

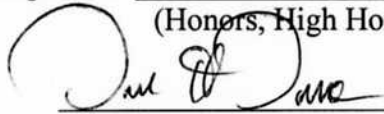
The Relationship Between Delinquent Behavior, Adolescent-Parent Relationships and Intergenerational Cycles of Crime

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
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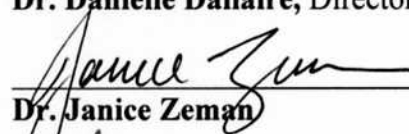
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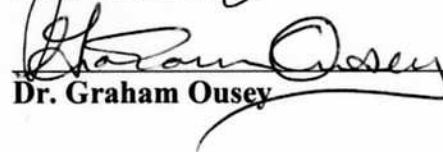
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Running head: INTERGENERATIONAL CYCLES OF DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR

The Relationship Between Delinquent Behavior, Adolescent-Parent Relationships and
Intergenerational Cycles of Crime

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Abstract

The present study examines the risky and delinquent behavior of juvenile detainees, the quality of their relationships with their parents, and their history of parental incarceration. Participants (N = 32) were recruited from the Merrimac Juvenile Detention Center and completed a survey-based interview including the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment, the Risky Behavior Protocol, and questions about history of parental incarceration. Results indicate that there are no significant relations between delinquency and history of parental incarceration, however, there were significant correlations indicating that less delinquency was associated with higher father-child relationship quality.

Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank my advisor, Dr. Danielle Dallaire. This project would not have been possible without her support and guidance. I would also like to thank the members of my defense committee, Dr. Janice Zeman and Dr. Graham Ousey, for their assistance. Additionally, I would like to thank the Merrimac Juvenile Detention Center for their cooperation and support. Lastly, I would like to thank my fellow research team members who assisted in recruiting participants, collecting, and coding data for this project.

The Relationship Between Delinquent Behavior, Adolescent-Parent Relationships and Intergenerational Cycles of Crime

Juvenile delinquency is a growing problem in the United States. According to a recent report 96,655 youth in the United States were considered juvenile offenders and placed in a residential facility (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006). Many of these troubled youth are influenced by peers or family members who engage in risky and delinquent behavior. For example, in the Commonwealth of Virginia, a five-year study from 1993 to 1998 found that 29% of boys and 25% of girls among incarcerated juveniles reported having a history of parental incarceration (McGarvey & Waite, 1998). These numbers indicate that there are a significant number of incarcerated youth who have at least one parent with a history of engaging in risky and delinquent behavior. The goal of the present study is to examine the familial experiences and behavior of juvenile detainees who have a history of parental incarceration in comparison to those who have no history of parental incarceration.

Parental incarceration may be just one of several factors which place children at risk for becoming a juvenile delinquent themselves. The term *at-risk youth* is used to describe children and adolescents who experience a variety of risk factors that may make them vulnerable to negative life outcomes such as delinquency (Merrell & Caldarella, 1999). These risk factors include history of parental incarceration, poor parent-child relationship quality, and delinquent peer affiliation. Both familial and peer factors will be examined in the current study.

Familial characteristics, especially parental history of incarceration and the quality of the parent-child relationship can impact child behavior and children's tendency to engage in delinquent behaviors in important ways. For instance, children with incarcerated mothers and fathers are at increased risk for incarceration later in life in comparison to their peers (Dallaire,

2007; Huebner & Gustafson, 2007). This increased risk is likely due to various factors such as the absence of the parent and the stress and trauma that is associated with parental separation (McLanahan & Bumpass, 1988). An additional reason why children with incarcerated parents may be at increased risk for incarceration themselves includes the greater likelihood that they are exposed to delinquent parental behavior and socialization patterns in the home (Huebner & Gustafson, 2007). An estimated 40-60% of the male sentenced prison population has antisocial personality disorder (Moran, 1999). Because children with incarcerated parents are especially likely to have an antisocial parent, they may be more likely to be exposed to parental behavior and socialization practices which contribute to their increased risk for delinquency.

Another serious factor which can influence children's likelihood to engage in delinquent behavior is their affiliation with delinquent peers or gangs. There is some evidence to suggest that children with a history of parental incarceration are more likely to affiliate with delinquent peers (Hanlon, Blatchley, & Bennett-Sears, 2005; Huebner & Gustafson, 2007; Werner & Silbereisen, 2003).

Though much research has examined at-risk youth and their relationships with their parents and/or peers, there is considerably less research investigating these two factors within the context of parental incarceration. The current study will examine the delinquent behavior of at-risk youth, their relationships with their parents and peers, and their history of parental incarceration.

Familial Characteristics

History of parental incarceration and parent-child relationship quality are familial characteristics that can impact child behavior. When a parent is incarcerated, they are absent from their child's life and are unable to support them emotionally and financially in the same

way that a non-incarcerated parent could. This is clearly a serious risk factor for diminishing parent-child relationship quality. Important aspects of any parent-child relationship include open and honest communication, feelings of mutual trust, supervision, and parental emotional support (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). Influential theories of how parent-child relationships influence child development include attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) as well the theory of parenting styles (Baumrind, 1991). Both theories place emphasis on two important components of the parent-child relationship including an affective or warmth component and a supportive or directive component (see Darling & Steinberg, 1993; de Wolff & van IJzendoorn, 1997). Because attachment relationships form during infancy and early childhood and continue to influence development throughout the life span, attachment theory is a helpful theory for helping to understand children's experience of parental incarceration. Furthermore, it is important to assess the current quality of the parent child relationship during other times of development (e.g., adolescence) because it may be a reflection of attachment quality.

Attachment can be defined as a child's need for a secure and supportive relationship with an adult caregiver, and attachment behavior is expressed through secure-base behavior in which the child explores his or her world yet remains connected to the caregiver for emotional support and protection (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1969). Beginning at birth, children demonstrate their instinctive need for relationships with an adult caregiver to protect and nurture them so that they can survive. The caregiver is a base around which the child's entire development focuses and from which the child learns relationship behavior. Ainsworth (1978) conducted a series of observational studies using a method called *The Strange Situation* to learn about infants' patterns and quality of attachment to caregivers. In this method, a child was observed playing in a room while caregivers and strangers entered and exited the room and the child's level of exploratory

behaviors as well as behavior upon reunion with the mother were observed. Ainsworth observed three main styles of attachment which are indicative of the quality of the parent-child relationship. Attachment security is reliably and validly predicted by the level of sensitivity and support provided by the parent whereas insecure attachment relationships are predicted by insensitive and unsupportive parenting practices (Ainsworth, 1978; de Wolff & van IJzendoorn, 1997). Longitudinal research has demonstrated that children with insecure attachment relationships in infancy show a number of social and emotional difficulties relative to their peers who are securely attached in adolescence (Carlson, Sroufe, & Egeland, 2004; Collins, Henninghausen, Schmit, & Sroufe, 1997).

Children with incarcerated parents are at increased risk of developing an insecure attachment during infancy because of parental absence and/or poor, inconsistent parenting behaviors. For example, Poehlmann (2005) found that young children with incarcerated mothers experience high rates of attachment insecurity. These children are also at risk for experiencing low-quality parent-child relationship quality later in middle childhood and adolescence. These two factors together place these children at especially high risk for engaging in delinquent behaviors.

Patterson (1982) uses a model of crisis disruption of family management practices to explain how attachment plays a role in contributing to youth delinquent behavior. This model expands upon important dimensions of parent-child relationships, including parental support and supervision. Specifically, these family management practices include establishing house rules, child monitoring, providing appropriate and consistent consequences, and problem management. When a parent does not implement these management or supervision practices consistently, the child may become confused and less well-adjusted, which are also thought to be indicative of a

poor quality parent-child relationship. Children's delinquent behaviors may result in part from these poor parenting practices and resultant low-quality parent-child relationship (Patterson, 1982). It is also possible that such low-quality parent-child relationships reflect an insecure attachment.

Separation from an incarcerated parent limits contact, often making it difficult for families to remain cohesive, organized and to implement many of the familial management strategies discussed by Patterson (1982). Families may not be able to visit as frequently because the locations of the jails or detention centers may be too far away, a means of transportation is unavailable, or visitation and contact regulations make it difficult for family members to remain in contact with one another (Kazura, 2001). Because these children's parents may be unable to participate in daily family life and support them emotionally, another family member often takes over the responsibilities of the absent parent and may be unable to fully meet all of the child's needs. Also in the absence of adequate emotional support, poor relationship skills and habits develop, supporting a social control theory (Kobak, Cole, Ferenz-Gillies, Fleming, & Gamble, 1993; Hirschi, 1969), in which adolescent problem behavior and low emotion regulation are outcomes of caregivers' lack of physical and emotional availability beginning in early childhood.

Opportunities for developing positive parent-child relationships and secure attachment are decreased due to parental absence during incarceration. This absence also leaves children with no relationship model. Adolescent problem behavior may stem in part from the parents due to lack of availability during childhood, such that when incarcerated parents are unable to support their children emotionally, the children will often turn to their peers for support. Huebner and Gustafson (2007) used data from women and children who participated in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth in 1979 to examine the impact of maternal incarceration. Results

indicated that children of incarcerated mothers were more likely to report a less emotionally supportive home environment, and higher levels of delinquent peer pressure and involvement in delinquent acts as adolescents. These findings indicate that perhaps children who do not feel supported emotionally are more likely to feel vulnerable and abandoned, and may turn to other sources, such as their peers, for support instead of their parents.

Social control theory may also help explain how children learn behavior from parents. According to Hirschi (1969), attachment to parents is the basis of conforming behavior in children, which explains that the more strongly children are attached to or can identify with their parents, the more they are bound to their parents' expectations of their behavior regarding standards of behavior and conduct. If children strongly identify with a parent who has a history of incarceration or involvement in deviant behavior, they may also demonstrate more deviant behavior via this process of identification. Patterson's model supports this theory and suggests that negative, harsh disciplinary transactions serve as a means for socialization of aggressive behavior (Patterson, 1982). If a child learns to be aggressive from the parent's aggressive discipline or reaction to the child's behavior, it is more likely that the child will aggress against others for similar reasons.

Both attachment theory and social control theory are used in research related to juvenile delinquency as they assess parent-child relationship quality and its impact on child behavior. Buist, Deković, Meeus, and van Aken (2004) conducted a longitudinal study to examine parent-child relationship quality and adolescent internalizing and externalizing problem behavior in a sample of 288 adolescent participants between 11 and 15 years old. Using the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) to measure parent-child relationship quality they found significant negative correlations between parent-child

relationship quality and internalizing and externalizing problem behavior. Their results suggest that adolescents with poor quality relationships to their parents have higher levels of externalizing behavior. Also using the IPPA as a measure of parent-child relationship quality, Butler, Fearon, Atkinson, and Parker (2007) found that parent-child relationship quality was associated with children's delinquent behavior. The highest levels of delinquency were observed when parent-adolescent trust-communication was low (Butler et al., 2007), indicating that communication and trust are key components of the parent-child relationship that can influence the behavioral outcome of the child. This supports attachment theory in which communication and trust would be indicative of secure parent-child attachment, thus promoting high parent-child relationship quality (Ainsworth, 1978).

Delinquent Peer Affiliation

Though a great deal of research has examined the importance of attachment security in infancy and early childhood, children's attachment representations and the quality of the parent-child relationship continues to influence children's feelings and behaviors throughout childhood and adolescence. However, during adolescence, peer relationships are increasingly important, sometimes peer relations are more important to adolescents than their relationship with their parent. It is within the context of the peer group that children and adolescents may first engage in delinquent behaviors themselves.

Poor quality parent-child relationships may be associated with an adolescents' tendency to affiliate with peers who also experience rejection or alienation from their parents, which can also promote delinquency. During a 16-year longitudinal study of 1,265 children, Fergusson and Horwood (1996) assessed childhood problem behaviors and later offending. They reported finding significant associations between early behavior and delinquent peer affiliations during

adolescence. Specifically, the children were assessed at age 8 for conduct problems, then at ages 14 and 16 assessments were made of their delinquency behaviors and delinquent peer affiliations. Results indicated that delinquent behavior evident in early childhood was reinforced and continued in adolescence when participants affiliated with delinquent peers (Fergusson & Horwood, 1996).

Though delinquent peer affiliation is a strong indicator of one's own tendency to engage in delinquent behavior, parent-child relationship quality remains a prominent factor in contributing to delinquency during adolescence. Werner and Silbereisen (2003) found that contact with delinquent peers was directly associated with increases in problem behaviors, whereas family influence on problem behaviors was indirect and varied as a function of gender. Specifically, closeness with fathers was associated with female contact with delinquent peers. Other results indicated that contact with delinquent peers was positively correlated with delinquent behavior in adolescents and that adolescents with average levels of closeness to their mothers and fathers were less likely to associate with peers who use illegal substances and engage in antisocial behavior.

Though several research studies cited herein have examined delinquent behavior in the peer and familial contexts, very few studies have examined delinquent behavior within the context of parental incarceration. In one of just a handful of studies to examine this issue, Hanlon, Blatchley, and Bennett-Sears (2005) assessed peer relations in a sample of 88 children who had an incarcerated, drug addicted mother. They found a tendency for these children to affiliate with deviant peers. In addition, Huebner and Gustafson (2007) found a trend (approaching statistical significance) for the children age 10 affected by parental incarceration (n

= 31) to be more likely to associate with deviant peers than their peers whose parent was not incarcerated ($n = 1666$).

The Current Study

Though there is much research about the individual factors that influence an adolescent's tendency to engage in delinquent behavior there is considerable less research examining delinquent behavior in relation to adolescents parental and peer relationships within the context of parental incarceration. Using a sample of juvenile detainees, the current study examines the relation between delinquent behavior and important aspects of the quality of their relationship to their parents as well as their family history of incarceration. From previous research, it is expected that adolescents with poor quality relationships to their parents will engage in more delinquent behavior and affiliate with delinquent peers, and that adolescents with a history of parental incarceration will have both a poor quality relationship with their parents and will be more involved in delinquent behavior than adolescents who have only a history of parental incarceration or only a poor quality relationship with their parents.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited from the Merrimac Juvenile Detention Center. Though parental consent was obtained from 37 participants, three juveniles choose not to participate, one dropped out during the course of the interview, and one was no longer at the Merrimac Center upon returning to complete the interview, thus reducing the sample size for these analyses to 32. The Merrimac Center is a residential facility that houses youth who were ordered to reside there by the court system for a variety of reasons including if they are considered a danger to themselves or others, or are suspected to avoid court appearance. The Merrimac Center receives

most of their juvenile referrals from the 9th and 15th Juvenile Court Districts in the state of Virginia which serve the greater Williamsburg and Fredericksburg areas respectively.

Participants were between 13 and 17 years of age ($M = 16.25$, $SD = 1.02$). The majority were male ($n = 24$). In terms of ethnicity, 56% of the participants were white, 31% black, 6% were Hispanic, and 3% were of another background.

One-third of participants ($n = 9$), 33% of boys and 13% of girls, reported having experienced parental incarceration. Among these participants, five experienced maternal incarceration and four experienced paternal incarceration, however, due to this small sample size, these groups were combined in further analyses. In terms of home environment before their internment, 28% lived with their mother and father, 44% lived with only their mother, 16% lived with only their father, and 13% lived with neither parent. Among those who did not live with either of their parents, 9% reported living with their grandparents, and 3% lived with their legal guardians. In terms of contact with their parent or guardian, 25% reported receiving regular visits from both parents, 50% reported receiving visits from their mother only, 13% were visited by their father only, and 13% were not visited by either parent at the Merrimac Center. In terms of non-visitation contact, 41% wrote and received letters from their parents, 19% only wrote letters to their parents, 9% only received letters from their parents, 69% made phone calls to their parents, and 16% reported no phone or mail contact with their parents.

Measures

Participants first completed a demographic questionnaire, which inquired about their history of residence in detention centers. Participants were also asked to give information about their family history of incarceration. Participants were asked to specify if anyone in their family has ever been incarcerated, and if so, to provide information about the family members' relation

to the participant, the participant's age at the time of incarceration, number of occurrences of incarceration, and the type of crime that was committed. Participants were also asked who lives in their house as well as how often they made phone calls, and received and wrote letters to their parents.

Quality of Parent-Child Relations. Quality of parent and peer relations was assessed using the revised version of the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA-R; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Gullone & Robinson, 2005) and using a family drawing task. The IPPA-R is a self-report questionnaire based on Bowlby's attachment theory and was developed to assess adolescents' perceptions of the positive and negative affective or cognitive dimension of relationships with their parents and close friends. The IPPA-R assessed quality of mother, father, and peer relationships separately with 25 items for each section (though only the mother and father scales are analyzed herein). The response format is a five point Likert scale (1= *Almost Never or Never True*, and 5= *Almost Always or Always True*). The three subscales measured for each of the three different relationships (mother, father, and peer) are the degree of mutual trust, quality of communication, and extent of anger and alienation. Subscale items for measuring parent trust include "My mother/father respects my feelings" and "I feel my mother/father does a good job as my mother/father." Subscale items for parent-child communication include "I like to get my mother's/father's point of view on things I'm concerned about" and "My mother/father can tell when I'm upset about something." Subscale items for alienation include "Talking over problems with my mother/father makes me feel ashamed or foolish" and "I don't get much attention from my mother/father." Armsden and Greenberg (1987) reported Cronbach's alpha of .87 for mother-child relationship quality, .89 for father-child relationship quality, and .92 for peer relationship quality. In the current study, the IPPA-R had good internal consistency with an alpha

level of .79 for mother-child relationship quality, .87 for father-child relationship quality, and .74 for peer relationship quality.

Family drawings were also used to assess parent-child relationship quality. The researcher asked participants to draw a picture of their family using a blank piece of paper and 5 colored pencils and to label the figures when finished. Participants were given five minutes to complete the drawing. The drawings were coded using coding systems developed by Fury, Carlson, and Sroufe (1997). Using 7-point rating scales, drawings were coded for family pride and happiness, emotional distance and isolation, tension and anger, bizarreness and dissociation, and global pathology.

Family pride and happiness was assessed by examining signs of positive affect, positioning and completeness of figures, proportion of figures, organization, and background detail. Drawings rated at the lower end of the scale appeared to have little or no family cohesion, pride or sense of belonging on the child's part. Emotional distance and isolation was assessed by placement of the child in relation to their mother, individuation of the family members, and expression of affect in the figures. Tension and anger was assessed by the rigidity of figures, figure size and facial affect, the drawing's construction, and figures with extremities appearing bound up, constricted, or "scrunched." Bizarreness and dissociation was assessed by unusual signs and symbols with a morbid or aggressive quality, angry scribbling, angry facial features, and unusual markings that have no apparent relation to the drawing as a whole. At the higher end of the scale, drawings appeared disturbing and complex because of angry affect, or figures were disguised in an aggressive way. Global pathology was assessed by distorted or disguised figures, omissions, false starts, color, size of figures, proportion of children's size in relation to their parents, affect, connectedness of figures, rigidity or relaxed nature of figures, and completion of

figures. Two sample drawings are included in the Appendix. One of these drawings was rated high in global pathology (see Appendix A), whereas the other drawing was rated low in global pathology (see Appendix B).

In addition to the first author, two undergraduate research assistants were trained to rate the drawings according to the system used by Fury et al. (1997). Following training, coders independently rated three family drawings, inter-rater reliability scores on these drawings ranged from 0.75 to 1.00. Each researcher initially rated each drawing, and then each drawing was given a final score that depended upon the agreement of all three researchers. If there was disagreement between ratings, researchers would discuss their reasoning for their initial rating and come to an agreement about a final rating. These consensus codes, which have higher validity than individual raters' codes (Uebersax, 1988), were used in the data analyses.

Fury et al. (1997) reported that the dimensions coded in the family drawings made during childhood can be reliably predicted by ratings of attachment security made during infancy. Furthermore, Fury et al. found the dimensions coded in the family drawings are concurrently related to children's depressive symptoms. Additionally, Pianta, Cox, Early, and Taylor (1999) and Gullone, Ollendick, and King (2006) reported adequate inter-rater reliabilities as well as predictive validity data for this procedure when used with youth.

Delinquent behavior. The amount of risky and delinquent behavior children engage in was assessed with the Risky Behavior Protocol (RBP; Conger & Elder, 1994). The RBP is a self-report questionnaire that contains 19-items for the child to answer about him or herself and 19 identical items for the child to complete about his or her friends. Using this instrument, two indexes of the participant's delinquent behavior were obtained: personal delinquency and peer delinquency. For the questions about themselves, participants rated whether they had ever engaged in these behaviors. For the items pertaining to the participants' friends, participants

were asked how many of their friends engaged in these behaviors. In addition, both the self and peer report of delinquency included two subscales, one subscale assessed major delinquent behavior (e.g., purposely set fire in a building or in any other space); the other assessed minor delinquent behavior (e.g., ridden in a car without a seat belt); combined, these subscales yield a total delinquent behavior score. In previous research this instrument has demonstrated acceptable internal consistency with alpha coefficients ranging from .63 to .77 (see the NICHD SECCYD, 2008). In the current study, the RBP had a high internal consistency of .92.

Procedure

After obtaining approval from the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice and the William & Mary Human Subjects Committee, participants were recruited by first obtaining parental consent, then by obtaining participant assent. Parents were approached by researchers before or during their visit with their child during designated hours at the Merrimac Center to ask if they would give permission for their child to participate. Participants completed the questionnaire in small groups of three to five residents, and two participants were given the interview individually upon request of the participant or staff members at the Merrimac Center. Data was collected over a period of 12 weeks, and participants were interviewed within one week after obtaining parental consent. Because the participants are not allowed to receive any tangible reward for participating in the study, the Merrimac Center was given a donation to compensate for their cooperation and coordination that would go toward programming for the residents.

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Preliminary Analyses

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for all measures as well as bivariate correlations of the instruments. According to bivariate correlational analysis there was an effect for gender with the variables of the mother-child alienation subscale of the IPPA-R, delinquent peer affiliation, and self reported delinquency. In follow-up analyses, the gender differences were taken into consideration. There were no age effects, however, correlational analyses indicated a trend that older children tended to have a higher overall mother-child relationship quality, $r = .32, p < .08$, and more mother-child communication, $r = .32, p < .08$. The bivariate correlational analyses also indicated that less tension and anger, as represented in the family drawing, was associated with more mother-child communication, as represented by participants in the IPPA-R, $r = -.40, p < .05$.

Impact of Parental Incarceration

A series of t-tests were conducted to examine differences between participants with and without a history of parental incarceration or the parent-child relationship quality variables and delinquency variables. The means and standard deviations for these measures are included in Table 2 as well as the results of the t-tests. Contrary to our hypothesis, participants exposed to parental incarceration demonstrated more family pride and happiness in their family drawings than participants not exposed to parental incarceration, $t(24) = -2.39, p < .05$. Drawings by participants exposed to parental incarceration scored lower in emotional distance and isolation, $t(24) = 2.51, p < .05$. Participants with a history of parental incarceration showed no detriments in parent-child relationship quality or increased delinquency. In fact, participants with a history of parental incarceration scored higher on father-child relationship quality, $t(19) = -2.41, p < .05$, which included higher scores in the subscales of father-child trust, $t(19) = -2.50, p < .05$, and father-child communication, $t(19) = -3.10, p < .01$. There were also no significant differences

between participants exposed to parental incarceration and those not exposed to parental incarceration in terms of delinquent peer affiliation and self-delinquency.

Delinquency and Parent-Child Relationship Quality

Because delinquency was associated with a significant gender difference (see Table 1) we reexamined the significant correlations between delinquency and parent-child relationship quality while controlling for gender. The correlational analyses presented in Table 1 indicated that delinquency was associated with lower parent-child relationship quality in the family drawing and father-child relationship quality in the IPPA-R. After controlling for gender with a partial correlation, delinquency was still significantly correlated with higher global pathology scores from the family drawings, partial $r = 0.44$, $p < .05$. Delinquency was also still significantly correlated with lower father-child relationship quality, partial $r = -0.52$, $p < .05$, less father-child trust, partial $r = -0.47$, $p < .05$, and less father-child communication, partial $r = -0.49$, $p < .05$. In all cases, greater delinquency was associated with poorer parent-child relations, particularly father-child relations.

Discussion

Because over a quarter of the participants in our sample of juvenile detainees had a history of parental incarceration, and we found significant relations between aspects of the parent-child relationship and delinquency, our results do indicate that history of parental incarceration and parent-child relationships have an impact on delinquent peer affiliation and self delinquency. However, the results of the present study confirmed as well as refuted several of our hypotheses and expectations gained from previous research. For instance, participants exposed to parental incarceration demonstrated indicators of higher parent-child relationship quality in their family drawings. Participants with a history of parental incarceration actually had

a higher quality father-child relationship and demonstrated more family pride and happiness and less emotional distance and isolation in their family drawings than participants without a history of parental incarceration. Yet, as expected, lower father-child relationship quality was associated with delinquency.

Impact of Parental Incarceration

Our participant sample was comparable to a similar study examining juvenile delinquents in terms of the percentage of participants with a history of parental incarceration, which confirms that our sample is representative of juvenile delinquent populations in other studies. In the study by McGarvey and Waite (1998), 27% of the juvenile detainees had a history of parental incarceration and in our study, 28% of the detainees had a history of parental incarceration. Contrary to our hypothesis, participants exposed to parental incarceration demonstrated more family pride and happiness in their family drawings than participants not exposed to parental incarceration, and those exposed to parental incarceration scored lower in emotional distance and isolation. These scores are indicative of higher quality parent-child relationships, which were not expected in this study.

As previously discussed, identification with a parental figure is the basis of conforming behavior in children (Hirschi, 1969), which explains that the more strongly a child identifies with his or her parents, the more they are bound to their parents' expectations for their behavior and conduct. If a child strongly identifies with a parent who has a history of incarceration and involvement deviant behavior, perhaps they will also demonstrate more deviant behavior. In the current study, we found that a child could have an incarcerated parent, yet perhaps have a high-quality relationship with the non-incarcerated parent or caregiver figure. Because participants who had been exposed to parental incarceration may have high-quality relationships with their

non-incarcerated parent figure, their delinquent behavior (which was unrelated to parental incarceration status) may reflect the expectations of the other, non-incarcerated parent.

Another possible alternative explanation for our null findings regarding parental incarceration history is that the incarcerated parent may maintain or develop an even better relationship with their child during their incarceration. According to Kazura (2001), during incarceration, parents are much more dependent on their families than they were prior to their arrest. Where the parent may not be as connected to their family prior to incarceration, being incarcerated may compel the parent to have more contact with them because they are isolated from their normal lives and may only be connected to their life through their family. Review of the current child welfare literature supports the importance of frequent, regular parent-child visitation following separation to combat children's risk factors (Hess, 1987). Frequent and regular parent-child visitation could involve more parent-child contact than when the parent was not incarcerated, giving their relationship an opportunity to develop.

Participants exposed to parental incarceration reported high-quality father child relationships and we found father-child relationship quality was associated with delinquent behavior in our sample. This indicates that father-child relationships are highly important for young juvenile detainees. Identification with one parent could be helpful in explaining these results. A child may personally identify with a certain parent, and if this parent has a history of parental incarceration, this could influence children to think and act as their parent with whom they most identify. Unfortunately our small sample size prevented us from being able to examine more complex child gender by parent gender interactions, future research should endeavor to not only have more participants but to carefully consider the impact of parent and child gender.

Predicting Delinquency

Though the results of this study indicated that a history of parental incarceration does not predict delinquency in this sample of juvenile detainees, there are indicators that parent-child relationship quality is associated in predictable ways within self-reported delinquency. Child family drawings showing more global pathology indicated more delinquent peer affiliation. More global pathology is an indicator of poor parent-child relationship quality, which could involve less emotional support or a strain in the parent-child relationship, leaving the child feeling neglected and unsupported.

More important than parental incarceration history in the prediction of youths' delinquency in our study, was parent-child relationship quality, and specifically father-child relationship quality. Our results reaffirm the study by Butler et al. (2007), who found that parent-child relationship quality was associated with children's delinquent behavior, and that specifically, the highest levels of delinquency were observed when parent-adolescent trust-communication was low. These results also replicated Werner and Silbereisen's (2003) study, which also demonstrated that father-child relationships are crucial in child development. Dannerbeck (2005) also found that though exposure to parental incarceration does not predict delinquency, children with a history of parental incarceration experience the negative effects of inadequate parenting and will be involved in more delinquency. In their study, 1,112 juvenile delinquents were interviewed about their parents' involvement in their life as well as their own delinquency. Results indicated that though parental incarceration may cause a strain in parent-child relationships which then influences delinquent behavior, there is no support that parental incarceration alone predicts delinquency.

Perhaps in this sample of juvenile detainees history of parental incarceration is yet another risk these children face, and that parental incarceration does not contribute to children's

risk for delinquency over and above other risks these children have been exposed to. However, within this high-risk population, the quality of parent, and specifically father-child relations matters. These results may have important implications for those working with juvenile delinquent populations as well as for those working towards preventing juvenile delinquency.

Implications for Future Research and Interventions

Results indicate that poor parent-child relationship quality predicts delinquency, and particularly that father-child relationship quality has a greater impact on youth delinquency. This could be important in encouraging school systems and educational programs to involve the parents, particularly fathers more in their children's school activities. As indicated by previous research (Barnes & Farrell, 1992; Wright & Cullen, 2001), strong parental support, which is a component of high parent-child relationship quality, is associated with less delinquency.

In particular, poor father-child relationship quality contributes significantly to delinquency, though various organizations and programs have already begun work trying to reduce this problem. For example, the National Fatherhood Initiative was established in 1994 and recognized that not only does father absence and poor father-child relationship quality produce negative outcomes for children such as delinquency, it is a growing problem in our society. Their mission is to improve the well-being of children by increasing the proportion of children growing up with an involved, responsible, and committed father, and they provide programs such as 24/7 Dad! which focuses on characteristics men need to be an involved father (<http://www.fatherhood.org/default.asp>). Other programs, such as the Parenting Wisely (American Teens) Program is a CD-ROM instructed program in which the viewer is presented with nine typical parent-adolescent problems, and actors present both effective and ineffective solutions for each problem, also followed by explanations of the techniques and skills viewed in

each segment. It has been proven to be effective in significantly reducing verbal and physical aggression between parents and teens, reducing the frequency and severity of problem behaviors, increasing knowledge and implementation of effective parenting skills, and improving and strengthening family relationships (Gordon & Rolland-Stanar, 2003).

Another parent-child program specifically for juvenile detainees and their parents is Operation Right Track (ORT). ORT focuses on assisting parents in regaining control of their child, increasing the family's ability to communicate and solve problems effectively, and decreasing the recidivism for first time juvenile offenders. An additional feature of the program is that the School Resource Deputy follows up with the families six weeks after completing the program to ensure that a strong bond has been established and continues (Seminole County Sheriff's Office, 2008).

Future Research

Among the strengths of this study were that the measures used in this study (the IPPA-R, the RBP, and the family drawing coding system) were reliable measures that were validated in other studies. These features and the fact that our findings were similar to other studies (Butler, et al. 2007; Werner & Silbereisen, 2003; Dannerbeck, 2005) gives us greater confidence that these measures were accurate and appropriate for the study. Another strength of the study was that though participants completed the interview in a room with other participants and at least one researcher, they were able to answer the questions at their own pace and confidentially, allowing them to respond as truthfully as possible without worry of the information having bearing on their court case or future issues.

Despite the strengths of this study, future research might address issues concerning the participant sample. Parental consent was obtained from parents who were visiting their child at

the Merrimac Center, which indicates likely higher parent-child relationship quality because they are demonstrating concern for their child by visiting them. This could skew the data by including only participants whose relationships with their parents are at a higher quality than participants whose parents did not give consent or are too far away to visit their child.

Another concern that could be addressed in future research is the validity of the family drawings for an adolescent-aged sample. Though the family drawing coding system was validated in other studies (Fury, et al, 1997; Uebersax, 1988; Pianta et al., 1999; Gullone, et al, 2006), their participant samples included younger children. Our participants ranged in age from 13 to 17 years old, which is older than the previous studies with participants who ranged in age from 6 to 10 years old.

Results also indicated that parent gender could have an impact on delinquency. This could have been determined in the study if we had obtained more information about the person whom the participants answered the IPPA-R questions. Though all participants responded to the questions about their relationship with their mother figure, 11 participants (34%) did not answer the questions asking about their relationship with their father figure. This could potentially mean that the participants identified more with their mother, however, that cannot be concluded from the data obtained in this study. In addition, it would be interesting and important to assess these relations in a low-risk sample of adolescents. With a low-risk comparison group we could further examine rates of history of parental incarceration in a non-delinquent population and compare them to the rates found herein. We could investigate whether the same pattern of relations among variables would emerge. To this end, we are currently working on recruiting a sample of non-delinquent adolescents from a high-risk neighborhood to participate in this research.

Conclusion

Overall, results of the study indicate that parent-child relationship quality has a greater impact on adolescent delinquency than exposure to parental incarceration, demonstrating the importance of good parenting skills to build strong parent-child relationships. This could involve a variety of strategies including more contact which fosters open and honest communication, providing adequate emotional support, and modeling proper social behavior. Parents are a child's first and arguably most important socialization agent, so it is important that positive parent-child relationships are established early and maintained throughout childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood to help prevent delinquency.

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