

**Interrupting intergenerational offending in the context of America's social disaster of mass imprisonment**

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## Abstract

Paralleling growth of the U.S. criminal justice system in recent decades, American families have increasingly experienced a social disaster of parents, and subsequently their children, undergoing imprisonment. Adopting a life course perspective to examine likely drivers of the intergenerational transmission of offending and incarceration, we contextualize the development of antisocial behavior in an era of mass imprisonment. In doing so, we draw from literature on the sociology of disasters to examine how traumas related to intergenerational incarceration may be both understood and ameliorated through appropriate policies and interventions. We argue that it is possible to better frame how risk factors for antisocial behavior, such as prenatal maternal stress, exposure to trauma, and deviant peer groups, may be integrated with factors that promote resilience and recovery. This includes improving safety, self-efficacy and connectedness to prevent intergenerational offending and incarceration and facilitate desistance. By framing mass incarceration as a social disaster, a multi-faceted, comprehensive approach takes on new urgency so as to reduce the prevalence of intergenerational offending and incarceration among millions of families in the United States.

*Keywords:* adverse childhood experiences, intergenerational delinquency, mass imprisonment, trauma, development, antisocial behavior in the lifecourse

## **Introduction**

With imprisonment rates between 5-15 times higher than other Western Democracies, the U.S. is unique in the scale and impact of mass imprisonment as a common event in the life course of adults and their families (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2014). It is particularly concentrated among minorities. Demographically, 4% of white children and one-in-four African American children experience a parent spend one year or more in prison before reaching age 15, while one-in-seven young adults report experiencing parental imprisonment (jail or prison) at some point in their lives (Wildeman, 2009; Roettger & Swisher 2011). Along with the 2.1 million adults imprisoned at any one time, Sykes & Pettit (2014) estimate that approximately 2.6 million children in the U.S. have a parent undergoing incarceration. Among U.S. males experiencing parental imprisonment, two-thirds will be arrested and one-half will be sentenced to imprisonment by their early 30s; double the risk for males not experiencing parental imprisonment in the general population (Roettger, Swisher & Boardman, 2018). Based on these figures, it is estimated that 3-4% of American men would experience intergenerational imprisonment lasting three generations (Roettger et al, 2018). This equates to approximately 4.5-6 million men using 2010 U.S. Census population estimates (Howden & Meyer, 2011). This is a population larger than the 3 million Puerto Ricans impacted by Hurricane Maria in 2017 and victims of the 9-11 terrorist attacks in 2001, both considered large-scale social disasters in modern research. And yet the profound intergenerational risks associated with mass incarceration are not given the attention, resources, or sense of urgency consistent with a response framework for social disasters.

Beyond their immediate effects, social disasters adversely impact individuals over the longer term through ill-considered policies and a failure to implement actions that ameliorate the impacts of the disaster. In the context of the widespread application of ‘tough on crime’ policies resulting in mass imprisonment in the US, these state sanctions simultaneously

impact multiple generations of families, thereby failing in their crime prevention objectives. For example, an analysis of national probability samples for the U.S. suggests that experiencing parental imprisonment extends young people's offending from adolescence to adulthood, significantly increasing the risk of eventual imprisonment (Roettger & Swisher, 2011; Muftic, Bouffard & Armstrong, 2016). Compared to other countries, such as the U.K. and Canada, the US legal system exposes incarcerated parents to temporary or permanent loss of voting rights, legal discrimination in employment, ineligibility for social welfare support programs (e.g., food and housing), lack of health care, and a general paucity of rehabilitation and transition programs to aid (re)-entry into society (Pinard, 2010). These formal penalties compound with informal social penalties, such as residing in disadvantaged communities with high unemployment, untreated mental health and substance abuse problems, and the potential 'double-whammy' of being a minority with a criminal record while seeking employment (Clear & Frost, 2014; Pager 2007).

The historical concentration of criminal offending within families has been observed for over a century and remains one of the most robust associations in criminology, present across a range of societies and cultures (Besemer, Ahmad, Henson, & Farrington, 2017; Mead, 1918; Murray, Bijleveld, Farrington, & Loeber, 2014; Robins, 1966; Thornberry et al 2003). A recent study by Wildeman & Anderson (2016) examined a Danish policy shock shifting sentencing from imprisonment to community service for some criminal acts, finding that parental offending and parental imprisonment each distinctly increase risk of their children engaging in delinquency. In the context of a punitive U.S. culture where over one-third of young adults are arrested by early adulthood and 70% of black high school dropouts are incarcerated for one year or more, the research of Wildeman & Anderson (2016) suggests that the intergenerational transmission of offending and incarceration each pose a distinct risk

for ggregately increasing offending rates among future generations of children (Brame, Turner, Patternoster, & Bushway, 2012; Western & Wildeman 2009).

The central question we address in this paper is, in the context of mass imprisonment, how does intergenerational offending and incarceration unfold as a social disaster, and how may we prevent it? To answer this question, we utilize a developmental and lifecourse framework to examine how parental imprisonment and linked traumas may be associated with the development of antisocial behavior and offending. We identify social policies and interventions that may ameliorate adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), reducing risk of intergenerational offending and incarceration. By framing mass imprisonment as a social disaster brought upon American society that requires a dedicated response like any other social disaster, we believe it is possible to reduce the intergenerational transmission of offending and incarceration. In what follows we argue that this necessitates a focus on reducing the traumas associated with parental incarceration and ameliorating their effects at relevant developmental stages, as well as intervening in the social disaster itself (i.e., reducing the rate of incarceration). In the context of a developmental and life course perspective, adopting a disaster framework can promote policies and interventions which more systemically build resiliency to adverse outcomes in later life.

### **Intergenerational Offending and the Disaster of Mass Incarceration**

As outlined in a recent report by the National Academies of Science (National Research Council, 2014), an extensive body of research has examined the scope and issues related to mass incarceration in the U.S., along with the parallel issues of parental imprisonment and inequalities experienced by children (Wildeman & Wang, 2017). Important dimensions for understanding mass imprisonment have been captured using racial discrimination and perpetuation of racial caste and class systems (Alexander, 2010; Semien

& Roettger, 2013), a mechanism to control populations with rising inequality and wealth redistribution (Reiman & Leighton, 2015), shifting use of criminal law to enforce social norms (Simon, 2007), intergenerational social exclusion (Foster & Hagan 2015), and punitive sanctions arising from the “War on Drugs” and “War on Crime” linked with public fears of crime and illicit drug use (Clear & Frost, 2014). However, by failing to comprehensively address the multiple underlying causes and factors which are implicit in a disaster, these perspectives leave gaps in the literature which need to: (a) more comprehensively frame intergenerational transmission of offending and incarceration in the context of a social phenomenon detrimentally impacting American society; (b) examine intergenerational imprisonment in the context of the developmental research on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and adversity in adulthood; and (c) develop policies and interventions more applicable to differing stages in the life course.

Placing the intergenerational transmission of offending within the context of the sociological disaster of mass imprisonment can help to address these limitations. Traditionally applied to natural disasters and human events which inflict harm on populations, such as Hurricane Katrina, terrorist attacks, and the Holocaust, social disasters pose major threats to societies and create or exacerbate risks to human populations (Tierney, 2007; Webb, 2002). We frame mass imprisonment as a disaster due to the scale, complex nature of origin underlying causes, and the economic, human, and social costs on society. As with other disasters, mass imprisonment is linked with loss of life, major health and economic consequences to offenders and families, the breakdown of social structures, and the financial and social destruction of communities where imprisonment is concentrated (Binswanger et al, 2007; Clear, 2007; Clear & Frost, 2014; Pinard, 2010; Tierney, 2007; Wildeman & Wang, 2017). The work of Clear and Frost (2014) is suggestive of the complicated underlying factors leading to mass imprisonment, and the many intentional and unintentional collateral

effects which result from the threat that mass imprisonment poses to the social fabric of American society.

While overall levels of imprisonment have declined slightly in the last decade, the U.S. justice system's focus on punishment, coupled with the heightened risk of criminal justice involvement among offspring, may impede efforts to reduce prison populations and prevent children and young people's recovery from the trauma of having an incarcerated parent (Kaeble & Glaze, 2016; Roettger, Swisher, & Boardman, 2018; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2014). As in the case of natural disasters where recovery efforts fail to assist marginalized and vulnerable populations, efforts aimed at reducing the scope of imprisonment and associated economic and social costs will likely fail unless the array of collateral consequences to prisoners and their families are fully addressed (Wisner, 1998). The focus of disaster research on the effects of collective trauma and recovery provide insights into ameliorating adverse developmental outcomes related to traumas experienced by millions of children experiencing parental imprisonment.

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are recognised risks for later antisocial behavior (Giordano & Copp, 2015; Schilling, Aseltine, & Gore, 2007). The resulting adversities for children stemming from parental incarceration can include homelessness, lack of health care, family instability, poverty, food insecurity, social exclusion, and abuse/neglect (Giordano, 2010; Giordano & Copp, 2015; Foster & Hagan, 2007, 2015). Long-term exposure to traumatic experiences such as these are strongly linked to antisocial behaviors and offending in later life. Both the severity and number of adversities children of incarcerated parents face may create significant obstacles to resiliency against the intergenerational transmission of offending and incarceration (Fox, Perez, Cass, Baglivio, & Epps, 2015; Mears & Siennick, 2016). As Giordano (2010, pg. 165) notes, resiliency 'is a process rather than a fait accompli... conceptualized in relative, multi-dimensional terms.'

A recent meta-analysis on ACEs suggests that traumas common to parental imprisonment increase odds of a range of adversities in the life course, including mental health issues, substance abuse, and violence perpetration; factors which perpetuate offending and related adversities across generations (Hughes et al, 2017; Kinner and Borschmann, 2017).

When considering intergenerational trauma in the context of mass imprisonment, disaster research highlights the importance of treatment of issues impacting both parents and children, along with the importance of promoting parent-child bonds and supportive social environments where children are raised. For example, Braga, Mello, & Fiks (2012) observed patterns of resiliency to behavioural problems among children of Holocaust survivors. Children demonstrated resiliency when parents were able to overcome their own personal issues, effectively communicate with children about their Holocaust experiences, and create a loving and supportive environment. Arditti and colleagues (Arditti, 2015; Arditti and Salva, 2015) have similarly highlighted resiliency in children of incarcerated mothers in the context of communication between children and imprisoned parents, stable and supportive familial environments, and policies that address an array of issues faced by incarcerated mothers (e.g., addictions, histories of domestic violence/assault, and childhood abuse).

Braman (2004) has documented the economic strains, shame, separation issues, and emotional difficulties faced by fathers and children when a father is incarcerated. While maternal gatekeeping often plays a pivotal role in preventing traumatic contact between formerly imprisoned fathers and their children, research suggests that, outside of cases leading to exposure to antisocial behaviour, maintaining paternal-child bonds after imprisonment can have a prosocial effect (Roy & Dyson, 2005; Jaffee, Moffitt, Caspi, & Taylor, 2003). While exposure to parental criminality and substance abuse likely strengthens the intransigence of intergenerational offending, addressing intergenerational traumas of issues linked to mass imprisonment by promoting communication and improving functioning



of parents and children may promote resiliency to offending across generations (Giordano, 2010; Rodriguez, 2016).

The complexity and varying nature of traumas experienced by children who have a parent undergo incarceration, suggest a need for a general, comprehensive framework to provide interventions that may prevent the emergence of adolescent and adult offending. Drawing on research for individuals experiencing disaster-related traumas, Hobfoll and colleagues (2007, pp. 185-186) propose a framework of five components for developing such interventions. These are: (1) promoting a sense of safety; (2) promoting calming; (3) promoting a sense of self-efficacy and collective efficacy; (4) promoting connectedness; and (5) providing children and their families with opportunities for reintegrating into the societies in which they reside through social acceptance and tangible prospects. In the following sections we consider this disaster framework with respect to opportunities to intervene in the intergenerational transmission of offending and incarceration at different stages of the lifecourse.

### **Prenatal & Infancy**

In disaster research, prenatal and postnatal trauma is linked to adverse birth outcomes, poor child development, and problem behaviors among children in later life (King et al 2012; Tan et al, 2009). As with children of Holocaust survivors, early traumas associated with parental incarceration may lead to antisocial behaviour and offending. Parental imprisonment prior to birth and during infancy may have profound impacts on the type and extent of adversity experienced in childhood, with impacts varying by parent gender. For example, paternal imprisonment during the prenatal and perinatal stages of offspring development may severely restrict the immediate and longer term economic and caregiving activities of fathers (Pinard, 2010; Swisher & Waller, 2008). Economic instability in infancy and early childhood

is linked with adverse development and antisocial behaviors in later childhood (Aizer, Stroud, & Buka, 2016; Peterson & Albers, 2001). Additionally, paternal imprisonment is linked with maternal stress and depression, which can have significant negative impacts on child development and behaviors (Wildeman, Schnittker, & Turney, 2012).

While there is generally a paucity of research on child outcomes related to imprisonment among mothers during the prenatal stage, a limited body of research has found that maternal imprisonment is linked with poor birth outcomes and development, mother-child separation, and attachment issues (Swah, Down, & Kingdon, 2015). A large body of research in psychology and medicine has found prenatal maternal mental and physical stress measures with poor child outcomes across the lifespan that include poor health and mortality, poor educational outcomes, and antisocial behaviour (Aizer, Stroud, & Buka, 2016; Entringer et al, 2011; MacKinnen et al, 2018). Postnatally, maternal imprisonment may lead to a lack of stable familial bonds and barriers to communication and interaction (Arditti & Salva, 2015), which medical research has found to be critical in ameliorating the effects of toxic stress in early life (Johnson, Riley, Granger, & Riis, 2013).

Policies and interventions that seek to ameliorate the impact of parental imprisonment on the early development of children are critical to promoting resiliency to delinquency and offending in later life. Consistent with Hobfoll et al's (2007) disaster framework, promoting a sense of safety and promoting calming are likely to be essential for infant development. As Johnson and colleagues note (2013), a stable, nurturing environment can reduce risks for a range of adversities later in the lifecourse. Policies and programs that improve nutrition, health and economic stability (e.g. welfare benefits, child health insurance, jobs programs for incarcerated parents), may reduce economic costs linked with parental imprisonment (Dallaire et al, 2017). In randomized clinical trials, treating effects of socioeconomic disadvantage, maternal stress, and substance abuse have been linked with improving child

birth outcomes, reversing the impact of stress, and treating adverse development related to drug use (Davis et al, 2007; Fontein- Kuipers et al, 2014; Glover, 2014; Neger & Prinz, 2015).

Parallel to research on parental imprisonment occurring prenatally or in infancy, findings from disaster research suggest that children whose parents experience extreme trauma are more likely to engage in substance abuse and family violence. Similarly, having parents who experience PTSD, poverty, and mental health issues that may detrimentally impact children throughout their lives (Catani, Jacob, Schauer, Kohila, & Neuner, 2008; King et al, 2012). By adopting a social disaster framework to address traumas associated with parental imprisonment, it is possible to reduce the probability of antisocial behaviors and other developmental issues which, untreated, may negatively impact children for the duration of their lives.

### **Childhood**

As children develop beyond infancy, parental imprisonment is linked with the development of aggression, conduct disorder, ADHD, and deviance (Murray & Farrington, 2008; Turney, 2014; Wildeman 2010; Turney & Wildeman 2015). Adverse experiences such as poverty, residential instability, parental substance abuse, risk of abuse/neglect, homelessness, and lack of closeness to parents or caregivers experiencing parental imprisonment may all act as potential traumas (Ardetti, 2015; Phoelmann, 2005; Sheehan, 2010). Existing multiple and complex traumatic experiences may compound adversities related to parental imprisonment (Hughes et al, 2017). Thus, ACEs and traumas of parental imprisonment interlink associated behavioural problems with a range of other adverse outcomes, including poor academic performance, stigma and alienation, physical health, sleep problems, internalizing behaviors, and delayed cognitive and physical development (Brahman, 2004; Jackson & Vaughn, 2017; McNichel & Tash, 2001; Murray & Farrington,

2008a, 2008b; Poehlmann, 2005; Turney, 2014; Turney & Wildeman, 2015; Wildeman, 2017). The presence of these adversities heighten children's risks for engaging in antisocial behaviors (Nagin & Trembley, 2001; Wallinius et al, 2016). Thus, through both direct and indirect association, the traumas relating parental imprisonment to childhood adversity may perpetuate antisocial behaviour and eventual intergenerational offending and incarceration.

Interventions and policies aimed at reducing the risk for the intergenerational transmission of offending and incarceration should consider the age of the child, the nature and sequencing of traumas experienced, and potentially, the gender of the parent. While promoting a sense of safety and promoting calming are also relevant for childhood, Hobfoll et al's (2007) third and fourth elements of promoting a sense of self-efficacy and collective efficacy and promoting connectedness also becomes particularly relevant. This can include providing a sense of control for children by enabling choices in interacting with incarcerated parents, and fostering dialogue between parents, children, and kin networks about traumatic experiences related to imprisonment. For example, among younger children who experience maternal imprisonment, implementing policies and guidelines for correctional and social service agencies may help to maintain communication with imprisoned mothers, address residential instability, and promote parent-child bonds (Ardevi & Salva, 2015). Interventions targeting substance abuse issues, preventing child abuse, creating a developmental context for parenting and the development of parenting skills in prison, and addressing issues of poverty and disadvantage may improve parent-child relations and reduce the risk of children experiencing additional traumas (Dalliere et al, 2017; Dennison, Smallbone & Occhipinti, 2017; Junger, Greene, Schipper, Hesper, & Estourgie 2013; Roettger & Swisher, 2013). School-based interventions may promote interaction between current or formerly incarcerated parents and address child behavioural problems. However, recent research suggests that the stigma of parental imprisonment may create bias towards children by teachers, making

training of educators and intervention personnel critical for success (Roettger & Swisher, 2013; Wildeman, Scardamalia, Walsh, O'Brien, & Brew, 2017).

Research by Turney & Wildeman (2015) is suggestive that complex traumas and heightened disadvantage are (1) much more difficult to overcome and (2) predominant in the majority of cases where children experience parental imprisonment. Consequently, the nature, complexity, and timing of the underlying causal factors of the trauma (e.g., if parental imprisonment → aggression, vs. if parental imprisonment and physical abuse → internalizing behaviour and poor academic performance → marginalization at school → conduct disorder) creates the need for significantly varying treatment and interventions across individuals. As children age from early childhood into late primary school years, it is also critical to consider the type of problem behaviour and appropriate set of policies and interventions. At age 3-5, when aggression and externalizing behaviors are more prevalent, antisocial behaviour is almost universal; however, by late primary school, social environments typically modulate children to act prosocially, making antisocial behaviour a much rarer event (Trembley, 2012). Thus, while teaching parenting skills and a stable home environment at ages 3-5 may be appropriate for reducing aggression related to parental imprisonment, multi-systemic approaches incorporating cognitive behavioural therapy for antisocial behaviour and encouraging a close relationship with a father or father-figure may more appropriate for conduct disorder at age 12.

## **Adolescence**

The period of adolescence marks a critical stage in the onset and development of offending trajectories. Adolescence is characterised by increased freedoms and choices, and marks a period where antisocial peers and family play a heightened role for engaging in delinquent behavior (Giordano, 2010; Haynie & Osgoode, 2005). Compared to general

patterns of offending in adolescence, adolescents experiencing parental imprisonment are more likely to engage in delinquency with greater frequency and chronicity (Moffitt, 1993; Rakt, Murray, & Nieuwbeerta, 2012; Roettger & Swisher, 2011). With over one-half of sons undergoing imprisonment by their early 30s (Roettger et al, 2018), the widely-replicated work of Nagin, Farrington, & Moffitt (1998) suggests children of incarcerated parents are more likely to engage in offending trajectories at varying levels of chronicity. Consequently, interventions should place greater focus on reducing the frequency and chronicity of juvenile delinquency as it occurs.

Compared to those not experiencing parental imprisonment, adolescents who have experienced parental incarceration have been found to have lower school attachment and increased risk of dropping out of high school, smaller and more antisocial peer networks, higher rates of parental absence, increased risk for poverty and homelessness, increased risk for teenage pregnancy, and a higher risk for engaging in risky sexual behaviors and substance abuse (Cho, 2011; Cochran, Siennick, & Mears, 2018; Dobbie, Grönqvist, Niknami, Palme, & Priks, 2018; Giordano, 2010; Hagan & Foster, 2007; Khan, Scheidell, Rosen, Geller, & Brotman, 2018; Roettger, Swisher, Kuhl, and Chavez, 2011). These risks, in turn, may compound with earlier traumas and behavioural problems to substantially increase risk for subsequent delinquency and adult offending (Giordano & Copp, 2015; Hughe et al, 2017). Policies and interventions must thus take into account multiple risks and cumulative trauma to aid in the desistance process, along with the unique issues faced by children who have experienced parental imprisonment.

Thus, interventions may need to be tailored or combined to deal with parental imprisonment and the idea of promoting self-efficacy and promoting connectedness may be particularly important. For example, the school-based PROSPER intervention has generally been found to reduce levels of antisocial behaviour by marginalizing such behaviors among

adolescent social networks (Osgoode et al, 2013). However, a supplemental program, such as strengthening ties with a father-figure, may prevent unintentional increases in antisocial behaviour that could be caused by further marginalizing children of incarcerated parents and shifting them into smaller, more antisocial networks (Cochran et al, 2018; Roettger et al, 2016). Programs helping children of incarcerated parents increase school attachment and complete secondary school might also be paired with a cognitive behavioural therapy program encouraging prosocial behaviors.

As suggested by disaster research, the reoccurrence of parental imprisonment may exacerbate prior traumas, increasing risk for depression, antisocial behaviors, and PTSD (Brown et al 2017; Self-Brown, Lai, Patterson, & Glasheen, 2017). Research on disasters and research in criminology suggest that schools, families, and peers play an important role in reducing such effects on antisocial behavior (Brown et al, 2017; Cook, Buehler, & Henson, 2009). However, as the research noted above suggests, these forms of social support may be diminished, or where the network is antisocial, may lead to increase risks for antisocial behavior in young people with an incarcerated parent. Policies and interventions must, subsequently, account for these limitations by attempting to create multiple sources of social support. Thus, successful multi-faceted interventions may need to encourage communication with imprisoned parents (which also requires prisons removing barriers to maintaining or developing quality parent-child relationships), assist caregivers in providing social structures to avoid problematic unstructured free-time, locate an appropriate role model or mentor to encourage graduation from high school, provide treatment for substance use problems, and create alternative school social networks to reduce the influence of antisocial peers. These efforts are consistent with Hobfoll et al's fifth element of instilling hope, by creating opportunities for social acceptance, achievement and alternative prosocial pathways. As with younger children who experience parental imprisonment, a more comprehensive and

sustained effort is critical for overcoming the multiple, persistent traumas related to a parent being imprisoned.

As noted above, parental imprisonment is linked to increases in residential instability, lack of healthcare, and general social exclusion in the communities where adolescent children of incarcerated parents reside (Foster & Hagan, 2007; 2015). Disasters are known to eliminate social capital and also create conditions where exiting poverty and disadvantage are remote if appropriate interventions are not taken (Adato, Carter, & May, 2006; Hawkins & Maurer, 2009). Hobfoll et al's (2007) conditions for recovery thus imply developing policies and interventions which provide resources to reintegrate into communities, including promoting stable housing, access to health care, and active involvement in civil society. Failing to address these basic needs exacerbates the risk of antisocial behavior extending into adulthood. Connecting adolescents who have experienced parental imprisonment with the needed resources and community linkages which enable resiliency through creating prosocial bonds and hope to foster change is essential. Such efforts would likely be put in place in response to other social disasters, but have largely been ignored in the context of mass (parental) incarceration.

## **Adulthood**

As children reach adulthood, the failures of policies and interventions at earlier stages of development increase the risk of intergenerational imprisonment. We then see reoccurrence of the many collateral consequences of parental imprisonment, compounding existing traumas experienced in childhood as adult children experience imprisonment, disadvantage and marginalization. As with disasters where the effects are not fully addressed, the ongoing social disaster of mass imprisonment in the U.S. is thus perpetuated on millions of American families. It remains important to consider that offspring of incarcerated parents



who offend in adulthood may still substantially benefit from policies and interventions. In fact, strong family ties and having children have been found to be strong predictors of hope, optimism and imagining a possible non-offending self, seen as important for desistance (Visher & O'Connell, 2012). Furthermore, opportunities to develop parenting skills and engage in parenting while in prison are important not only for current relationships but also for parental and cultural generativity, so that disconnection from family and community is not perpetuated (Dennison, Smallbone et al., 2014). In addition, Gendreau (2012) notes that a range of rehabilitation programs provide an effective means for addressing substance abuse, mental health issues, antisocial behavior and other issues which aid in the desistance process.

For adult children of incarcerated parents that become parents themselves, support for desistance and reintegration are essential for limiting the intergenerational traumas, exclusion and risk for imprisonment that may be brought upon the next generation. Opportunities to integrate into communities after release, to receive social acceptance, to find work and engage in civic participation are important in instilling hope for families to recover from the intergenerational transmission of offending and incarceration. Disaster research emphasises the importance of communities to collectively act to address traumas (Tierney, 2007), making reintegration and social support of adult offenders a critical component in both the desistance process and preventing intergenerational offending in the next generation.

## **Conclusion**

By examining the transmission of intergenerational offending and incarceration in the context of mass imprisonment as a social disaster, it is possible to better understand how trauma of parental imprisonment and associated issues is linked to antisocial behaviors at various stages of development in the lifecourse. Moreover, the research on interventions to

reduce the impact of disasters provides a frame for addressing the complex, interrelated traumas by children who experience incarcerated parents. Research on the challenges and needs linked with parental imprisonment suggest a more comprehensive framework is needed to address these issues, particularly for the large majority of children experiencing imprisonment that appear non-responsive to a simple intervention or change in personal circumstances (Arditti, 2015; Giordano & Copp, 2015). Furthermore, traumatic experiences and adverse risks may interact, resulting in an increase in antisocial behaviors over time. Promoting wellbeing and resiliency to traumas is therefore likely to require a long-term and multi-pronged effort that should incorporate families, schools, government institutions, and the communities in which children of incarcerated parents are embedded.

Using approaches for treating trauma after disasters can aid in formulating such efforts. As suggested by Hobfoll et al (2007), creating safe, supportive, and socially-connected environments which lead to self-efficacy and hope among children of incarcerated parents can provide a basis for preventing and reducing antisocial behaviors. As the work of Braga et al (2012) suggests, the need to rehabilitate and treat current and formerly incarcerated parents for addictions and mental health issues is also critical in enabling a supportive environment, where interventions such as parental education and training can be implemented to reduce early antisocial behaviors that persist into adulthood.

Children of incarcerated parents have been found to transition to adulthood earlier than the general population. The experience of traumas and heightened risk to a range of adverse outcomes, such as dropping out of high school, criminal behaviors, and imprisonment, setting the stage for a transition into a life of disadvantage and marginalization (Hughes et al, 2017; Turney & Lanuza, 2017; Wildeman & Wang, 2017). By addressing such collateral consequences resulting from mass imprisonment, it is possible to reduce the continuity of intergenerational offending among millions of families while improving the

overall welfare of one of society's most marginalized populations. Failing to act may, alternatively, perpetuate intergenerational offending and contribute to the high economic, social, and personal costs on generations of families unable to recover from the disaster of mass imprisonment.

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