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Parenting From Juvenile Confinement: Adults' Reflections on Their Juvenile Experience

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Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

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LaKeasha Renee Moore

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Walden University
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Abstract

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by

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MA, American Public University, 2016

BS, Norfolk State University, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Developmental Psychology

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May 2023

Abstract

Mass incarceration in the United States has resulted in an estimated 19.7 million youth living in fatherless homes. Incarcerated juvenile fathers are contributing to that number. Juvenile fathers who are incarcerated is a socially pertinent topic with significant implications, yet child developmental scholars understudy it. This phenomenological qualitative study was conducted to fill this gap by exploring the lived experiences of adults who, as juveniles, were incarcerated fathers and how they coped with social and emotional stressors while attempting to balance adolescence and defining fatherhood. Five adult males were interviewed and asked a series of four demographic and 18 semistructured questions. The data were coded and placed in emergent themes following the interview process to determine the study's findings. Based on the results, it was determined that the participants could not balance adolescence and fatherhood. The need to be a provider for their child led to criminal activity, eventually leading most study participants to incarceration. This study could be a preventative resource for all juvenile males with children, promoting positive social change.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to juvenile fathers who are actively trying to be involved in their child's life. To all juvenile fathers who are incarcerated and feel that their voice is unheard, this is dedicated to you!

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First and foremost, I want to give all praise to my God for giving me strength, patience, resilience, and dedication to finish this dissertation. To my husband, Justin, I can't thank you enough! You made sure the kids were not a distraction when I was writing, you made sure I ate a hot meal when I was too tired to cook, and you made sure that I didn't give up, thank you for being my rock, I love you! To my three beautiful children, Aaliyah, Imani, and Josiah, you guys have been so understanding and patient with me when I was too tired and did not have the energy to give you all the attention you may have needed. A big thank you to my friends, coworkers, and family who kept pushing me to finish and speaking this completion into fruition. To my participants, thank you for allowing me to enter your lives and share your experiences with me. To my committee members, my chair, Dr. Shores, and second committee member, Dr. Hertenstein, thank you for your guidance, patience, and wisdom in assisting me throughout this process. I could not have done this without any of you!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The American criminal justice system holds almost 2.3 million people in 1,833 state prisons, 110 federal prisons, 1,772 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,134 local jails, 218 immigration detention facilities, and 80 Indian Country jails, as well as in military prisons, civil commitment centers, state psychiatric hospitals, and prisons in U.S. territories (Sawyer & Wagner, 2020). Every year, over **600,000** people enter prison gates, but people go to jail 10.6 million times each year (Sawyer & Wagner, 2020). Given the current estimates of 2.3 million people incarcerated in U.S. prisons and jails on any given day (Maruschak, & Minton, 2020), it is expected that many children from the communities most affected by U.S. incarceration policies will have at least one parent involved in the justice system. According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2017), an estimated 19.7 million youth live in fatherless homes. One in four people who go to jail will be arrested again within the same year, often those dealing with poverty, mental illness, and substance use disorders, whose problems only worsen with incarceration (Sawyer, 2019).

Among the 52,000 youth in confinement in the United States, too many are there for a “most serious offense” that is not even a crime. For example, there are over 6,600 youth behind bars for technical violations of their probation, rather than for a new offense. An additional 1,700 youth are locked up for “status” offenses, which are “behaviors that are not law violations for adults, such as running away, truancy, and incorrigibility” (Sawyer & Wagner, 2020). Nearly 1 in 10 youth held for a criminal or

delinquent offense is locked in an adult jail or prison, and most of the others are held in juvenile facilities that look and operate a lot like prisons and jails.

For youth involved in the criminal justice system, father identity develops with other identities. Alternate identities are created with reflection of ethnic or racial grouping, social class status, criminal arrest history, gang involvement, and more. Gender is the most prominent influence on identity development and is deeply affected by social and cultural influences (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Sociocultural construction of male gender identity is influenced by ideals of manhood, what Jewkes et al. (2015) considered *hegemonic masculinity*. Incarceration and impoverished communities influence hegemonic masculine attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors through the supervision and control of boys through the juvenile justice system. The hyper-masculine man and the features of institutionalization are similar, yet they are incompatible with some of the characteristics of a caring father, such as warmth, sensitivity, and attentiveness. This study's aim was to obtain an in-depth description of and understand the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated teen fathers and how they coped with social and emotional stressors while defining and performing their paternal role. I intended to identify factors that influence the acceptance or rejection of a teen father's identity for those who were parenting a child.

Background

One of the most repeated frequent findings concerning teen fatherhood is that, as with adult incarcerated fathers, teen fatherhood has been empirically associated with boys who come from disadvantaged families and communities and with those who participate

in delinquent behaviors (Bamishigbin et al., 2019). Research has clearly shown a correlation between early-onset fatherhood and juvenile delinquency (Landers et al., 2015; Tremblay et al., 2017).

Studies have shown that 92% of incarcerated individuals are male and about 1.1 million have minor children (Glaze & Maruschak, 2018). Prior research has reported that up to a third of incarcerated juveniles are fathers (Khurana & Gavazzi, 2011; Wei et al., 2002). There have been several programs that have been implemented to address parenting while incarcerated; however, the focus has been primarily on the mother and child. The teen fathers who are incarcerated have been unknown figures. Prior studies have found that incarceration shapes parenting and can present barriers to father child relationships (Hayes et al., 2018; Moran et al., 2017).

Chideya and Williams (2013) emphasized that teen fathers, like their female counterparts, must work through their developmental process while dually trying to adjust to their paternal role. Prior research has also shown that most teenage fathers are confused, afraid, and anxious (Henson, 2020), much like the teen girls they impregnate. Although these teen fathers are scared, contrary to stereotypes, most teenage fathers care about what happens to their children and remain committed (Charles et al., 2019; Madiba & Nsiki, 2017). In addition, studies of incarcerated teen fathers indicate that the quality of family roles affects adolescents' level of psychological distress (Reczek & Zhang, 2016). This can be interpreted as meaning that when an adolescent father is supportless, he will experience distress because of lack of belonging. Teenagers who become fathers are also likely to change how they behave.

These teen fathers need to be given the opportunity to explore their concerns and feelings. The neglect of adolescent fathers embodies a lack of concern with the paternal role in childrearing (Barr et al., 2014; Matlakala et al., 2018). Prior research has also shown that males have been ignored in most reviews and discussions of teen pregnancy because childbearing has traditionally been viewed as a female issue. Literature shows that psychological connections of adolescent fatherhood need to be in depth. Changes in self-esteem, locus of control, level of ego development, and interpersonal maturity are just a few functioning variables that might be associated with the event of becoming a father. Perhaps most importantly, it is necessary to examine the extent to which becoming a father while incarcerated during adolescence is a stressful event requiring readjustment to life goals. Research conducted by Lemay et al. (2010) indicated that involvement with their children could help to encourage psychological well-being and improve quality of life for incarcerated teen fathers.

Problem Statement

The problem addressed by this study was teen fathers who parent while they are incarcerated. Over 48,000 youth in the United States are residing in facilities away from home and their families because of juvenile delinquency involvement (Sawyer, 2019). Approximately 45% of incarcerated men aged 24 or younger are fathers (Sawyer, 2019). Incarceration can intensely alter the involvement and devotion between a father and their child, which compromises the preservation of a positive fatherly identity and often destroys relationships between father and child. Being a father as a teen is a serious life experience. New teen fathers are confronted with a simultaneous developmental crisis:

being a teen and becoming a father (Uengwongsapa et al., 2018). With already having to confront the negative stressors of stereotypes as an incarcerated teen being labeled as a delinquent, criminal, and offender, teen fathers who are incarcerated also must confront the stressors and stigmas that come with being a teen father, such as being labeled selfish, negligent, and predatory (Neale, 2016; Neale & Davies, 2015; Taylor, 2013; Weber, 2012). Research has shown that responses to shame or stigmas can hinder functioning and can contribute to deprived mental health and maladaptive behaviors (Moore et al., 2016). Additionally, while they are adapting to the new role of being a father while incarcerated, the experience of fatherhood for these teens can be tainted, and they must learn to cope with these stressors.

There has been consistent empirical qualitative exploration research that has examined the experiences of currently incarcerated teen mothers, adult mothers (Aiello & McQueeney, 2019), and adult fathers (Prins et al., 2020). Matlakala et al. (2018) and Barr et al. (2014) asserted that the phenomenon of teen fatherhood does not receive as much attention as that of teen motherhood.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was to explore, obtain an in-depth description of, and understand the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated teen fathers and how they coped with social and emotional stressors while defining and performing their paternal role.

Research Question

Informed by Tuffour's (2017) IPA approach, my dissertation study was geared towards understanding the lived experiences of incarcerated teen fathers in relation to the following research question:

RQ1. What are the lived experiences of incarcerated teen fathers?

The research subquestions were as follows:

SRQ1. What are the social and emotional stressors that incarcerated teen fathers experience?

SRQ2. What are the coping skills that incarcerated teen fathers with social and emotional stressors use while parenting from confinement?

Integrated Theoretical Framework

With scholarly research relating to teen fathering being understudied, there is no current all-inclusive theory on teen fathering during incarceration. Therefore, it would be overwhelming to address the massive diversity of fathering perspectives, and understanding teen fathering from a developmental framework would become divided due to the various theories related to lifespan development (Palkovitz, 2007). Because there is no definitive teen fathering theory, I selected several theories with relevant concepts to guide my research. This theoretical framework was built by four interrelated constructs that I used to understand the lived experiences of incarcerated teen fathers: (a) Erik Erikson's (1968) psychosocial theory; (b) Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory; (c) John Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory or love between parent and child; and (d) Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) coping theory, which focuses on cognitive

and behavioral efforts to manage any stressful situations. This theoretical framework suggested that incarcerated teen fathers learn their own social, emotional, and parental skills from self-determination based on wanting a relationship with their child. These teen fathers' social and emotional skills influenced their own personal outcomes, as well as the parenting practices and family climate that they developed with their own children while incarcerated.

Nature of the Study

This qualitative study used a phenomenological paradigm, IPA (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Tuffour, 2017). IPA was used to explore how people interpret their personal experiences (Alase, 2017; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). IPA gives researchers the best opportunity to understand the deepest discussion of the “lived experiences” of research participants. IPA was mainly aligned for this research because of its commitment to explore, describe, interpret, and situate these teen fathers' personal perspective on their lived experiences.

In-depth, one-on-one interviews were conducted with current adults who, as teens, were incarcerated in a Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice facility. This study utilized a purposive sample of five participants. I conducted in-depth interviews with three to six formerly incarcerated male adults ages 18–24 who were teen fathers who parented from confinement during their juvenile years. These interviews allowed them to share and describe their lived experiences, challenges, social and emotional stressors, as well as coping strategies, all while the participants defined and performed the paternal role.

Definition of Terms

The following terms derived from the literature review are defined in order to better acquaint the reader with the intended meaning of each.

Adolescent father: To maintain consistency with the statistics used in this research, an adolescent father is a male age 15 to 19 years who has fathered a child (Ventura et al., 2001).

Detention center: A short-term facility that provides temporary care in a physically restricting environment for juveniles in custody pending court disposition and, often, for juveniles who are adjudicated delinquent and awaiting disposition or placement elsewhere or are awaiting transfer to another jurisdiction.

Father: In the context of my study, *father* describes a male who has biological children. Fatherhood includes fertility status and when a man has biological children, adoptive children, or stepchildren.

Fatherhood: The state of being a father. Fatherhood includes fathers' behaviors and identity in terms of what they do and experience in their role as fathers (Pleck, 2007).

Father involvement: Father involvement, according to Lamb et al. (1985) is broadly defined and comprised of three components: engagement (interacting with the child directly), accessibility (being available for the child, but not interacting directly with the child), and responsibility (monitoring and providing for the child).

Incarceration: State of being confined; imprisonment..

Juvenile: Relating to young people under 18 years of age.

Assumptions

Assumptions were made that all participants were incarcerated as a teen while being a father. Assumptions were also made that all participants would be truthful during the interviews, especially because they were given the opportunity to utilize an alternative name. Partial viewpoints were assumed to have been offered, because of shame or other concerns that could have arisen during the interviews. Deliberate dishonesty could also have been likely, because of questions regarding situations that could have happened during their incarceration, although it was assumed not to be a substantial concern. Confidentiality agreements may have helped results with eliminating the desire for participants to be dishonest. It was further assumed that participants would reveal their true experiences whether those experiences were positive or negative.

The purpose was to explore the lived experiences of teen fathers who were incarcerated. Positive experiences were assumed to be associated with seeing their child via visitation and upon release, which had the possibility of manifesting during interviews. There was also the assumption that participants would discuss having negative experiences with being ousted from their children's lives. The various assumptions did not delegitimize the acknowledged need for this qualitative research study, which targeted incarcerated teen fathers. Young adults' participation was strictly confidential. All young adults who participated in the interviews had the right to discontinue engagement in their interview at any time and were informed of this fact. If at any time the participants no longer wished to participate in the interview, they would have informed me.

Scope and Delimitations

The purpose of this study was not to represent the experiences of all teen fathers who have been incarcerated, but to reflect the experiences of only those participants who were represented. This study did not include individuals outside Virginia who had similar experiences or individuals who did not respond to the request for participants.

Limitations

A study's limitations are potential weaknesses beyond the researcher's control (Ross et al., 2019). The backgrounds and bias of the participants in this study were limitations to the complete development of the lived experience. Another limitation was that the study was gender specific in focusing only on teen paternal parenting. The geographical limitation of Virginia was also an aspect to consider. Another limitation of this study could have been the sampling strategy (i.e., snowball sampling), which was dependent on one participant's recommendation of other participants who fit the criteria for the study (Naderifar et al., 2017).

Significance

This study was significant in stimulating research efforts on this neglected population of incarcerated teen fathers and providing teen fathers, children of teen fathers, mothers of teen fathers' children, social workers who deal with incarcerated teen fathers, juvenile correctional officers, counselors, detention superintendents, juvenile correctional program directors, educators, mental health personnel, and other professionals with a deeper awareness and understanding of their lived experiences. Psychological research on this population would also be useful to inform educational

psychologists (EPs) of the issues affecting young men who are entering fatherhood while in the criminal justice system.

This study of adult men who, as juveniles, were incarcerated teen fathers and their lived experiences of navigating fatherhood while incarcerated can be a significant contribution to the body of knowledge on the effects of juvenile incarceration. Little is known about the lived experiences of incarcerated teenage fathers and how they cope with social and emotional stressors. If developmental psychologists, as well as members of the juvenile justice system and social service field, can identify challenges and come up with strategies that will benefit the future of children of incarcerated teen fathers as well as the quality of life and emotional stability of incarcerated teen fathers, they as well as the children can benefit from the information gained in this interpretive phenomenological study. This study can change lives, policies, and practices and has the potential to make a positive impact on social change. Most of all, it could be a preventative resource for all juveniles with children.

Summary of Chapter 1

Chapter 1 provided an overview of pertinent literature, outlined the purpose of the study, presented the research questions, and included definitions in support of this qualitative study of previously incarcerated adolescent fathers. The need for additional research is evident from the high cost associated with adolescent parenting, negative stereotypes, and challenges facing this population. This phenomenon not only affects adolescent parents and their offspring, but also financially impacts the larger society. This study set the stage for adolescent fathers to provide a narrative in their own voice to

address the stereotypes attributed to them and to provide greater insight into their needs as young parents.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction

The United States has over 2.5 million people incarcerated, a rate that far exceeds any other country in the world (Nutt et al., 2008; Porter, 2019; Shlafer et al., 2019). On any given day, over 48,000 youth are confined in secured facilities (Sawyer, 2019). Moreover, the history of incarceration is associated with many negative consequences, such as poor physical and mental health outcomes, difficulties obtaining employment, and socioeconomic hardship (Huebner & Frost, 2018; Massoglia, 2008). The effects of imprisonment on a family can hinder the relationship between loved ones. A well-known fact is that over half of the individuals incarcerated in the United States are parents (Glaze & Maruschak, 2016). Documented research over the past several decades has focused on how periods of incarceration affect the children and family members left behind. Researchers have also presented potential solutions to improve consequences for children, such as parenting courses during periods of imprisonment. Conversely, more research on how incarceration affects the parents themselves is needed (Dargis & Mitchell-Somoza, 2021).

Due to incarceration or other factors, separation from children represents significant acute and long-term stressors (Beckmeyer & Arditti, 2014). In addition, there is evidence that links incarcerated parents to institutional misconduct and psychiatric distress (Dargis & Mitchell-Somoza, 2021). However, the separation distress that contributes to such risk may depend on several other factors, such as the availability of an alternative caregiver, support within the institution, and the nature of parent-child

relationships before incarceration (Arditti, 2016). Navigating relationships with children is a significant stressor for incarcerated parents; this may signify a service need for this population. Incarceration can intensely alter the involvement and devotion between a father and their child, which can compromise the preservation of a positive fatherly identity and often destroy the relationship between father and child. Being a father as a teen is a profound life experience. New teen fathers face a simultaneous developmental crisis: being a teen and becoming a father (Uengwongsapa et al., 2018). Incarcerated teens are labeled and stigmatized as delinquent, criminal, and offender. Incarcerated teens who are fathers also must confront the stressors and stigmas that come with being a teen father, such as being labeled selfish, negligent, and predatory (Neale, 2016; Neale & Davies, 2015; Taylor, 2013; Weber, 2012). Research shows that responses to shame or stigmas can hinder functioning and contribute to deprived mental health and maladaptive behaviors (Moore et al., 2016).

There has been little attention to date on incarcerated teen fathers' lived experiences and challenges. Different research strategies were used to locate articles and literature for this study involving the lived experiences of incarcerated fathers, the challenges they face while parenting while incarcerated, and how they cope with stressors and separation from their children. This literature review looked at research conducted to date regarding the targeted population and resources available to those who are parenting while incarcerated. The fundamentals of Arditti's family inequality framework (FIF) are essential for understanding why parenting from juvenile incarceration impacts mental wellness.

Synopsis of Literature

In past decades, researchers have been more attentive to the emotional well-being of incarcerated offenders' children, partners, and family members than to that of the incarcerated offenders themselves. However, the previous focus has been more on the processes of adaptation and coping than on specific sources and experiences of stress (Porter, 2019). Hence, the findings of the reviewed articles (including reviews and meta-analyses) focus on how incarceration affects the incarcerated parent (Dargis & Mitchell-Somoza, 2021; Loper et al., 2009; Porter, 2019). While literature has placed interest in some potential stressors felt by current and former inmates (i.e., loss of freedom, economic strain, marital dissolution), few studies have explored the firsthand accounts of this population. Furthermore, prison ethnographies consistently paint prison life as straining (Crewe, 2018; Porter, 2019). At the beginning of a prison term, elevated indications of stress may reflect emotional reactions to the disruption of a prior lifestyle, family separation, and the uncertainties involved in being a resident in a new environment. However, recent literature (Meyers, 2021; Paulus & Dzindolet, 2019; Stansfield et al., 2019; Talik & Skowroński, 2018) has focused on coping with said stress experiences through religion, meditation, clinical psychological programs, and parenting programs.

Finally, while studies have shown benefits to implementing family parenting programs in jails and prisons, recent work has shown that these programs may not be contextually relevant (Henson, 2020). Parenting programs may provide valuable skills and information about parenting children once released from jail or prison effectively.

Incarcerated parents have few tangible details on effectively engaging with their children from an institution and managing frequently complicated caregiver dynamics resulting from incarceration.

Literature Search Strategy

Through the literature review, I aimed to identify relevant articles, journals, and dissertations related to the lived experiences of incarcerated teen fathers. To conduct a comprehensive review of the literature, several databases were used. The initial search was limited to the previous 5-year period (2017–2021). However, the literature search was extended beyond 5 years to cultivate more depth on the topic. This extension was due to limitations in the number of resources available to support the research question. The discovery resources included searching Walden University's library and searching the following databases: EBSCO, JSTOR, PsycINFO database and Complementary Index. ProQuest and the search engines Google and Google Scholar were used to explore peer-reviewed journal articles. The initial key search terms included *maternal/paternal imprisonment, teen parenting, teen parenthood, teenage parents, juvenile, prison, jail, incarceration, teen parents, adolescent parents, teen fathers, adolescent fathers, adolescent mothers, juvenile justice system, detention center, teen birth rate, father identity, father–child relationship, early-onset fatherhood, parental stressors, gatekeeping, father–child bond, and coping*.

In the EBSCO database, for the main subject of "incarcerated teen fathers," there were no articles generated. I then generalized the search and searched "teen parenthood"; this populated only 19 peer-reviewed articles from 2017–2021. When I used the search

phrase "incarcerated teen fathers" in Google Scholar, there were approximately 8,500 articles; however, these articles were generalized to all incarcerated fathers, with most articles focusing on adult incarceration.

Research that fit the criteria for the literature review was sorted based on the topic of the study. The articles selected were from various consolidated sources, focused on parenthood, teen parenthood, fatherhood, juvenile incarceration, gatekeeping, parenting challenges while incarcerated, coping with stressors, and parental incarceration. The relevant articles were categorized by topic and organized by date. Organizing by date allowed me to focus on the most recent information.

This integrative literature review contains various studies, including quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. In the first section, I discuss the characteristics of incarcerated parents. In the second section, I look at the challenges of parenting while confined. The third section presents the topic of the psychological impact that incarceration has on parents. The fourth section focuses on incarcerated fathers, the fifth section focuses on challenges involving gatekeeping. Last, the sixth section focuses on coping with the stressors of teen parenting from incarceration.

Theoretical Perspectives

Although the current literature pertaining to fathering is flooded with empirical studies, there is not a comprehensive integrative theory for researchers to utilize (Cabrera et al., 2007a). Due to the lack of a comprehensive theory, researchers have conducted a patchwork approach to research or selectively addressed variables and constructs to be analyzed in their studies (Palkovitz, 2007). Pleck (2007) reviewed and provided critiques

of four existing theories that are essential to conceptualizing the dynamics of paternal influences: (a) psychosocial theory, (b) attachment theory, (c) Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, and (d) coping theory.

Psychosocial Theory

Erik Erikson coined the identity concept. Literature shows that finding an identity is a primary developmental task during adolescence. Erikson developed the psychosocial theory to explain the human development phenomenon. Erikson (1968) claimed that individuals go through eight stages during human development. Furthermore, Erikson believed that this developmental process involves the somatic or bodily system, ego system, and societal system. The somatic system is all those biological processes necessary for the individual's functioning. The ego system includes those processes central to thinking and reasoning. Last, the societal system is where a person becomes integrated into society. For this study, the adolescence stage was explored with its crises, as it is a time of experimentation with sexual behavior and mischief. During this stage, teenagers face identity versus role confusion; with parenthood, they may not complete this stage, hence stagnating in role confusion.

Kroger (2006) asserted that proponents of psychosocial theory seek to dissect and understand the interplay between individual biology, psychology, and social acknowledgment and response within a historical context. In other words, this theory recognizes that boys are not physically or emotionally close to their male role models in some cultures. Given the distance between teenagers and their role models, teenage fathers are without much-needed support to see them through their transition from being

a teenager to becoming a father as a teenager (Chideya & Williams, 2013). The lack of support leads teenage fathers to feel isolated. Because they have to juggle two stages, adolescence and fatherhood, they resort to what is known as an *identity crisis*

Additionally, Ragelienė (2016) stated that identity crisis exposes the conflict between identity and role confusion. At this stage, a teenage father starts to wonder what his role in society is. The inability of a teenage father to clearly distinguish his position in society results in a teenage father being unable to transition from the adolescence stage to fatherhood. Failing to transition as a teenage father can lead to ego identity issues. According to Erickson (1968), ego identity is the awareness of an individual's uniqueness and the unconscious desire for continuity of experience. At this point, teenage fathers find themselves as unique individuals for having a child as teenagers; on the contrary, the community sees them as deviant children. The stigma that hovers over teen fathers does not stop many from pursuing employment to provide for their children.

Attachment Theory

From a developmental point of view, many theories are pertinent to understanding the consequences of parental incarceration. Bowlby's (1973) attachment theory aids as a framework in understanding the significance of the growth of the parent-child relationship. Bowlby's (1973) attachment theory is the most cited trauma theory regarding parental incarceration. Bowlby (1973) posited that the disruption of parent-child attachment—in this case, via parental incarceration—can result in adverse emotional reactions. Therefore, when researching the psychosocial impacts of the relationship between an incarcerated father and his child, attachment theory is a tool to

gauge the harmfulness of separation. Parental incarceration might threaten children's attachment security because of parent–child separation, confusing communication about parental absence, restricted contact with incarcerated parents, and unstable caregiving arrangements (Murray & Murray, 2010).

Murray and Murray (2010) stated that maternal incarceration tends to cause more disruption for children than paternal incarceration and may lead to a greater risk for insecure attachment and psychopathology. Children's prior attachment relations and other life experiences are likely to be of great importance for understanding children's reactions to parental incarceration. Paternal incarceration can cause economic strain, reduced supervision, stigma, home and school moves, and other adverse life events for children. At its most basic level, attachment is a bond between a caregiver and child manifested in efforts to be physically close and emotionally in touch with the attachment figure, especially in times of distress (Bowlby, 1982). This attachment figure creates both physical and emotional safety for the child to find, creating a consistent, responsive relationship (Murphy, 2018).

Literature concerning infant development and attachment argues that every child needs at least one consistent and responsive caregiver, especially during infancy and early childhood (Bowlby, 1982; Byrne et al., 2010). Bowlby's stance for decades was that infants are driven to attach to their caregivers through a genetically determined motivational system, whether or not those caregivers are responsive to them (Reisz et al., 2018; Schore & Schore, 2008). There have been consistent findings that although genetic factors may make one vulnerable to psychopathology, environmental factors are highly

influential in how the symptoms present themselves (Peters, 2021; Siegel, 1999). Early attachment relationships are the environment in which "genetically preprogrammed but experience-dependent brain development" unfolds (Siegel, 1999, p. 112). Therefore, one's attachment model serves as an organizational component of the mind, providing benefits in the case of secure attachment or interferences in insecure attachment.

Attachment theory conceptualizes both the early experiences of incarcerated fathers and their present-day roles as fathers, promoting valuable multigenerational treatment intervention options.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory holds that the environmental surroundings of people, or where people live, influence their biological, psychological, and social development. Bronfenbrenner also contended that children do not grow up in isolation. Bronfenbrenner postulated that there is a set of interrelated systems that guide children in life. These systems include the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem. According to Bronfenbrenner's theory, social systems have roles, norms, and rules that contribute to a person's psychological development. Additionally, according to Bronfenbrenner's theory, people face numerous challenges in life, especially during their teenage years. For this reason, Bronfenbrenner postulated that providing young people with a high degree of social and environmental support would be beneficial.

Conceptually, this study could also be informed by Arditti's (2018) FIF and a conceptual model of responsible fathering (Doherty et al., 1998). Arditti's model suggests

that there are precise ways in which “parental incarceration impacts family functions, roles, and investments in children in ways that contribute to or intensify inequality in family life” (Arditti, 2018, p. 43). Arditti named material hardship, family instability, and parenting quality as mechanisms that shape child and family outcomes in the context of parental incarceration. Doherty and colleagues’ (1998) model of responsibility was drawn from an ecological framework, emphasizing the role of individual, relational, and contextual factors in conceptualizing father involvement. Both are advantageous in that they help to offer a view to consider the factors that inspire fathering (Doherty et al., 1998) and the factors that affect child and family well-being and inequality in the context of parental incarceration (Arditti, 2018).

Literature Review

What is a father?

There is no universally accepted definition of what constitutes being a father. Traditionally, societal norms describe a father as the head of the household, a primary provider in the family (Lamb, 2000), and a protector. Although there is not a universally accepted definition of what constitutes being a father, Yogman et al. (2016) broadly defined *father* in his study as the male or males identified as most involved in caregiving and committed to the well-being of the child, regardless of living situation, marital status, or biological relation. While society views a father's predominant role, it is neither simplistic nor historically accurate for all fathers. This is a significant idea because many adolescent fathers model adult fathers with this restrictive definition of fatherhood (Paschal, 2013). A gradual change takes place from being a recipient of care to being a

provider starting in adolescence. One of the predictors of adolescent father involvement is providing financial support (Paschal, 2013; Wilkinson et al., 2009). Lamb (2000) and Paschal (2013) noted that if the adolescent father cannot meet these needs, he may stop participating in his child's life.

The mid-1970s is when fathers became more dynamically involved in all aspects of parenting (Lamb, 2000). Lamb acknowledged that the father's active role as a co-parent might have started earlier than the mid-1970s but recognized this later when fathers accepted their new role that encompassed daily caregiving. Lamb sites represent fathers in the media and society as illustrations of fathers being nurturers actively involved in everyday parenting. Paternal nurturing became the standard for father involvement (Lamb, 2000).

The timing of parenthood is an essential determinant of its benefits and costs. Teenage pregnancy and parenting, given national U.S. statistics, are most often thought "too early." "Statistics are not the only way to explain teen parenting. Regardless of the accuracy of the data, it tells only part of the adolescent father's story. The emergent body of qualitative literature has been instrumental in producing a forum for teenage fathers to speak their perception of what being a father means to them. These descriptive narrative reports from fathers have enriched the literature on fatherhood and adolescent parenting (Tuffin et al., 2010). Qualitative studies have provided an objective view of the fathers' contribution (Rominov et al., 2018), a perspective to understanding their needs, and understanding their perceptions of their new identity as a father.

Qualitative studies by Paschal (2013) offer evidence that specifically adolescent fathers describe themselves as feeling responsible for the moral compass of their family, providing financial support, and being actively involved in child-rearing. By obtaining narratives from the fathers themselves, instead of relying on stereotypes, it can be surmised that some adolescent fathers recognize the importance of being a multifaceted contributor in their child's life.

Paternal Identity

A more specific issue that has received increasing attention and will be one of the main focuses of this study, is the effects of imprisonment on the 'paternal identity' of adolescent male offenders with children (Chui, 2016). Defining identity remains to be a difficult task for scholars. When applying concepts of identity theory to fatherhood, identity theory has many components within it and is the nucleus to many studies focused on titles, roles, and responsibilities (Adamsons & Pasley, 2016; Pasley et al., 2014; Willetts & Clarke, 2014). Rogers (2018) returns to Erikson's concept of psychosocial relativity, which he used to define identity, to describe a transactional approach to examining identity processes, an approach wherein self and society are actively and jointly (re) constructed. Okeefe (2019) conducted a study that examined the experiences of 15 imprisoned fathers regarding their involvement in their children's education. The participants in Okeefe's study validated restricted identity standards concerning education and sometimes led to a strayed commitment.

A study by Randles (2020) study showed that fathers overwhelmingly found parenting programs appreciative because it offered the social and economic means they

needed to enact diverse meanings of “being there.” Most fathers in the study reported that the program allowed them to realize their contribution goals, thereby enabling them to better align their paternal identities and behaviors. Research finds men with less egalitarian gender attitudes are less involved (Buchler et al., 2017; Coltrane et al., 2004). However, one understudied factor is the climate surrounding expectations of fathers' roles, including men's perceptions of the importance of father involvement. Fathers may demonstrate low prenatal involvement because salient social norms do not hold men to high involvement expectations. Based on the social roles ascribed to men and women by society, men are held to lower expectations compared to women as caregivers (Eagly & Wood, 1999).

Hutton (2016) found that negative effects on relationships with partners and children stem to a large degree from the long periods of separation which a prison sentence inevitably entails. During the time spent incarcerated, the prisoner has little knowledge about, or control over, what is happening on the outside. Factors that can make this even worse include: frustrations and resentment experienced by partners due to extra burdens placed upon them, emotional stress, loss of income, and long and complex journeys to visit prisons, unfriendly visiting conditions not conducive to intimate communication (Hutton, 2016); and prison cultures dominated by ‘macho’ attitudes or ‘authoritative, controlling, heterosexual, independent, and violent’ kinds of masculinities (Ricciardelli et al., 2015), which make it difficult for men to express ‘softer’ emotions. Specifically, where relationships with children are concerned, attention has been drawn to the damage done by imprisonment to ‘paternal identity’.

Teen Fatherhood

Until recently, teen mothers have received far more attention than teen fathers; the relative invisibility of fathers contributes to the stereotype that teens are irresponsible or absent fathers (Kiselica & Kiselica, 2014; Smith-Battle, 2021). Teen fatherhood occurs when the teenager is in a developmental stage of identity, and becoming a father is an adult stage (Hunt et al., 2015). This means the teen father will now have to go through two stages concurrently. This double identity of adolescence and parenthood can lead to anxiety due to the un-readiness of the teen father to assume the new parental responsibilities. Hunt stated that teen fathers are often ill-prepared for the duties and responsibilities with fatherhood.

In a qualitative study exploring co-parenting and father involvement, Varga & Gee (2017) found that adolescent couples had difficulties whether married, romantically involved or not, maintaining supportive co-parenting relationships, in part because of their lack of interpersonal skills. There are different characteristics and factors associated with teen-fatherhood. Fathers under the age of 21 are often characterized as promiscuous teen boys who fail in their responsibilities to the children, and the mothers of their children (Jaffe, et al. 2001). Jaffe found that only 50% of adolescent fathers lived with their child after birth. A study by Dudley (2007), argued that several young fathers report that they sincerely want to be actively involved in their role as parent/father, yet the primary factor in the continued involvement of the father is ‘the existence of a continuous romantic relationship between the biological parents. In another qualitative study by

(Uengwongsapat et al., 2018) all the expectant teen fathers resolved to do their best in raising their babies.

Jaffe et al.'s (2001) study aimed to explore whether young men who come from disadvantaged family backgrounds and whose behavior puts them at risk of a range of adverse outcomes in young adulthood. Jaffe found the following risk factors are associated to an increased risk of becoming a young father: Being born to a teenage mother; living with a single parent; early initiation of sexual activity; low interest in school; and a history of conduct disorder. A quantitative study by Landers et al., (2015) stated that delinquent teens when residing with their children reported fewer offending behaviors, such as marijuana use and drug distribution, compared to periods when they did not reside with their children.

Stressors Associated With Teen Fatherhood

Most teens enter parenthood unprepared for the stress a new baby brings. Many experienced frustrations, resentment, and even anger toward their newborns, which may explain why teen parents are at higher risk for abusing and neglecting their babies.

Becoming a parent usually changes an individual's life in many important ways, such as influencing an individual's health and other vital outcomes. The most predominant impact might be on general well-being or life satisfaction (Routon, 2018). Whether the effect of parenthood on happiness will be positive or negative for a particular individual is challenging to predict.

One of the challenges teen parents face when attempting to complete high school is the stigma attached to being a teen parent (Watson & Vogel, 2017). Although it is no

surprise that teen parents are going to receive some unwanted attention, many people fail to realize the impact this has on these adolescents. Young parents may internalize negative stereotypes of teenage parents in ways that can create feelings of shame, fear, insecurity, and frustration (Hans & White, 2019). Negative societal views of teenage parenting can be powerful and internalized by young parents.

Alongside challenges teen fathers face, there have been many stressors that are associated with young fatherhood that have been identified by research; amongst those identified in these studies by teenage fathers were: finance (Yogman et al., 2016), lack of information about legal rights and childcare; difficulties accessing support services; lack of involvement in decision making processes both during pregnancy and the birth; conflict with the maternal grandparents. These stressors can potentially lead to a lack of involvement despite research (Clayton, 2016). Clayton also revealed that there is a strong desire in many fathers to be involved in their child's upbringing.

In a study conducted by Reczek & Zhang (2016), it was discovered that the quality of family roles affects teenagers' level of psychological distress. This means that when a teen father does not receive support from his family, he will come upon distress because of a lack of empathy. Teenagers who become fathers are also likely to change how they behave (Thornberry, 2000). A study conducted by Thornberry emphasized that teenagers engage in risky behaviors such as smoking, drinking, drug use, and dangerous hobbies.

Quinlivan & Condon (2005) revealed that some teen fathers experienced stress when they learned that their partners were pregnant. This stress is often caused by

realizing their inability to provide for their children and society's reaction to teen fatherhood, which is often restrictive and disapproving, thus leading to the conscious development of shame and guilt. It is common that most cultures disapprove of teen fatherhood. As such, teenagers who find themselves on the wrong side of their societal norms are likely to develop these feelings. Without proper family support and proper education, teen pregnancy is an uncertain and challenging experience for young girls and boys.

Characteristics of Incarcerated Parents

Over two million people in the United States are in detention centers, jails, and prisons. More than half of this population has a history of mental health problems, including substance use (James & Glaze, 2016). Trauma exposure is immensely high among those incarcerated (Briere et al., 2016), particularly incarcerated women (Komarovskaya et al., 2011). There is also a growing recognition that the systemic racism inherent in the United States criminal justice system is in and of itself a traumatic experience for people of color who are court-involved, who comprise a disproportionate percentage of the criminal justice system (Sawyer, 2020). On average, those incarcerated within the US prison system have experienced widespread socioeconomic adversity, exposure to violence and trauma, mental health symptoms, struggles with substance use, racism, and inequality, all when a judge has allocated a criminal sentence. The additional stressor of being a parent forcibly separated from their children is another stressor placed on incarcerated parents.

It is vital to obtain a better understanding of who comprises this population. In-state prisons, 48% of black males, 51% of Hispanic males, and 40% of white males report having a minor child, whereas 50% of black females, 62% Hispanic females, and 60% of white females report having a minor child. Considering federal prisons, 64% of black males, 64% Hispanic males, and 34% white males report having a minor child. Comparatively, two-thirds of Hispanic (67%) females in federal prison were mothers with minor children, compared to about one in two white (49%) and black (54%) females (Glaze & Maruschak, 2016). Children of color are significantly more likely to have a parent in prison than white children (Glaze & Maruschak, 2016).

Parents incarcerated in state or federal prisons have on average, two children each, resulting in over 1.5 million children with a parent currently in prison and up to 5 million children who have ever had a parent incarcerated (Murphey & Cooper, 2015). Most parents lived with their children before their incarceration, although this is nearly twice as likely for mothers compared to fathers (Johnson-Peterkin, 2003). Studies have shown that less than half of the fathers incarcerated in jails have completed high school or an equivalent degree (Shlafer et al., 2020). In addition, mothers in prisons, compared to fathers, are more likely to have lived with their children as primary caretakers before incarceration (Jensen & DuDeck-Biondo, 2005). However, when researching caretakers, although some research suggests that Black fathers are not commonly available for their children during incarceration, studies have found that Black fathers are interested in being involved in their children's lives (Lee et al., 2012).

Challenges of Parenting While Incarcerated

It is understood that parenting while incarcerated comes with many challenges (Massoglia & Warner, 2011). Most institutional policies and procedures only allow limited contact between family members. Consequently, incarceration disrupts the regularity of interaction between parents and their children. This limited contact is valid for all secured facilities such as detention centers, jails, and prisons, although each setting presents unique barriers to family contact. Detention centers and jails are short-term holding facilities for individuals typically serving a sentence of less than one year or awaiting trial or having been arrested recently.

In contrast, prisons or penitentiary house individuals' post-conviction who serve more than a 1-year sentence. By nature of these systematic differences, jails tend to have higher security requirements, and individuals housed in jails are often undergoing more acute psychiatric concerns (e.g., acutely psychotic, under the influence of a substance, experiencing withdrawal) when compared to individuals in prison (Cramer et al., 2017). Not surprisingly, these differences affect the extent to which incarcerated parents can communicate with their children. Jails allow inmates to call and write to family members and often allow in-person visits. However, due to security concerns, visits may happen via plexiglass barrier such that physical contact is not possible or are only available through video rather than live in-person (Campos-Holland, 2016). Prisons offer more flexibility with in-person visits than jails (i.e., allowing physical touch) and utilize video visits. However, many prison locations are far from metropolitan areas, which can affect the ability of family members to visit (Rubenstein et al., 2021; Cramer et al., 2017). In

addition, proximity to family is not routinely a priority when determining the placement of an individual sentenced to prison (Loper et al., 2009). Accordingly, once in prison, an incarcerated individual may be housed hours away from their nearest relative, making in-person visitations burdensome or impossible, given the family's limited financial and transportation options (Loper et al., 2009).

Visiting practices and contact policies vary widely across jail and prison institutions, although they typically allow for telephone calls, email, written correspondence, and in-person visits. The institution determines the frequency and duration of phone calls and in-person visits and often entails several security requirements, negatively affecting the overall connection (Poehlmann-Tynan & Pritzl, 2019). Phone calls and letters are monitored by correctional staff, reducing privacy and comfort in communication between family members (Arditi, 2003). Similarly, correctional staff monitor in-person visits, and there may be limitations on the extent to which family members can physically touch each other. Visitation protocol has no modification in protocol for minors. Parental rights are disrupted by visitation protocol because of cost-prohibitive access and extreme security measures (Dargis & Somaza, 2021).

According to Weill (2016) although institutions may allow for phone calls, letters, and email correspondence, most require specific contact lists to be approved, with only a certain number of contacts allowed. Meaning that the incarcerated individual is limited in who they can speak with at any given time, and the institution may deny their contact list altogether. This limitation becomes particularly relevant for parents trying to contact their

children. There are many reasons why an institution will not approve a contact visit, which will negatively affect the parent's ability to communicate with their child (Weill, 2016).

Incarcerated Fathers

According to Glaze et al., (2018), 92 % of incarcerated individuals are male and about 1.1 million are men with minor children, half of whom lived together with their children before their current sentence. The untold story of these statistics centers on the large number of incarcerated fathers who are separated from their children and families and navigating stressors while attempting to maintain their social roles and family responsibilities. Some of which are young juvenile fathers who are facing identity role confusion between fatherhood and adolescence. Research has consistently demonstrated the adverse psychological impact on incarcerated fathers. Active fatherhood as defined by society is establishing paternity, providing financial support, and participating in physical and emotional care is challenging to enact during periods of incarceration (Clarke et al., 2005). Incarcerated fathers often have less contact with children compared to incarcerated mothers (Loper et al., 2009) and receive less social support (Lee et al., 2012).

Incarceration may have a strong impact on fathers' self-concept. For example, current literature suggests that most incarcerated fathers have reported losing their fatherhood identity (Day et al., 2005). Similarly, other studies have described incarcerated fathers as having repressed their fatherhood identity during imprisonment to cope with separation from their children (Arditti et al., 2005). Incarcerated fathers in direct interviews shared that they see their incarceration as a form of child neglect or

abandonment (Arditti et al., 2005). Moreover, incarcerated fathers have been found to focus on their inability to perform fathering duties such as protection, support, guidance, and discipline. Outside of specific parenting duties and identity, it has been documented that incarcerated fathers' express feelings of guilt and concern about the distress they have caused in their children's lives. Similarly, many incarcerated fathers also describe a sense of loss that they are not able to participate in their children's lives (Fowler et al., 2017). Depressive symptoms are a risk that is concerning for men who feel detached from their children (Lanier, 1993).

Considered together, these results indicate that stigma, emotional pain, and institutional barriers (restricted phone access and visitation rules) affect incarcerated parents. Incarcerated mothers face considerable parental stress and challenge given the high likelihood that they were the primary caretaker to their children prior to incarceration, and therefore specific gender appropriate parenting accommodations are critical. However, it is also apparent that incarcerated fathers also experience considerable parental stress and are affected by child separation. The father's caregiver role in their children's lives is often overlooked, which may adversely affect the children when a father is removed from the home (Bartlett et al., 2018).

Psychological Impact of Incarceration on Parenting

Parents who are incarcerated report experiencing psychological distress, due to general worry about their children, lack of control associated with forced separation, caregiver conflict, and custody issues. Incarcerated parents also develop psychological stress due to the transparency about their criminal behavior, and concerns surrounding

loss of identity as a parent. Mental health prevalence is common with the aforementioned factors for incarcerated parents (Milavetz et al., 2020). Dargis & Mitchell-Somoza (2021) note that incarcerated parents who have young children report elevated rates of depression, experience hallucinations, and it is common for self-harming behaviors. Mental health symptoms are three to five times that of the general population (Milavetz et al., 2020). Parenting stressors have been related to more depression and anxiety symptoms, institutional misconduct, and self-reported in-prison aggression (Loper & Houck, 2002). A feeling of relationship disconnection and occasional contact with children are drivers for depressive symptoms.

Scholars have theorized that disruptions in attachment during a period of parental incarceration may make this separation a particular risk factor for the development of psychopathology in children (Marakiev & Shaver, 2010). The model of attachment, originally proposed by Bowlby (1982), highlights the importance of children feeling secure and safe with their care givers, for them to feel safe navigating their environments. Without this secure base, Bowlby theorized that children are at risk of adverse outcomes, and research has demonstrated that individuals who have insecure attachments to their caregivers are more likely to experience psychopathology later in life (Colonnesi et al., 2011).

Although discussion around attachment issues related to parental incarceration has understandably focused on the attachment consequences for the children, it is relevant for the parents who are incarcerated as well. First, adults who are incarcerated have often experienced incarceration of their caregivers as children (Novero et al., 2011),

suggesting that any adverse attachment consequences experienced in childhood may be exacerbated when separated from their own children. Second, it is well documented that rates of trauma exposure and adversity are high among people who are justice involved, which also has implications for attachment insecurity (Briere et al., 2016, Fowler et al., 2013). Studies have shown that individuals who are incarcerated generally report insecure or otherwise disorganized attachment styles (Miller & Klockner, 2019). It is reasonable then that the sole distress incarcerated parents experience related to separation from their children stems in part from long-standing insecure attachment patterns. The existing literature further suggests differential stressors such as relational, emotional, and social stressors among parents who are incarcerated that may result in unique psychological needs during periods of incarceration.

Challenges Involving Gatekeeping

In addition to issues related to parenting while incarcerated, the issue of gatekeeping in social science research is one that sociologists generally have been conscious of for many years now (Broadhead & Rist, 1976). As gatekeepers, caregivers play a pivotal role in the facilitation of parental prison contact, and some caregivers may be more likely to take children to visit than others (Tasca, 2016). There are situations where the father has been convicted of an intimate partner crime such as domestic violence and may not be able to contact the victim of violence, and for understandable reasoning. However, if that victim is the primary caregiver or gatekeeper of that fathers' children then this essentially may mean that he will not be able to contact his children (Dargis & Somaza, 2021).

While situations such as this are complicated to navigate, this shows that the ability to make a phone call from prison does not mean immediate opportunity to interact with their children. Furthermore, most prison facilities charge the inmate and/or their families a fee for phone calls and email exchanges (Fuchs, 2019), which can present an additional financial barrier to parents maintaining contact with their children. Inmates typically have three payment options when making phone calls from prisons: collect calls, debit, or pre-paid accounts (Fuchs, 2019). This means that sometimes inmates make the payment, while other times the family members pay. Expensive phone calls are burdensome for either the inmate or the family because studies show that incarcerated people and their families are more likely to come from low-income communities (Elliott & Reid, 2019; Fuchs, 2019). When fathers go to prison, mothers inherit an unexpected expansion of their roles as primary caregiver, advocate for the incarcerated father, and sole breadwinner (Fang et al., 2021). Mothers tend to become the ultimate gatekeeper, not just for access and communication to the father, but also as a mediator of his moral standing.

Coping While Incarcerated

Coping strategies have been connected in a range of behaviors including mental and physical health (Maschi et al., 2015). According to Lazarus & Folkman (1984) coping refers to the way that people manage responsibilities, problems, or situations. Coping is often measured in the sense of how a person cope with stress; however, the process is cognitively based. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define coping as “constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal

demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (p. 141).

Other scholars consider coping to be the combination of cognitive and behavioral strategies that are used by individuals to manage stress (Compas et al., 2001; Shulman & Cauffman, 2011).

Huck et al., (2012) found that when individuals responded to stressful events with positive emotions, including acceptance and being content or hopeful, they tended to use more positive coping strategies. Similarly, those who responded to stressful events with negative emotions, such as depression, disappointment, or anger, tended to utilize negative coping strategies to deal with those situations, including resorting to criminal or delinquent activity.

LaCourse et al., 2019 note that individuals of lower socioeconomic status or lower self-esteem had scarcer positive coping strategies and, therefore, responded to difficult situations with negative coping strategies. On the other hand, those who were involved in school activities and had stronger family dynamics responded to stressful situations with positive coping strategies. Picken (2012) found that coping style was related to adaptation to prison. Those who engage in maladaptive coping, such as blaming others, blaming themselves, or dwelling on problems, are less successful with adjusting to prison and are more likely to become involved in prison misconduct (Reid & Listwan, 2015; Sappington, 1996). In a study by Rocheleau (2014), found that inmates who used certain coping strategies, such as active coping, venting emotions, and humor, were more likely to be involved in prison misconduct. In contrast, those inmates who used social

support, acceptance, and mental and behavioral disengagement were involved in less misconduct during their incarceration.

Conclusion

This qualitative research helped address this issue by providing an essential complement to quantitative investigations. Giving a voice to the participants allowed aspects of how the family functions and processes this issue in ways that quantitative research can't depict. This study filled the gap that addressed each effect and suggested ways to improve or eliminate this phenomenon. This research addressed the challenges faced by incarcerated male juveniles with children and offer suggestions for overcoming these challenges by building on previous research and discussions that have been conducted and explored on this phenomenon. Describing philosophical and methodological approaches will provide recommendations for overcoming these challenges.

Summary

45% of Americans with an immediate family member who is incarcerated must face incarceration policies in the United States (Mitchell et al., 2016). Accordingly, the aim of the current literature review was to summarize the extant literature on how incarceration affects the parents themselves. In this review many barriers incarcerated parents face in remaining present in their children's lives are presented.

Previous literature has focused on a considerate number of challenges with incarcerated parents in general. However, very little research to date has shown evidence of any study or research on the lived experiences of incarcerated teen fathers and how

they cope with social and emotional stressors. By increasing our attention in general to the role of males in adolescent pregnancy, childbearing, and child-rearing, we may not only better understand the issues but be guided to more effective prevention and intervention programs and policies in the criminal justice system for not only adolescent fathers but for all incarcerated fathers.

It is imperative to hear the voices of this population themselves; the purpose of this study was to gain insight regarding being a teenage child and raising a child while incarcerated and how it impacted them. This study could lead to better mental health solutions for these young, incarcerated fathers. This literature review recognized that entering fatherhood is a transformative process with implications for psychological well-being.

This chapter reviewed the literature relating to parenthood, specifically the incarcerated parent. Due to the lack of literature on incarcerated teen fathers, the review focused on general parenthood and nonresidential fathers before narrowing the focus to the teen father. The chapter includes a historical overview of parenting from incarceration and incarcerated adolescent fathers. In addition, it included pertinent statistical information about incarcerated parents. Attachment and psychosocial theories were used as theoretical frameworks to guide the study.

This current study consisted of confidential, in-person and telephonic interviews with adults who, as adolescents, were incarcerated while they were both an incarcerated juvenile and father. To help provide adequate care and services for incarcerated teen fathers in similar situations, I hope to contribute to the existing research to serve better

the needs of incarcerated teen fathers. Chapter 3 includes a detailed description of the research protocol used for the interview, research design, how participants were selected, and how data were chosen for my study.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

Introduction

Chapter 3 consists of the following components: (a) Research Design and Rationale for selecting a qualitative methodology, (b) Role of the Researcher, (c) Methodology, (d) Instrumentation, (e) Data Analysis Plan, (f) Issues of Trustworthiness, (g) Ethical Procedures, and (h) Summary. The purpose of this IPA was to explore, obtain an in-depth description of, and understand the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated teen fathers and how they coped with social and emotional stressors while defining and performing their paternal role. This study provided formerly incarcerated adolescent fathers a safe, inviting platform from which to voice their story. The research questions focused on incarcerated adolescent fathers' lived experiences by capturing the essence of the participant's view of and behaviors as a father. The semistructured question format was used to explore the incarcerated adolescent father's life while becoming a father, his fatherhood experiences, and his personal reflection of fatherhood. The research question that guided the study was the following:

RQ1. What are the lived experiences of incarcerated teen fathers?

The research subquestions were as follows:

SRQ1. What are the social and emotional stressors that incarcerated teen fathers' experience?

SRQ2. What are the coping skills that incarcerated teen fathers with social and emotional stressors use while parenting from confinement?

Research Design and Rationale

A qualitative design was the most appropriate for a topic focused on fatherhood, predominantly for a group whose members are rarely asked how they experience fatherhood. Ostracized populations, such as the incarcerated adolescent fathers whose narrated experiences and social contexts have been essentially excluded from research, are principally appropriate for qualitative study (Dornig et al., 2006). Qualitative studies have proven beneficial in providing a voice and honoring participants' perspectives and own words as knowledge (Chandler et al., 2015).

This study used an IPA approach to explore the incarcerated adolescent father's lived experiences and the meanings the participants attached to fatherhood. The aim of this study was to explore, obtain, and understand an in-depth description of the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated teen fathers and how they coped with social and emotional stressors while defining and performing their paternal role. As in Matlakala's (2018) study of adolescent fathers in Vaalbank, Mpumalanga Province, purposeful sampling was used in selecting participants for the study.

Role of the Researcher

I am a doctoral candidate in the developmental psychology department at Walden University. I have also been a juvenile detention counselor for 10 years, where I have been exposed to quite a few incarcerated adolescent fathers. It was my experience with these former residents that sparked my interest in this topic. One resident stood out. He was serving a blended sentence at the age of 16 and already was a father of two young children.

While there were programs within the juvenile justice system I previously worked for, the programs only accommodated adolescent mothers. There was no support or accommodation provided for adolescent fathers during my tenure. Additionally, curiosity made me wonder about the differences between incarcerated adolescent fathers and incarcerated adult fathers. As a mother of three children, one being a son, I am familiar with many of the challenges that parents face. I cannot help but consider how my son would respond if placed in similar situations of these participants.

Furthermore, becoming a parent at the age of 24 and unmarried, I was both anxious that I did not have the necessary tools to be a good mother and simultaneously excited about the prospect of guiding, nurturing, and being responsible for another human being. Although I had witnessed incarcerated fathers and mothers attempt to parent from behind bars, I still did not understand the incarcerated adolescent father's life experiences. Because I worked more closely with the females, I was not aware of the impact fatherhood had on incarcerated teen fathers. Before interviewing the participants, a lot of my knowledge about this group of adolescents came from the existing literature. As a result, I was more conscious of being partial by prior research, than of my own experiences with this group of adolescents. The acknowledgement that this group of male adolescents continues to be ignored in the justice system as well as in the community led to this project and the desire to learn more about the life experiences of these formerly incarcerated teen dads. To guarantee that my curiosity and prior knowledge did not inadequately influence this research, I relied on my experience as a residential counselor

and the use of phenomenological procedures of gathering information, organizing, and analyzing (Burkholder, 2016), and I remained neutral for the duration of this study.

Participant Selection

The target area for the study was Richmond, Virginia, which is an urban area in Central Virginia. I anticipated the challenge for this research to be greater than for those who have studied adolescent mothers or adolescent fathers who were not incarcerated. To identify potential participants, I relied on my relationships with the local juvenile detention and correctional facilities and spoke with directors of the programs to identify candidates who previously participated in fatherhood programs at the juvenile facilities. I worked directly with a contact person at each potential location to seek permission from the organization to post flyers on their bulletin board. Once permission was granted, the flyer was sent to the program director and was posted with my contact information (phone and email) so that interested individuals could directly contact me in a discreet and confidential manner. In conducting qualitative research, results are not generalized; therefore, a small number of participants is considered appropriate (Polkinghorne, 2005). Dukes (1984) also recommended that the number of participants in phenomenology should range between three and 10. As the study proceeded, I was forced to utilize snowball sampling, asking participants if they knew of other adolescent fathers who were previously incarcerated and in similar circumstances (Creswell, 2007). This generated two additional participants who were needed for the study. Using the sampling techniques mentioned above, six participants was the target number for recruitment, and I was hopeful that saturation of data was going to be achieved. I also used a participant

recruitment letter to identify myself and provide an overview of my study to potential participants, community agency personnel, and detention officials.

Informed Consent

Prior to conducting my study, I obtained approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB). In adhering to ethical standards of research practice, participants read and completed an informed consent document prior to participation. I also verbally explained the informed consent to each participant. The informed consent document specified the scope and sequence, goals, objectives, and purpose of the study; outlined confidentiality safeguards; and provided contact information for me and Walden's IRB office. Informed consents were completed at a private location or via email, where confidentiality was guaranteed. To assure participants' anonymity, each participant selected a pseudonym to be used throughout the study. I obtained recorded audio permission from all participants to audio record all interviews. Participants were advised that information obtained through audio recordings would be transcribed and audio tapes as well as transcriptions would be safely locked in a secured file cabinet. Furthermore, participants were made aware that audio recordings and transcriptions would be kept for a period of 3 years following the completion of the dissertation defense.

If participants were to encounter an emotional risk, all participants were able to receive referrals to mental telework counseling services within their locality. Additionally, all participants were informed that their participation in the research study was completely voluntary, and they had the option to withdraw at any time without

consequences. Three years following the completion of the dissertation process, all information obtained (i.e., informed consent documentation, demographic questionnaire, audio recordings, and transcriptions) will be destroyed to protect the participants' anonymity.

Selection Criteria

Purposeful and snowball sampling were used in this IPA study, given the marginalized population, intended purpose of the research, and age requirements for participation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Groenewald, 2004). For the purposes of this study, an adolescent father was a male biological parent who between the ages of 13 and 19 years fathered a child. Participants must have become fathers prior to their 19th birthday and be between 18 and 25 at the time of the interview (Tuffin et al., 2010). Additionally, the father must have been actively involved with his child for consideration in this study. At a minimum, being actively involved consisted of having contact with the child monthly. I utilized the participant demographic questionnaire to ascertain whether potential participants met the established criteria.

Instrumentation

Two instruments that were used in this research were a demographic questionnaire and a semistructured interview protocol. The demographic questionnaire consisted of seven variables (participants' age, ethnicity, educational level, total number of children, length of period incarcerated from child [in months], level of education, and employment status after incarceration). Moustakas (1994) contended that within a phenomenological study, the method for data collection is an interview. Moustakas

(1994) explained that “the phenomenological interview is an informal, interactive process and utilizes open-ended comments and questions” (p. 114).

Data Collection

The focus of this study was to explore incarcerated teen father lived experiences. A qualitative methods framework allowed the incarcerated teen father to reenact his experiences and personal reflections (Seidman, 2006). I used semistructured participant interviews as the primary method of data collection for this study. The research questions and interview protocol guided this study; however, the study evolved based on the participants and their descriptions of the incarcerated teen fatherhood phenomenon (Groenewald, 2004).

Data was gathered using field notes and an audio recorder. In accordance with the IRB policies, written consent to audio record interviews was obtained from the participants. The use of an audio recorder captured the interview and ensured that the participant’s narrative was accurate. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. The field notes were used in documenting immediate thoughts and reflections after each interview. This process was explained to each participant prior to the interview.

Data Analysis Plan: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Phenomenology is a philosophical approach, initially articulated by Husserl, the aim of which is to produce an account of lived experience in its own terms rather than one prescribed by pre-existing theoretical preconceptions. IPA is idiographic in its commitment to examining the detailed experience of each case in turn, prior to the move to more general claims. IPA is a qualitative approach that aims to provide detailed

examinations of personal lived experience (Smith & Osborn, 2015). IPA integrates the works of four major phenomenological philosophers Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre to illuminate phenomenology as a singular and pluralist endeavor existing in a continuum (Tuffour, 2017). Researchers conducting qualitative studies seek to shed light on things that are less noticeable and explore intricacies of the social world. Therefore, applying the IPA approach in qualitative research restates the fact that its main objective and essence are to explore the “lived experiences” of the research participants and allow them to narrate the research findings through their “lived experiences.” IPA is helpful here because of the ability to enable the participant to recount as full an account as possible of their experience.

Limitations of This Study

A study’s limitations are the potential weaknesses beyond the researcher’s control (Ross et al., 2019). The backgrounds and bias of the potential participants in this study were limitations to the complete development of the lived experience. The study’s gender specificity in only focusing on teen paternal parenting was also a limitation in this study. The geographical limitation of Virginia was also an aspect to consider. Another limitation of this study could have been the sampling strategy (i.e., snowball sampling), which was dependent on one participant’s recommendation of other participants who fit the criteria for the study (Ghaljaie et al., 2017).

Issues of Trustworthiness

According to Maxwell (2005), credibility threats to validity exist in qualitative studies that Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) categorized as being either external or

internal threats to validity. Simply defined, internal credibility is the truth value or consistency of the interpretations and conclusions held by the group being studied, whereas external credibility is the transferability of the findings and conclusions across other populations. Internal and external credibility threats can occur during three stages: (a) research design/data collection, (b) data analysis, and (c) data interpretation.

To address threats to credibility, Onwuegbuzie and Leech's (2007) qualitative legitimization model was used; however, not all validation strategies were applied given that not all threats to validity are pertinent to every qualitative study (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Therefore, threats to validity that I addressed included researcher bias, reactivity, and observational bias. In addressing these threats, two validation strategies were employed to increase legitimization of my study: (a) dependability and (b) confirmability.

Ethical Considerations With Respect to Participants

The relationship and intimacy that are established between researchers and participants in qualitative studies can raise a range of ethical concerns, and qualitative researchers face dilemmas such as respect for privacy, establishment of honest and open interactions, and avoiding misrepresentations (Van den Hoonaard, 2002). Important ethical concerns that should be considered are also anonymity, confidentiality, and informed consent. To alleviate this, I needed to attempt to minimize the possibility of intrusion into the autonomy of study participants. Walden's IRB also reviewed the research protocol to examine the ethical considerations of this research study.

Summary

Chapter 3 provided a description of the qualitative study. The rationale for using qualitative methods, participant selection, the interview protocol, and research procedures are detailed. This chapter presents the methods and procedures that were used in this study. In addition, the research design, sample description and size, data collection procedures, and questionnaires were detailed, as well as the content analysis methods used to evaluate and interpret data.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and examine the lived experiences of adolescent fathers who parented during juvenile incarceration in Virginia. The goal of this study was to get a clear understanding of the lived experiences of teenage fathers who are incarcerated. The research questions focused on the adolescent father's lived experiences by capturing the essence of the participant's view of and behaviors as an incarcerated teen father. All data collected were utilized to answer the research question guiding this study. The main research question that guided this study was the following:

RQ. What are the lived experiences of incarcerated teen fathers?

The research subquestions were as follows:

SRQ1. What are the social and emotional stressors that incarcerated teen fathers experience?

SRQ2. What are the coping skills that incarcerated teen fathers with social and emotional stressors use while parenting from confinement?

This chapter presents an appropriate demographic overview of the study participants. This chapter also contains a review of the data analysis procedures, including the data collection instrument, how many participants were in the study, location and settings of the interviews, and frequency. Next, I explain the process of data analysis, addressing how the raw data were converted into codes and themes. The chapter then addresses the evidence of trustworthiness, comparing the strategies that were

developed earlier in Chapter 3 for conformability, credibility, and dependability. Last, I discuss the findings of the study and close with a summary of the answer to the research question.

Participant Demographics

This phenomenological study used a purposeful and snowball sampling of five adults who were formerly incarcerated juvenile fathers. The racial backgrounds of the participants do not reflect the diversity found in Virginia from which the sample was drawn. Although participants were from three different geographical locations of Virginia (Central Virginia, Tidewater, and the Peninsula), the racial makeup of the participants was 100% African American males. The current age of participants ranged from 22 to 25, with an average age of 23. The average age at which the participants became fathers was 16.4 years. There was one participant with multiple children during their incarceration stay as a juvenile father. The remaining four participants had one child, each with an average age of 1 year and 4 months old. Two participants were able to see their children during their incarceration period. One of those two participants was only granted unique or "special" visits once a month; the other could only see his child once he went to a different facility. He saw his child every week for 4 weeks during his fatherhood program.

Data Collection

This study initially included seven adult male participants; however, two participants started the interview but could not complete the interview, being that one had a personal obligation, and by the time we rescheduled, the participant was reincarcerated,

and another participant decided not to continue the interview once it started and opted not to finish because he was uncomfortable with telling his experiences. Each participant was given the option to meet in person, via Zoom, or via telephone. I met with all seven participants via telephone. I only conducted one interview with each participant; after the interview, I transcribed the interview and provided the participant with a copy to review. Each participant was given 7 days to review the transcript and contact me for accuracy. Data was recorded using a digital recorder.

Data Analysis

The research instrument, the interview questions, was broken into two sections. The first section of interview questions dealt with demographic and background information before incarceration. The second section of the interview questions focused on participants' experience of fathering while incarcerated as a juvenile and their life after release. After each interview, I transcribed the interview, reviewing the audio recordings a minimum of five times to ensure that all responses were recorded accurately. Once I had transcribed the interview, I created an Excel worksheet, and for every question, I recorded keywords or phrases that each participant used per question. The next step in the data analysis process was to develop themes by using similar keywords and phrases that participants used to answer interview questions.

Despite Bloomberg and Volpes's (2008) indication to avoid the inflexibility associated with quantitative research, I utilized Creswell's (2007) approach to increase the credibility and dependability of the study. In this process, I listened to each interview, transcribed the interviews verbatim and reviewed the transcripts for accuracy, read each

transcript repetitively to categorize definitive statements, and extracted relevant themes about the research questions to gain an inside look at the lived experiences of incarcerated juvenile fathers.

The interview process started with a brief introduction. I made sure that each participant wanted to continue with the interview process; once they agreed, I described how the interview would be conducted, and informed them that if they needed to stop for any reason during the interview, they should just let me know. Five participants fully completed the interview, and two participants decided to discontinue due to personal reasons.

The participants were all asked the same or similar open-ended questions. However, the questions were not asked in the same order for all participants. Some participants were asked more subquestions or follow-up questions to produce in-depth responses. The first four questions asked were demographic questions. Question 1 asked the participants their current age. The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 25. Question 2 asked about their current educational level. One participant had earned an associate degree, one had some college, one had earned a high school diploma, one had earned a GED, and one had an 11th-grade education level. Question 3 asked the ethnicity or race of the participants; the study included five participants who all identified as African American. Question 4 asked the participants their geographical location. All five participants were from Virginia, but they came from different cities and regions: Two participants were from the City of Richmond or Central Virginia region; two participants were from the Tidewater region, with one participant from Norfolk and the other from

Virginia Beach; and one participant was from Newport News, Virginia which is in the Peninsula region.

I generated the following codes from each open-ended question: No codes were developed for Questions 1 through 3 as they were questions about the age of the participants and their children. Question 4 asked to describe the participant's overall experience of being an incarcerated juvenile father and what it meant to them: The following were statements from the participants ranging from fear of fatherhood to acceptance of the situation. For all participants, fatherhood meant a lot, and they all shared that it was hard, and they weren't ready. Statements included "it was hard," "I wasn't ready," "I was scared," "nobody understands," and "I just had to accept the situation." Question 5 asked about balancing both roles of being a teenager and a father while being incarcerated. The following significant statements were noted: "I was never treated as a child," "I wasn't able to balance," "I ain't gone say I balanced it," and "I had a responsibility." The majority ($n = 3$) admitted that they could not balance being a teenager with being a father. Question 6 asked to describe the participant's initial reactions when they knew they would spend time away from their child. I noted the following significant statements: "at first I didn't know if the child was mine, the mom was older and didn't want to get a mouth swab because she was going to go to jail," "I was thinking many things like missing first moments like him taking his first steps," "I was just hoping for a second chance," and "I was stressed up." All the participants' initial reactions were different; two participants were dealing with initial paternity issues where they weren't sure if they were the father because the mother was afraid to take a paternity

test due to fearing jail time. Question 7 asked the participants to describe their first visit with their child; I recorded the following significant statements: "I didn't want my child to see me incarcerated"; "the mom wasn't going for that"; "I wasn't able to see my child"; "I was happy to see him of course, but it hurt me to see him hurt, he would ask me to come to go with him and I couldn't"; and "it was a hard time, especially when my son told me lets go home Daddy, I couldn't handle my tears." The majority ($n = 3$) of participants did not initially see their children while in a juvenile detention facility; the two participants who were able to have visits described their visit as an experience of being sad and hurt by seeing their children hurt and not being able to go home when their children asked them to come home. Question 8 asked the participants how often they were able to see their child(ren): Two participants were able to see their child while in a juvenile facility but only with monthly special visitation with the parent or guardian of the participant. One participant, though able to see his child due to being a juvenile incarcerated in an adult facility, opted not to allow him to see him in that condition of being confined. The other two participants did not see their child while incarcerated in a juvenile facility.

Question 9 asked the participants how their family members coped with them being incarcerated; this question did not emerge any themes. Question 10 asked the participants to explain their coping strategies while confined and separated from their children. All five participants coped in different ways. For example, one participant journaled or documented his feelings daily, another participant would take his frustration out on others by getting into physical or verbal altercations, another participant compared

his circumstances to other circumstances, and one participant would read, play games, or call home to talk with his family and child. Question 11 asked how the experience of being incarcerated and away from their child(ren) changed their life; all five participants spoke about not wanting to be away from their children anymore. Common themes and phrases used were learning from their mistakes and the child being a catalyst for positive self-change. There was also guilt from not being present for their children and wanting to do right to see their child. Question 12 asked the participants to explain what changes they had made since their incarceration: Most participants stated that they no longer participated in illegal activities or committed crimes. One participant admitted that he had not entirely stopped; however, having a daughter had slowed him down. Question 13 did not lead to the emergence of any pertinent information. Question 14 asked the participants if they knew of any other incarcerated juvenile fathers; all five stated that they knew other incarcerated adolescent fathers. Question 15 asked the participants if there were fatherhood programs in the juvenile facility where they were incarcerated. There was only one participant who stated that there was a fatherhood program in a juvenile facility. There were no codes or themes that emerged from Questions 16 through 18.

After the interview session, I created files and organized them to store all the interview data. Then, I formed initial codes by reading through the data and making notes in an Excel worksheet created with each question and participant's answer. First, I looked for the transcripts' themes, patterns, and patterned regularities (Smith et al., 2009). I also

looked for themes and patterns related to the study's research question and the conceptual framework (Maxwell, 2013).

Emergent Themes From the Lived Experiences of the Incarcerated Adolescent Father

Phenomenology analysis involves identifying noteworthy statements, producing telling elements, and developing a visualization that captures the core of the phenomenon. Five formerly incarcerated juvenile fathers were interviewed for this study, resulting in the identification of 75 meaningful statements and phrases that were coded into 23 open codes, which were linked to each of the three research questions through three main themes: (a) unprepared for fatherhood, (b) family gatekeepers, and (c) child as a catalyst. These themes were used to capture the reflective responses given by the participants to each of the three research questions. These themes formed the essence of the lived experiences of incarcerated juvenile fathers.

Codes and themes were generated by asking the interview questions and getting each participant's response. The research questions served as a framework for the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated juvenile fathers. Every question gathered specific information about the participant's life as an incarcerated new juvenile father. The main research, subquestions, and related themes are organized in the following section. Participant quotes are used to give voice to these lived experiences. Where detailed quotes are cited, I refer to the participants by pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Unprepared for Fatherhood

All ($n = 5$) participants remembered feeling scared upon discovering they would be fathers. Some of the initial reactions were "I was scared," "I wasn't ready," "It meant a lot to me to be there for my child 100% because my father was there for me," and "It was hard, I didn't really understand I was a dad until I got out." Although all five participants reported being afraid of fatherhood, they all agreed that being a father meant a lot to them and wanted to be there for their child(ren).

Family Gatekeepers

Two participants spoke of the mother of their child being older and not wanting the participants to get paternity tests, fearing they would be sent to prison because they were dealing with a minor. Furthermore, once paternity was revealed, two mothers refused to let the participants see their children while incarcerated. Other issues also arose between the child's paternal grandparents and the mother of the child with some of the participants. For example, participants JJ and CJ experienced turmoil between their mothers and the mother of their child, where the grandmothers could not help with the child's needs because they didn't know about the child until later. Participant JJ stated, "It was stressing my mom out, they knew I had a child on the way, and they couldn't buy him stuff for his birthday and Christmas, and she didn't know what was going on about him."

Child as a Catalyst for Positive Self-Change

When asked what changes they had made since being incarcerated, all ($n = 5$) participants spoke of not participating in the negative activity that got them incarcerated.

The majority ($n = 4$) spoke of their child(ren) being the main factor in wanting to change.

Some of their responses are below:

JJ: I don't commit or do those types of activities anymore, the things that I was doing and the stuff that I was doing back then, I try to keep myself close to him, because if I'm acting up, he's gonna act up, if I'm not seeing him, he's going to start doing something.

DJ: Umm being that I had been incarcerated a couple of times and now that I have more than 1 child, I gotta daughter now, things are really different now that I have a daughter in my life so that's what really slowed me down.

AJ: I just try to stay out the way, try to keep busy and just do good by my children and do the best I can.

TJ: I promised myself not to stay away again as a father from my child.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness enhances the quality of research. In Chapter 3, I discussed utilizing three components—credibility, dependability, and confirmability—to promote trustworthiness. Credibility was formed through verification checks with participants to ensure that the responses and interpretation of the data were accurate and truthful. After each interview, I transcribed the interview, met with the participant, and provided a copy of the transcribed interview. Participants were given 7 days to review and return any feedback or changes needed in each transcript. The goal was to capture the essence of the incarcerated adolescent fathers' lived experiences by accurately depicting their narratives.

Triangulation through peer reviews with the dissertation committee reviewing the procedures and results ensured that the data were consistent with the purpose of the study.

With dependability, the plan was to provide a detailed description of the research methods. The researcher organized complete drafts of the research study's protocol throughout the study. The researcher also developed a detailed track record of the data collection process.

Keeping data neutral achieves confirmability (Creswell, 2007). To help limit research bias, The researcher journaled throughout the process to document any assumptions or potential bias conceptions about the participants. Journaling allowed the researcher to reflect on their thoughts and opinions and address them if they arose. Closing off feelings was also utilized to achieve confirmability. Bracketing contributed to identifying and isolating prior knowledge of the phenomenon. In turn, this allowed the participant's narratives to direct the research. Additionally, my experience as a juvenile corrections officer and counselor aided my focus on the participant and their experiences. Seidman's (2006) interview approach also heightened the study's trustworthiness. Field notes addressed the study's legitimacy and included the time and date of each interview. In addition, all participant interviews were captured using an audio recorder, and interviews were transcribed directly after each session and sent back to the participants for review (Creswell, 2007; Seidman, 2006).

Results of the Study

Interviews with five current adults as juvenile incarcerated adolescent fathers from Virginia were the focus of this phenomenological study to provide a voice for their lived experiences. The main research question was answered. Each participant painted a vivid picture of what it is like being a teenager and father and trying to find a balance between the two while incarcerated.

First, a brief background of the participants will be outlined. All five of the participants were from inner-city, low-income communities located in three different regions of the state of Virginia. When conducting interviews, the researcher found that when the tape recorder was turned off, the participants opened up and spoke more freely about their lives. They described their childhood as growing up fast and not even remembering having a childhood because some had to provide for their families, or had to be the man of the house, so they would do what was necessary to have the necessities like food and clothing, even if it was committing crimes.

When asked about balancing between being a teenager and being a father, not one participant expressed that they balanced it. One participant even expressed how, before he found out he was a father; he was never treated as a teenager or a child unless he was in school. All the participants expressed their fear of becoming a father. They expressed that although they did not know what to expect when becoming a father, being a father meant a lot to them. They all knew that taking care of a child was now their responsibility. A vast majority expressed that they would have done anything to ensure their child had all the necessities they needed. One of the participants stated the

following: "I mean, I ain't gone say I balanced it, I knew what he needed and what he supposed to have, so I was doing everything in my power to make sure he had it, that is why I received all that time and had to sit in prison."

Every participant stated that their environment was crucial in wanting to be a good father. Only one participant had their biological father in their life. There was one participant who grew up with his mother and stepfather. The remaining participants grew up in a single-parent household, where the mother was rarely home due to working multiple jobs. Most participants expressed that the idle time of being home without supervision is what cause them to seek to fill the void of being and feeling alone. This eventually led all five participants to join neighborhood gangs or groups that committed illegal activities. Although these groups were not in the best interest of the participant's future, at the time, these groups gave the participants a sense of family, gave some a roof over their heads, and food to eat. One participant stated, "I was scared, I wasn't ready to be a father, everything was new, I didn't even have a steady roof over my head, I was sleeping at different friends' houses every night."

While incarcerated, many participants gravitated to the same type of family as they had outside the facility, joining detention groups based on their neighborhood, area code, or actual gangs. When asked why they joined, they were many different reasons; some participants joined for protection, some for that sense of family to fill the void of not being around their child and family, and some because that was just who they were and what they have always known or seen growing up in their neighborhoods or it was a part of their family's history.

Participants were asked about being able to see their child(ren) while they were incarcerated. The vast majority did not see their child(ren), some because the facility did not allow minors to visit, some because the gatekeepers (child's mother) would not allow their child to come up to see them, and one participant did not want his child to see him incarcerated. The participants who could see their children saw them only via special visits with the participant's mother only once a month. Another participant was initially unable to see his child for the first two years of his incarceration until he was moved to a lower security level facility in the Tidewater region, allowing him to see his son weekly. Although each participant's experience was different, they all shared the experience of feeling hurt for their children, ashamed, regretting committing the crimes that led to their incarceration, and angry toward themselves for not being present for their children. The participants were asked how they felt when their child(ren) visited them while incarcerated. Only two participants' children could visit while in a juvenile detention center. Those participants said the most challenging thing was hearing their child ask them to come home, which they could not. Both express that seeing the hurt look on their child's face hurt them even more. The participants were asked how they coped with being away from their child(ren) while incarcerated. Each participant utilized different coping strategies, some good and some bad. One participant journaled his thoughts and emotions down each day; another participant stated he took his anger out sometimes on others; while another participant stated he compared his circumstances to others and thought to himself that things could be worse; another participant stated he sought out the love that he could not receive from spending time with his child and family in gangs in the

penitentiary when he was transferred from juvenile detention to an adult facility; the last participant stated he just read magazines, played whatever games they had in the facility and tried to keep his mind off of being away from his child.

The researcher asked the participants their thoughts on what could be done to prevent the incarceration of African American youth in their communities. Two participants explained that having a positive male role model with whom they could talk and share anything without feeling any judgment helped them when they were incarcerated. One participant CJ spoke about having one-to-ones.

I: What do you mean by one to ones?

CJ: Like when you have somebody who ain't just gonna go tell their information, somebody that they can confide everything in. Like people don't understand how good it feels to tell somebody everything that you want to say but you can't tell no body because you know they gonna go tell somebody, so to have somebody that you can say everything to feel so good to let it out so I feel like juveniles need more 1to 1's.

Participant CJ was fortunate to have a positive role model while he was in detention, but once he was released, he went back to the same environment and began to be back around the same peers and started doing the same activities. Participant AJ responded the following:

AJ: See the thing I always realized, like when I was in the detention, I had people around me that was gonna keep me on the straight and narrow. But

when I go back home from the detention it's like I ain't got nothing to do, I'm just sitting in the house, it's nobody to keep focus on me.

I: What would have helped with keeping you on track?

AJ: Say I had a job I wouldn't have had the time to break the law or do whatever. You know in Virginia and you're a juvenile they don't allow you to go back to school?

I: I didn't know that, so, you weren't allowed to go back to school?

AJ: Nope, the first time I caught a case they put me in home school until my case was solved. When my case was solved, they took me from home school and put me in alternative school. None of my problems came from school, they came from out of school when I had free time.

In Virginia, alternative schools in general are schools that offer kids a non-traditional way to learn. These schools generally accommodate students who have not succeeded in traditional schools, often due to behavioral or academic issues. The alternative school was a part of this participant's ecological exo-system.

All the participants were at the center of their personal narrative experiences. Their interactions between their micro, meso, exo, and macro ecological systems were pertinent in this study. The participant's microsystem included the father, child, child's mother, peers, and paternal grandparents. Participants' mesosystem included the parents. Participants' exo-systems include their school systems. Macro-systems of the participants include the juvenile detention systems, jails, and prison systems where the participants were incarcerated in.

Summary

Interviews with five adult males from Virginia who were previously incarcerated as juvenile fathers were the focus of this phenomenological study to provide a voice for their lived experiences as incarcerated juvenile fathers. The questions explored life while being an incarcerated teen father, their stressors, and how they coped with them. The questions also explored how the participants balanced being a teenager and a father. Organized data analysis procedures were followed to maintain credibility and trustworthiness in identifying themes and navigating those themes into the lived experiences and the transformation from a teenager to a father. The family bonds between the mother of the child and the participants varied, with only two participants knowing they were fathers when the mother conceived. Three participants were excluded from knowing until a paternity test revealed they were fathers. The child's birth exposed the teenage father's lack of preparedness for fatherhood, ultimately leading the participants to commit crimes to provide the necessities for their child.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The review of the literature in Chapter 2 highlighted a deficit in research relating to incarcerated juvenile fathers. The juvenile father was not portrayed favorably in much of the prior literature (e.g., Neale, 2016; Neale & Davies, 2015; Taylor, 2013; Weber, 2012). Practitioners labeled the juvenile father as selfish, negligent, and predatory and an irresponsible parent (Neale, 2016). Incarcerated teens are often labeled. Policymakers have labeled these incarcerated adolescents as criminals, offenders, delinquents, and menaces to society (Paschal, 2006). Additionally, prior research on incarcerated teen parenthood has focused primarily on adolescent mothers, adult mothers and fathers (Aiello & McQueeney, 2019), and adult fathers (Matlakala et al., 2018; Prins et al., 2020). The research's missing component is the adolescent father's voice (Barr et al., 2014).

To address this gap in the literature, I aimed to explore and take an in-depth look at the lived experiences of incarcerated adolescent fathers. I sought to identify stressors that incarcerated teen fathers face and coping strategies to overcome those stressors. In this study, I also sought to understand whether the incarcerated teen father could balance adolescence with parenthood, considering that these two major identity crises happen while incarcerated. Each of the participants stated that they were not able to balance being a teenager and being a father. The study used a qualitative research study method and a phenomenological research design.

Phenomenological tactics provided adolescent fathers an opportunity to narrate their stories. Using a phenomenological approach also provided me with the theoretical framework to describe and define the lives of these participants through connotations that they attached to their lived experiences (Rich & Ginsburg, 1999; Seidman, 2006). Finally, I used a semistructured interview format to capture the lived experiences of the participants best to explore the adolescent life of raising a child while incarcerated.

The sample was drawn through purposeful and snowball sampling of five adolescent fathers from three different regions in Virginia. The participants were five African Americans. Their current ages ranged from 22 to 25, with an average age of 23. The average age at which the participants became fathers was 16.4; the average age of the child while the participant was incarcerated was 1.4 years. Four adolescent fathers had one child, and one participant had two children while incarcerated as a juvenile.

Interpretation of the Findings

While each participant individually shared different fatherhood experiences, the essence of their lived experiences was transformative. The participants constantly discussed becoming a father as life-changing. Becoming a father altered their relationships with their peers, criminal activities, and view of the future. The most significant transformation from adolescence to fatherhood was how these individuals shifted to the needs of their child once they learned that they were going to be fathers. All the participants' processes began with fears and anxiety about becoming a father. Next, the participants worried about how they would provide for their children. The need to be a provider led to criminal activity, eventually leading most study participants to

incarceration. Once incarcerated, the participants experienced emotions of regret, sadness and fear.

Limitations of the Study

The results of this study should not be generalized to all incarcerated adolescent fathers. This study was also gender specific, focusing only on incarcerated teen paternal parenting. Participants were purposefully selected from Virginia, thereby limiting the ability to generalize. Any conclusions are limited to only the participants in this study. The goal was to interview a sample population of three to six adult males who were previously incarcerated juvenile fathers. However, although snowball sampling helped reach the targeted sample size in the proposal of three to six, the interview process was complicated in finding participants willing to speak about their experience of being an incarcerated teen father. There were originally seven participants; however, two did not complete the interview for personal reasons. The backgrounds and biases of the participants in this study were limitations to the complete development of the lived experience.

Although all seven participants did not complete the interview process, I still met the sample size of three to six outlined in the proposal and can still state that the benefit of this research is that it provided a viewpoint and voice for a marginalized group whose voice has not been heard. Through qualitative measures, I learned that the incarcerated adolescent father finds it difficult to balance both being an adolescent and being a father. This study also found how the incarcerated teen father views fatherhood through a lens comparable to his incarcerated adult father peers. For example, the incarcerated teen

father sees himself being a provider for his child, being actively involved and present, and now wanting a future better than his own for his child.

Results were based on participants' self-reported experiences. I feel confident that the participants were direct and honest; however, their responses were personalized. Additionally, the historically negative view of incarcerated adolescent fathers may have partially influenced participant responses by making them not want to disclose information perceived as unfavorable. Again, however, I have confidence that the participants responded truthfully. Finally, regardless of the limitations, using open-ended, in-depth interviews stimulated a deeper understanding of the incarcerated adolescents' perceptions of fatherhood.

Recommendations

In this study, I sought to explore the participants' narratives, and the participants' socioeconomic status and cultural influences were not explored in detail. The macro system may provide more significant information relating to how fatherhood is conceptualized. It is recognized that socioeconomic status and cultural influences are significant and should be addressed in future incarcerated teen father studies.

While each participant wanted to be actively involved in childrearing, prior research guides the perception that environmental barriers such as the relationship with the child's gatekeepers and the participant's physical capabilities may influence their continued involvement. A longitudinal study exploring how well these participants enact fatherhood may provide insight into possible barriers that influence involvement. I recommend that this study be done with currently incarcerated juvenile fathers. This will

allow the participants to express what they are feeling emotionally and physically. I also recommend that facility staff (i.e., floor staff who observe them when they return or are denied visitation from their children,) be included in a replicated study; this would allow insight into the participants' behaviors from an objective point of view.

Positive Social Change

The results of this study do foster positive change. This study of adult men who as juveniles were incarcerated teen fathers and their lived experiences of navigating fatherhood while incarcerated can represent a significant contribution to the body of knowledge. Little is known about the lived experiences of incarcerated juvenile fathers and how they cope with social and emotional stressors. This study provides developmental psychologists with a narrative and insight into the challenges that this marginal population faces while learning to become new fathers in an unprecedented environment. This study will allow developmental psychologists, social workers, members of the juvenile justice field, stakeholders, guardians, mothers, fathers, and many others to develop strategies to improve the quality of life and emotional stability of these incarcerated juvenile fathers and their relationship with their children. This study can provoke change in juvenile justice policies and procedures to allow children to visit juvenile facilities. Most of all, this study could be a preventative resource for juvenile males with children.

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Appendix A: Social Media Flyer

Were you ever incarcerated in a Virginia juvenile detention or a Virginia juvenile correctional facility? Were you a father during your time of incarceration? Are you now between the ages of 18-25?

If so, consider participating in a research study on parenting from juvenile confinement, and let your voice be heard about your experiences.

3-6 participants in this study will:

- 1) Be interviewed for about 45minutes to 1 hr.

If you participate you will be asked questions about:

- balancing being a teenager and father
- how you felt about being away from your child
- how you coped with being incarcerated while being away from your child

Appendix B: Interview Protocol—Research Instrument (Interview Questions)

To help ensure that I accurately convey our conversation, I would like to record our conversation with a digital recorder. (Go over Informed Consent Form with participants)

This form provides information about the study and says you agree to the conditions outlined for this study. This form is called informed consent/assent and it advises you that:

1. Your information is confidential
2. Your participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time
3. There is no compensation for participation
4. I will provide a copy of this transcript for you to review and require your feedback within 7 days to review for accuracy.

If you consent to this audio recording, please state I consent.

Demographic Questions

How old are you now?

What is your ethnicity?

What is your highest level of education?

What City in Virginia are you from?

1. Can you tell me how old you were when you had your first child?
2. Can you tell me how old you were when you were incarcerated as a juvenile father?

3. Can you tell me how old your child or children were when you got incarcerated?
4. Can you describe your overall experience of being a father while incarcerated, and what that means to you?
5. Can you tell me how you balanced being a teenager and being a father?
6. Can you tell me your initial reaction when you finally realized that you may spend some time in prison and may not be coming home anytime soon?
7. Can you describe the first time your child ever visited you while you were incarcerated? If so, what was the experience like? How did you respond physically, and emotionally?
8. Can you tell me how often were you able to see your child?
9. Can you tell me how your family and child copes with the experience of having an incarcerated family member?
10. Can you tell me about your coping strategies good or bad that you used to help you deal with being away from your child?
11. Can you describe how the experience of being incarcerated and from your child has changed your life?
12. Can you tell me what changes you have made in your life since your incarceration?
13. Can you tell me what you think can be done to reduce the incarceration of African American male youth within your community?
14. Can you tell me if you know any other incarcerated African American teen fathers with a child?

15. Can you tell me if there were fatherhood programs for teen fathers like you in your facility? If so, how did it help?
16. Can you tell me what would help current teen fathers who are incarcerated in juvenile facilities?
17. Can you tell me what advice would you give current teen fathers that are incarcerated?
18. Is there anything else you would like to add?