it possible for a child to talk about the incarcerated parent.

CONCLUSION

The most important message of this review is that in studies from a variety of countries, there is no support for the often-used claims that (a) seven out of ten CIP will become justice-involved and (b) CIP are six times more likely than other children to become justice-involved. These claims may result in stigma, which is a crucial issue in the lives of CIP (Phillips & Gates, 2011). The claims should therefore no longer be used. Rather, accurate information should be disseminated on CIP and their needs (Adalist-Estrin, 2009), and research should investigate interventions to effectively address the challenges they may face.

Another issue is implications of our findings for intervention with CIP. We do not believe there are clear, direct implications, but rather believe that it is important to have a conversation (along with additional research) around effective interventions. Adalist-Estrin (2014) argued that in setting policy and developing programs, rather than depending on preconceived ideas about CIP or their parents it is critical to listen to CIP and understand the meaning they make of their parents' incarceration.

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