The Male Inmate Perspective on Jail Parenting Programs

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Research Problem: About 85% of inmates with children want to learn how to better their parenting skills and increase their visitations (Griswold & Pearson, 2005).

Research Question: What are male inmates’ perspectives on what would be effective in a jail parenting program?

Hypothesis
We predicted there would be a relationship between inmates wanting to learn how their parents' form of discipline has impacted their parenting and the desire to learn how to discipline without spanking, understanding the impact drugs and alcohol have on parenting, and how to better communicate with their children.

Theoretical Framework
The Social Learning Theory states that without any reinforcement, humans learn from observing others. Modeling is observing other individuals and their actions and replicating them (Berger, 2009). Social Learning Theory would predict that children of incarcerated parents would be more susceptible to becoming involved in criminal activity due to parental modeling of such behavior.

Literature Review
• Loper and Tuerk (2011) studied a program whose objectives were to reduce stress which resulted from issues of parenting. Participants reported less parenting stress, and a decline in mental distress.
• Eddy et al. (2008) conducted a program that included topics on how to set limits, guide, and discipline their children. Outcome analyses are currently being conducted.
• Gonzalez, Romero, and Cerbana (2007) directed a program to enhance interactions between incarcerated mothers and their children. Mothers were able to improve their knowledge about parenting skills.
• Case, Fasenfest, Sarri, and Phillips (2005) concentrated on support systems for ex-inmates by providing programs for women. Out of the 80 participants, 41 went on to enroll in a vocational program.
• Griswold, and Pearson (2005) studied programs that focused on how to better serve incarcerated parents with child support obligations. Ninety-six percent of participants stated that this project helped them become a better parent.

Methods
Participants
• 40 incarcerated males in a western Wisconsin county jail
Research Design
• Non-random
• Cross-sectional
• Purposive sampling
• Snowball sampling
Procedure
• Administered surveys to incarcerated males by the Jail Program Director
Data Analysis Plan
• Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)
• Frequencies, mean-comparisons, correlations, and a reliability analysis: Cronbach's Alpha

Variables
Demographic Variables
• (GEN) = Gender
• (AGE) = Age
• (DHC) = Do you have children
• (PCF) = Do you plan on having children
• (TCP) = Have you ever taken a parenting class
• (PIP) = Would you participate in a jail parenting program

Dependent Variables
• (PIP) = Learning how my parents’ or caregivers’ form of discipline and parenting have impacted me and my parenting
• (DAI) = Learning how drugs and/or alcohol can impact my parenting
• (HRS) = Learning skills to help reduce stress
• (ISE) = Learning skills to improve my self-esteem
• (SIF) = I would like assistance on how to successfully integrate back into my family after release
• (SIF) = I would like to learn how to discipline without spanking

Results Summary
Statistically significant correlations were found at the p<0.01 and p<0.05 level which supported this study’s hypotheses. There was a large significant correlation at the p<0.01 level between the variable (PIP) Learning how my parents’ or caregivers’ form of discipline and parenting have impacted me and my parenting and the variables (DWS) Learning how drugs and/or alcohol can impact my parenting, and (CCC) I am interested in how to better communicate and stay connected with my child. There was a medium correlation at the p<0.05 level with the variables (PIP) and (DWS) I would like to learn how to discipline without spanking.

Mean Comparisons

Correlations

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** Correlation is significant at the p<0.01 level (2-tailed)
* Correlation is significant at the p<0.05 level (2-tailed)

Implications
Practitioners
• This study has the ability to increase knowledge of corrections practitioners and policy makers about what male inmates say they need in a jail parenting program.
• The data from this study could also be utilized by program directors in rural county jails when planning or reconstructing a jail parenting program.

Future Research
• It is recommended that future research would include a random, large, national sample in order to be able to generalize the findings nationwide. It would also be useful to increase the variability on the scale by using a 1-7 Likert scale instead of a 1-5 Likert scale.

Conclusion
This study revealed male inmate perspectives about what they would find beneficial in a jail parenting program. Many inmates are struggling to communicate with their children due to parenting styles that were developed prior to incarceration (Looper & Tuerk, 2010). If you change one parent you can change a generation. The importance of jail parenting programs to inmates cannot be underestimated as evidenced by this comment included in one of the surveys:

“I think it is a great thing to have a class and to help the men & women in jail. It is tough to not be with family and especially children. Anything that helps is a plus in my book. We can never stop learning or become better people or parents.”