Family Ties: Exploring Familial Relationships for Individuals with a Felony Conviction

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Since the rates of incarceration have been growing, it is important to consider the reentry process that individuals have to face.

This has caused policymakers and citizens to focus with the prevention of recidivism instead of focusing on the process that these released individuals go through as they reunite with their families.
Families are seen as anchors that provide released prisoners with a place to live, with food, or with connections to job opportunities.

Travis and Waul said that family is important and beneficial in the reentry process.
Celinska and Siegel (2010) demonstrate that children play more of an essential role in the life of incarcerated women than in the lives of incarcerated men. For instance, it has been seen that women that are incarcerated face a harder family burden than incarcerated men because “women in prison are the main caregivers of their children before going to jail”

Therefore, I expect that the importance of families to the lives of released prisoners varies by gender.
However I decided to focus my research on two questions the first being:

- Existing literature suggest that family members are positive and supportive and this is very likely to be true however,
  - 1) Are there instances where families are not supportive and if so, what are the specific problems?
  - 2) How do these experiences with family vary by gender?
DATA

- 30 in-depth interviews
- 20 Men
- 10 Women
- Varied offenses
  - Sex offenses
  - Reckless homicide
  - Drug-related
  - Felony DUI
  - Robbery
- 23-55 years
  - 41.6 average
- 22 African American; 6 Caucasian; 2 Hispanic
- 72.4% unemployment rate
ANALYSIS

- Qualitative Analysis – thematic coding
  - Coded interview transcripts for any mention of family
  - Coded these excerpts for three themes
    - Children
    - Partners
    - Immediate and extended kinship ties
- Specific topics:
  - Emotional distress (frustration and regret)
  - Abuse
  - Severed relationships
  - Support
General Findings

- Common themes for both men and women

**Children**
- Children were the cause of considerable emotional distress
- Regret
- Frustration
- Depression
- Being away from their children made many of them realize that they had to get their life back on track, and it became an easier transition when they had the support and love of their children.

children played an important role in their lives one way or another.
Damian, a 49 year old African American male was convicted of multiple offenses. He talked about how the primary incentive for his change was knowing that his children counted on him and that they wanted him by their side.

Lynne a 42 African American female was convicted of forgery and ID theft, attributed her strength and potential of starting a new life to her children,

When asked by he interviewer, “Is there anything in your experience that has kept you from wanting to commit any crime?”
...General Findings

- Another common theme for both men and women was:

**Family**
- Families provided respondents with financial and emotional support but were also the source of dysfunction.
Family Relationships

**Darla**
“you know, there’s some days I don’t come home right away and [my family] make sure they watch my kids because, my kids come home every weekend. When I’m in school, they make sure they eat you know.”

**Randell**
“Sometime, you even gotta let family go. ‘Cause like in my case, most of my family members, everywhere I went, somebody was smoking marijuana, smoking cocaine and drinking. And, I can’t be around it because it’s like a bad trigger for me you know.”

**Paul**
“I used to, manage all of my mom’s money. And as soon as the rest of the family found out that I got arrested, they changed all the passwords on all the accounts and everything so I couldn’t manage it anymore.”

Darla a 28 year old African American Female was convicted because of a drug offense. According to Darla watching over their children while they were in prison and after they got out was one of the best way to provide them with support,

Randell a 44 year old African American male was convicted of multiple crimes (armed robbery- first, theft, burglary). He talks about he had to distance himself from his family because they were a bad influence.

Paul, a 55 year old White male convicted of drug conspiracy..... Even though he was convicted of his family distress him and stigmatized him.
Gender Differences

- Men and women respondents had different relationships with their children.
  - Fathers: Role Reversal
    - Instead of fulfilling their role as fathers, children often cared for and supported men respondents
It was significant for the men to see and hear that their children were being supportive throughout their time seeking employment and their reintegration into society.

Roy, a 44-year-old African American male, was convicted of multiple crimes (property crimes, burglary, theft). From that moment he realized that he wanted to do something different with his life and set an example for his children just like they were doing it for him.

Their children would not only provide them with inspiring words in stressful situations but also set the example for them.
...Gender Differences

- In contrast to the men, women seemed to maintain their role as a parent throughout their incarceration.
- The primary goal for most women was to maintain contact with their children during their imprisonment and after they were released.

It was important that their children visit them while they were imprisoned and the times that they didn’t several of them were depressed and reported having to take depression pills.
Maintenance Of Parental Role

Veronica
“mothers do not belong in jail. I’m a mother; I can’t keep going to jail. I’m a grandmother I want my grandkids to look up to me.”

Keisha
“prison was a horrible place for anybody to be in, especially woman”; this was because they “have to deal with the fact that they are away from their children.”

Latasha
“I don't have no help right now because I don't leave my kids with anybody and my mom been very busy and so it's like as soon as I got in there, it's like she got busy, so I just ain't been doing nothing. But now I'm going to try to find somebody I can trust with my kids until I can get a job.”

Veronica, a 49 year old African American women convicted of a drug offense demonstrated her frustration of being away from her children by saying that .... Maintenance Of Parental Role

Keisha, a 33 year old African American woman convicted of reckless homicide. According to Keisha being separated from their children was a horrifying experience, which is why prison was not a place for any mother

Latasha a 26 year old African American female was convicted of a drug offense was one of the women who was not able to find a job because she had to take care of her children.
Partners and Kinship Ties

- Additional differences between men and women
  - Abuse
    - patterns of substance abuse and continued physical and sexual abuse
Yoyo is a 46 year old African American convicted of Welfare fraud and Drugs she was in an abusive relationship for 13 years before she got incarcerated and her partner introduced her to drugs and prostitution on the street.

Abuse

Yoyo
“...My grandfather sexually abused of me. And even to this day, if I go around him, he'll make little remarks and try to rub on me and feel on me and I'm grown now.”

Keisha
“He kept cheating and I kept taking him back and trying to make marriage work because I’m a family person and he kept doing it and taking advantage.”
Research shows about ½ of annual prison admits are individuals that failed conditions of their parole or probation – and harmful family environments can play a role in that.

Researchers know very little about the ways in which stress from harmful family environments can adversely affect health outcomes for released prisoners.
References


