

The Effect of Peer Influence and Neighborhood Quality on Incarcerated Fathers' Attachment

International Journal of
Offender Therapy and
Comparative Criminology
2025, Vol. 69(16) 2283–2302
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DOI: 10.1177/0306624X241234856
journals.sagepub.com/home/ijo



Eman Tadros¹ , Anha Jhuremalani²,
and Branden McLeod³

Abstract

Commonly referred to as the “hidden victims” of incarceration, children with a parent who is intermittently or repeatedly incarcerated face various challenges that exacerbate behavioral and psychological development. Using a baseline adaptation of the Multi-site Family Study on Incarceration, Parenting and Partnering (MFS-IP), we sought to clarify how peer influence and neighborhood quality can predict the extent of an incarcerated father’s attachment to the focal child and partner. Results showed a negative association between negative peer influence and poor neighborhood quality. Conversely, incarcerated fathers’ relationship with their biological mother and fathers produced a significant positive association. These findings propose that risk and protective factors can directly influence attachment levels with the focal child, as suggested by Social Control Theory. This article provides a basis for a more comprehensive understanding of clinical support that can be offered to children and families who bear the systemic societal mechanisms of incarceration.

Keywords

incarceration, peer influence, social control theory

According to the United States (U.S.) Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1.5 million people in the U.S. were incarcerated in 2020, representing 4% of the population. However, the effects of incarceration are not only endured by

¹Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY, USA

²Columbia University, Teachers College, New York, NY, USA

³University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL, USA

Corresponding Author:

Eman Tadros, Ph.D., LMFT, Syracuse University.

Email: emantadros@gmail.com

the individual; siblings, parents, friends, children, and community members of the incarcerated can also be profoundly impacted. Specifically, children of an incarcerated parent are most at risk for developing behavioral and social-emotional issues (Dwyer, 2018; Provencher & Conway, 2019; Shlafer et al., 2020; Song et al., 2018; Turney & Halpern-Meekin, 2020). For instance, they may be more likely to exhibit aggressive and externalizing behaviors (Dwyer, 2018; Shlafer et al., 2020). Additionally, with the absence or distance of a parent, children experience mental health difficulties which continue to magnify if left unnoticed or untreated (Shlafer et al., 2020; Turney & Halpern-Meekin, 2020). In a meta-analytic review, Provencher and Conway (2019) concluded that children and adults who have incarcerated family members are more likely to be diagnosed with mental and physical disorders (e.g., alcohol dependency, asthma) as compared to children and adults who do not. Furthermore, social-emotional and behavioral problems that develop at home can directly affect education and schooling; children with incarcerated parents tend not to perform as well as their peers in school (Banachowski-Fuller, 1997; Song et al., 2018).

Similarly, incarceration can lead to economic hardship and financial stress. Here, incarcerated persons are no longer able to contribute to general household and living expenses (e.g., loss of income and childcare, legal expenses), inducing additional strain on those at home (Turney, 2015). Prior to incarceration, males contribute to approximately 50% of the household income. This places a substantial burden on family members who are required to find alternative means of covering the lost half (Bruns, 2020). The economic strain may exacerbate upon returning home when faced with unemployment and a tough job market not looking to hire a formerly incarcerated individual. For this reason, individuals may return to maladaptive behaviors that lead to more incarceration, such as drug use or robbery (DeHart et al., 2018). The cycle of incarceration has a growing impact; more than 50% of incarcerated individuals are reincarcerated within 3 years of their release (Awofeso, 2010).

Peer Influence and Criminal Behavior

A peer is an individual who shares similarities in regards to age, interests, background, and social status (e.g., a classmate or sports team member). Moreover, individuals can be involved with multiple peer groups, each of which have varying degrees of effect based on the amount of time spent interacting with said peer groups. Because individuals seek out peers who are like-minded, they begin to adopt certain behaviors that are influenced or pressured by their peers so as to establish compatibility (Brehwald & Prinstein, 2011).

This is defined as *peer influence*, whereby an individual's desire to feel validated and accepted by the group is conveyed by these behavioral choices (Dodge & Prinstein, 2010; Lewis et al., 2012). Most notably, the power of peer conformity and normative social influence was exhibited by Asch (1951). In brief, participants continued to answer incorrectly on a simple perceptual task so as to mimic the behaviors of a confederate. This paradigm is widely used to ascertain social desirability and related phenomena. More specifically, peer influence can either be implied or expressed: implied

peer influence is subtle and challenging to recognize. For example, if members of the group engage in substance use, an individual may feel pressured to comply in order to avoid being labeled the outcast member. Oftentimes if an individual chooses to act differently, they may face rejection from the group. On the other hand, expressed peer influence is explicit and directed at the individual. For example, an individual is told that they must perform risky behaviors (e.g., reckless driving, shoplifting) in order to be welcomed into the group.

From a developmental perspective, Albert et al. (2013) found that adolescents are willing to engage in behaviors (that they otherwise would not have) if it ensures the acceptance of their peers. Here, adolescents are in the developmental stage of *Identity* versus *Role Confusion* (Erikson, 1956). During this stage, individuals begin to develop a sense of who they are, and this is heavily influenced by peer interaction. In this vein, Chassin et al. (2009) found that a strong predictor of criminal behavior in adolescence is peer affiliation. Crime statistics indicate that adolescents typically commit crimes, ranging from vandalism and drug use to homicide, in peer groups (Albert et al., 2013). However, it is unclear whether criminal behavior is influenced by peers (Meldrum et al., 2013; Sutherland, 1947), or if peer affiliation is mediated by crime behaviors (Albert et al., 2013; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Hirschi, 1969). In regards to the latter, a selection effect postulates that an adolescent who presents with antisocial behaviors is more likely to affiliate with delinquent peers alike (Beardslee et al., 2018).

On the other hand, Copp et al. (2020) found that adolescents who grew up in a familial environment consisting of violence, drug use, and system involvement were more likely to affiliate with peers who engaged in criminal behavior. Unlike adults who typically commit crimes alone, adolescents are accompanied by peers when they commit a crime (Albert et al., 2013; Zimring, 1998). Similarly, Gardner and Steinberg (2005) found there were no sex differences regarding criminological-related risk taking behavior. However, Mrug et al. (2014) suggests that young girls who experience puberty at an earlier age tend to gravitate towards older girls who engage in risky behaviors.

However, due to projection bias, Gallupe et al. (2019) used the Stochastic Actor-Oriented Models (SAOMs) to measure peer selection and the influence of peers and criminal behavior. Here, it can be suggested that the relationship between individual behavior and peer offending is affected by both the influence of peers and the choice to befriend peers with similar offending profiles (Gallupe et al., 2019). Overall, the results supported the notion that adolescent criminal behavior increases the likelihood of criminal behavior among his or her peers. Previous research on the influence of peers on criminal behavior has used self-report or survey-based assessment types, and have shown a positive relationship between the two factors. In previous literature, there is a large focus on adolescent incarceration; therefore, this study explores how adult fathers are impacted by the influence of peers.

In this vein, parental incarceration is common in American low-income minoritized neighborhoods among uneducated minoritized men with lower-levels of education as romantic partners or children who witness their arrest (Turney, 2014). Further,

neighborhood plays a role in reentry and abstinence from reoffending, residential growth, and neighborhood attainment (Campbell et al., 2020). Therefore, it is vital to consider how neighborhood quality can not only determine future incarceration, but level of involvement in familial obligations and parenthood. In regards to the latter, less is known about the extent to which peers and neighborhood quality can influence attachment to focal children. This is especially pertinent given the psychological consequences of parental incarceration on children.

Attachment

Attachment in children may be complicated by separation of one or more parents due to incarceration. When attachment representations were examined in children during the time of their mother's incarceration, most children show representations of insecure attachment (Poehlmann, 2005). Data indicated that when the mother is incarcerated, children are more likely to have a change in caregivers during this time (Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010). Furthermore, Tasca et al. (2011) found that maternal incarceration leads to greater chances of youth rearrest among offspring. On the other hand, paternal incarceration was strongly associated with adult sons' arrest and conviction (Burgess-Proctor et al., 2016). In this vein, attachment is not only prevalent in childhood, but can greatly influence how individuals behave and interact with others throughout lifespan development (Keiley et al., 2015).

When children are raised in a stable environment with secure family attachments, they are more likely to transition into successful adults who have healthy cognitive, mental, and emotional skills (Kim et al., 2020). However, children are not the sole beneficiaries of parent-child relationships. Research shows that adults' health and well-being are significantly impacted by their relationships with their children (Umberson et al., 2010). Due to the high number of individuals who are incarcerated and the way that the prison structure operates, parent-child relationships have been heavily negatively impacted (Warren et al., 2019). Incarceration is a break in consistency and a potential threat to romantic relationships and attachment security. For example, Young et al. (2017) found that insecure attachment styles in early childhood predict higher rates of instability in adulthood, and vice versa with secure attachment styles. Moreover, Poehlmann-Tynan et al. (2017) found that attachment styles in children of incarcerated individuals vary depending on visitation, home environments, and partner stability. Therefore, it is vital to explore the effects of paternal incarceration on children's well-being, specifically how father-child attachment and coparenting can predict future behavioral outcomes.

Social Control Theory

Social Control Theory (SCT) proposes that people's relationships, commitments, values, norms, and beliefs encourage them to abide by the law. One example of this is the notion of marriage. Often, individuals who are married are less likely to commit crimes due to respective social ties (Wyse et al., 2014). These may include fear of breaking

the attachment bond between married couples, eliminating social situations that could induce criminal opportunities, creating structure that requires individuals to contribute financially, as well as developing identities within married dyads that are inconsistent with criminal behavior (Wyse et al., 2014). Thus, when individuals commit to a marital relationship, they are less likely to engage in criminal behaviors because of social and emotional obligations aforementioned.

SCT is a criminology-based theory and can therefore be useful in exploring incarceration rates. For instance, individuals who experience child abuse are more likely to commit crimes as they get older due to disruption of social bonds with parents (Berryessa, 2021). SCT posits that parental abuse may influence criminal behavior in two ways: (1) negative parenting may reduce the development of a child's self-control, which could in turn create the inability to not engage in criminal activity, and (2) weakened parental bonds may diminish a child's conventional values, ultimately leading to delinquency (Rebllon & Van Gundy, 2005). Therefore, when social bonds are negatively impacted, the likelihood of the engagement in delinquency and criminal behavior increases.

We can recognize how SCT intersects with peer influence, whereby those who engage in institutions of informal social control (i.e., friend groups, school, and family) are less likely to pursue delinquent acts (Andreescu, 2019). Given that SCT highlights how individuals' relationships, values, and norms diminish criminal behavior, the extent to which peer influence and neighborhood surroundings play a role in incarceration can be understood through this lens.

Current Study

Although a plethora of literature delves into the consequences of paternal incarceration on child development and partner relations, less is known about how specific protective and risk factors can affect the nature of said relationships. There is growing evidence indicating poor developmental outcomes for children with incarcerated fathers, specifically regarding aggressive behaviors and attention problems (Geller et al., 2012). These outcomes are exacerbated by marriage instability and domestic disturbances as a result of incarceration.

To decipher the factors which most influence familial relationships would prove beneficial toward clinical implications and more comprehensive rehabilitation practices, ultimately increasing the quality of living after incarceration. This study aims to understand the relationship between peer influence and neighborhood surroundings (i.e., risk factors), as well as men's relationship with their biological mother and father growing up (i.e., protective factors) and their effect on attachment with child and partner. The current study yields the following hypotheses: (1) men who experience negative peer influence and poor neighborhood quality are less likely to be attached to their focal child and partner, and (2) men who experience poor relationships with their biological father and mother growing up are less likely to be attached to their focal child and partner. Lastly, we hypothesize that attachment is moderated by fathers' race and ethnicity.

Method

Data Source

Data are used from the baseline adaptation of the Multi-site Family Study on Incarceration, Parenting and Partnering (MFS-IP; Bir & Lindquist, 2017). Some recent studies have utilized this dataset to explore family dynamics with an incarcerated father (Comfort et al., 2018; Durante et al., 2022, 2023; McKay, 2022; McKay et al., 2018; Tadros & Ansell, 2022; Tadros & Durante, 2022; Tadros et al., 2022). The Multi-site Family Study was constructed as an evaluation of family strengthening programs for incarcerated and reentering men and their partners which focused on five state prisons in five different states. The men from these prisons were asked to name the women who were their intimate or co-parenting partners. In order to participate in this study, individuals had to speak English, have the mental and physical capacity to participate in an interview, be of age 18 or older, and male had to have agreed to provide researchers with the contact information of their partners. Between December 2008 and August 2014, every participant was individually interviewed by trained interviewers by way of an audio computer assisted interview protocol. Interviews for women primarily took place in community settings, whereas all men's baseline interviews occurred in state prison facilities. Survey queries included family contact, parenting and coparenting, the well-being of children and mothers during the fathers' incarcerations, and relationship quality. Participants were requested to identify all of their biological and nonbiological children; from these identified, the survey program selected a "focal child" with priority given to children who were parented by both the incarcerated man and his partner, and who were closest to 8 years of age.

Analytical Approach

The current study leverages the panel data structure of the MFS-IP study. We examine the risk factors (i.e., negative peer influence and poor neighborhood quality), protective factors (i.e., fathers' relationships with their biological mothers and fathers while growing up), and demographic characteristics (i.e., fathers' age and race). Specifically, we analyzed how these regressors impact incarcerated fathers' attachment to others. In so doing, we employ both random and fixed effects regression to examine these relationships. Random effects analysis is more efficient and allows time-invariant variables. Fixed effects analysis is less efficient and excludes time-invariant variables. In addition, with fixed effects, one wave of panel data is excluded from the analysis to achieve the relevant transformation (Hamaker & Muthén, 2020). For instance, in three waves of data collection, one-third of the data is not used to achieve the fixed effects transformation. However, unlike random effects models, fixed effects models assume that there is a correlation between the residuals (i.e., error terms) and predictor variables (Hamaker & Muthén, 2020). After conducting the random and fixed effects models, we compare the two approaches using the Hausman Test to assess any differences in the models.

Measures

Dependent Variable: Attachment. The outcome variable of interest examines fathers' attachment to the others across the three waves of MFS-IP study (i.e., baseline, ninth-month, eighteenth month, and thirty-fourth-month follow-up periods). Four summated items make-up the attachment construct. These items ask, "For each of the following statements, please tell me how much you agree or disagree when it comes to close relationships": (1) It is easy for me to become emotionally close to others. (2) I am uncomfortable getting close to others. (3) I want to be emotionally intimate, but others are reluctant. (4) I am comfortable w/out close emotional relationships. Items 2, 3, and 4 were scaled 1 = *Strongly agree*, 2 = *Agree*, 3 = *Somewhat Agree*, 4 = *Somewhat Disagree*, 5 = *Disagree*, 6 = *Strongly disagree*, as lower scores indicate less attachment. Item one was reverse coded so that higher scores on this item indicate greater attachment. In totality, the summated attachment composite index ranged from a low score of 4 to a high score of 24. This variable from this dataset has been utilized in a recent study that examined romantic attachment, childhood stability, depression, and PTSD in couples with an incarcerated partner (Tadros & Ansell, 2022).

Independent Variables

Potential Risk Factors

Negative Peer Influence. The risk factor, negative peer influence, consists of four summated items. The composite index was examined at the study baseline, 9th month, 18th month, and 34th-month follow-up periods. These items ask fathers, "(1) Of the people you know, how many have ever been in prison? (2) Of the people you know, how many are employed full time? (3) Of the people you know, how many use illegal drugs? (4) How often do people convince you to do things you shouldn't do?" Items were scored 1 = *All*, 2 = *Most*, 3 = *Some*, 4 = *None*. However, negatively stated questions were reverse coded so that higher scores reflect increased levels of negative peer influence. In totality, the negative peer influence ranges from 4 to 16.

Poor Neighborhood Quality. The risk factor, poor neighborhood quality, also consists of a 4-item summated composite index. We analyzed the composite index at baseline, 9th-month, 18th-month, and 34th-month follow-up periods, similar to the negative peer influence construct. The poor neighborhood quality composite index asked fathers to what extent they agreed with the following statements about the neighborhoods they mainly live in. (1) "Hard to stay out of trouble in your neighborhood? (2) Drug selling is a major problem in our neighborhood? (3) Your neighborhood is a good place to live? (4) Your neighborhood is a good place to find a job?" The responses for items 3 and 4 were reverse coded to account for positive statements about neighborhood quality. In totality, the poor neighborhood quality composite index ranged from 0 to 14, with higher scores indicating poorer neighborhood quality.

Potential Protective Factors

Fathers' Relationship With Their Biological Father Growing Up. The protective factor, fathers' relationship with their fathers while growing up, consists of two combined questions in the baseline survey. Fathers were asked the following questions. (1) "While you were growing up, how close did you feel to your biological father?" The item scale responses were "extremely close," "somewhat close," and "not very close." (2) "How involved was your biological father in raising you?" The item scale responses were "extremely involved," "somewhat involved," and "not very involved." The item responses were reverse coded so that higher scores indicate better relationships between fathers and their fathers. When combined, the composite index ranged from 2 to 6.

Father's Relationship With Their Biological Mother Growing Up. Identical to the procedures above, the protective factor, fathers' relationship with their mothers while growing up, consists of two combined questions in the baseline survey. Fathers were asked the following questions. (1) "While you were growing up, how close did you feel to your biological mother?" The item scale responses were "extremely close," "somewhat close," and "not very close." (2) "How involved was your biological mother in raising you?" The item scale responses were "extremely involved," "somewhat involved," and "not very involved." The item responses were reverse coded so that higher scores indicate better relationships between fathers and their mothers. When combined, the composite index ranged from 2 to 6.

Results

Descriptive Analyses

In Table 1, we describe our analytic sample. A total of 1,942 fathers are in the study sample. The mean age of fathers was 33.6 years old. As far as race/ethnicity, Black and White fathers made up most of the study sample (86%) with Black fathers comprising a disproportionate share of incarcerated fathers (59%) compared to their share in the U.S. population. Less than 14% of the sample identified as multi-racial and other ethnicities. Among this sample of fathers, the mean attachment score was 14.22 ($SD=3.59$). Thus, the mean attachment score is about midrange given the minimum and maximum values (4–24). Regarding risk factor variables, the mean score for negative peer influence was 7.73 ($SD=2.5$), which was below the midpoint given the composite index's range (4–16). When taking together fathers' mean age and slightly lower negative peer influence score, the results appear reflective of the extant research, which suggests that peer influence peaks at age fourteen and declines, thereafter (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007). Fathers reported a mean score of 6.02 ($SD=2.0$) on the poor neighborhood quality composite index. Similar to the mean negative peer influence score, the poor neighborhood quality composite index was below the midpoint. Communities with higher levels of disadvantage or more likely to experience criminal legal system involvement (Hipp et al., 2010). In terms of protective factors, the

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the Sample.

| | Mean (%) | SD | Min–Max |
|------------------------------------|----------|------|---------|
| Attachment | 14.22 | 3.59 | 4–24 |
| Negative peer influence | 7.73 | 2.5 | 4–16 |
| Poor neighborhood quality | 6.02 | 2.01 | 0–14 |
| Relationship with their father | 3.70 | 1.54 | |
| Relationship with their mother | 5.36 | 1.10 | |
| Fathers' age | 33.55 | 8.72 | 18–68 |
| Fathers' race/ethnicity | | | |
| White | 27.22 | | |
| Black | 59.12 | | |
| Multi-racial and other ethnicities | 13.66 | | |

Note. $N = 1,942$.

average score for fathers' relationship with their biological father was 3.7 ($SD = 1.5$), and the average score for their relationship with their biological mother was 5.36 ($SD = 1.1$).

Regression results

As described above, this study examined risk factors (i.e., negative peer influence and poor neighborhood quality), protective factors (i.e., fathers' relationships with their biological mothers and fathers while growing up), and other demographic characteristics (i.e., fathers' age and race) on incarcerated fathers' attachment to others. In so doing, we employ both random and fixed effects regression to examine these relationships. First, we present the results for the random-effects model followed by the fixed-effects model. Next, we present the results of the Hausman test.

As shown in Table 2, we first explored the individual risk factors separately, starting with the bivariate association between negative peer influence and attachment among fathers. The random-effects model suggested a negative association between negative peer influence and fathers' attachment ($\beta = -.15$; $p < .001$). Similarly, the results of the fixed-effects model suggest that negative peer influence also demonstrated a negative and statistically significant impact on fathers' attachment ($\beta = -.74$; $p < .05$). Note that the fixed-effects model reported a slightly smaller coefficient and slightly larger standard error. The Hausman test indicated no statistically significant difference between the random and fixed effects simple linear regression analyses. Next, we examined the impact of poor neighborhood quality on fathers' attachment. The random-effects model provided that poor neighborhood quality had a negative impact on fathers' attachment ($\beta = -.096$; $p < .001$).

Similarly, the results of the fixed-effects model suggested a negative and significant association between poor neighborhood quality and fathers' attachment ($\beta = -.86$; $p < .05$). Similar to negative peer influence, the Hausman test demonstrated

Table 2. Simple Linear Regression.

| | Random-effects β (SE) | Fixed-effects β (SE) |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Risk factors | | |
| Negative peer influence | -.154 (0.023)*** | -.074 (0.033)* |
| Poor neighborhood quality | -.096 (0.028)*** | -.086 (0.040)* |
| Protective factors | | |
| Relationship with their father | .152 (0.041)*** | |
| Relationship with their mother | .189 (0.057)*** | |

Note. The impact of negative peer influence and poor neighborhood quality on attachment. Standard errors in parentheses.

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 3. Multiple Regression.

| | Random-effects β (SE) | Fixed-effects β (SE) |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Risk factors | | |
| Negative peer influence | -.127 (0.024)*** | -.054 (0.035) |
| Poor neighborhood quality | -.058 (0.029)* | -.062 (0.042) |
| Protective factors | | |
| Relationship with their father | .099 (0.046)* | |
| Relationship with their mother | .119 (0.064) † | |
| Demographic characteristics | | |
| Fathers' age | .027 (0.008)*** | |
| Fathers' race/ethnicity | -.037 (0.044) | |

Note. The impact of negative peer influence and poor neighborhood quality on attachment. Standard Errors in Parentheses.

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

no significant differences between the random and fixed-effects models. The final bivariate analyses examined the association between protective factors and fathers' attachment. The random-effects model for fathers' relationship with their biological mother and fathers produced a positive and significant association ($\beta = .189$; $p < .001$). However, the fixed-effects model omitted the regressor due to collinearity. Given the collinearity in the fixed-effects model, the Hausman test produced no results. Similarly, the random-effects model for fathers' relationship with their biological fathers and attachment produced a positive and significant association ($\beta = .152$; $p < .001$). However, the fixed-effects model omitted the regressor due to collinearity. Given the collinearity in the fixed-effects model, the Hausman test produced no results.

Building on the bivariate analyses above, we included all the independent variables in the random and fixed-effects models to examine the relationship between risk and protective factors on fathers' attachment. As shown in Table 3, the random-effects model results suggest that, even after including all covariates, a negative association

between the risk factors (i.e., negative peer influence ($\beta = -.13$; $p < .001$) and poor neighborhood quality ($\beta = -.06$; $p < .05$). While these negative effects persisted, their impact appeared slightly less than in the random-effects bivariate analyses when including the protective factors (i.e., fathers' relationship with their biological father [$\beta = .099$; $p < .05$] and $\beta = .12$; $p < .10$), and demographic covariates (i.e., $\beta = .03$; $p < .001$) and fathers' race/ethnicity ($\beta = -.04$; $p = .39$). On the other hand, while demonstrating a negative association between risk factors and fathers' attachment, the fixed-effects model did not produce statistically significant results. Finally, we examined the differences between the two models, and the Hausman statistic ($p < .05$) suggested a significant difference between the random and fixed-effects results. It is, therefore, prudent to exercise caution and accept the fixed-effect model's results.

Discussion

This study focused on the influence of peers, neighborhood quality, and parental relationship on incarcerated fathers' attachment toward their focal child and partner. Approximately 90% of incarcerated parents are fathers (Geller et al., 2012). Fathers support child development through multiple domains, such as behavioral modeling, financial resources, and emotional guidance. However, children of incarcerated fathers have limited access to these interactions (Arditti et al., 2003). The strength of attachment has implications for child development and behavior, such as psychological strain, academic performance, and criminal tendencies. Moreover, the father-child relationship post-incarceration may influence the child's future success and ability to overcome adverse challenges (Haskins, 2015; Turney & Haskins, 2014). While it is incumbent that research clarifies the core determinants of father attachment to their children too, neighborhood context and peer relationships must also be considered.

We first hypothesized that incarcerated men who experience negative peer influence and poor neighborhood quality were less likely to be attached to their focal child and partner. This was supported by our results: put differently, fathers involved with peers that have a criminal record, poor employment history (e.g., consistent unemployment), use illegal drugs frequently, or encourage misconduct were less attached to their focal child and partner than fathers who were not impacted by said negative peer influence. Fathers who perceived their neighborhood as one that drives problem behaviors (e.g., selling illegal drugs, difficulty staying out of trouble) or job insecurity were less attached to their focal child and partner than fathers who lived in a better neighborhood community. Regarding peer influence, Charles et al. (2019) found that father involvement with children was mediated by positive male mentors and similar-age peers. More specifically, fathers with positive peer support systems were able to gain advice on parenting after incarceration, to ensure a positive role model for their child. On the other hand, Giordano (2010) found that children, as means of bonding with their father, adopted similar maladaptive behaviors such as joining gangs, involvement with deviant peers, and exposure to risk-averse circumstances. Here, lack of father involvement is associated with negative neighborhood-peer influences, propagating the cycle of incarceration amongst children (Foster & Hagan, 2007). Similarly,

Ryan et al. (2008) suggested that father involvement, despite the quality of interaction, plays a large role in the behavioral and psychosocial development of the child. An explanation for poor attachment may be attributed to limited contact during incarceration as a result of distance or unpleasant visitation rules. Conversely, when regular contact during incarceration is in place, family relationships are strengthened (Boppre & Novisky, 2023; Charles et al., 2023; McLeod & Bonsu, 2018; McLeod et al., 2019)

Next, we hypothesized that men who experienced poor relationships with their biological father and mother growing up are less likely to be attached to their focal child and partner. Our results supported this hypothesis: fathers who felt as though they were close to their biological mother and father growing up, and with both parents being involved during childhood were more likely to have a stronger attachment to their own child than fathers who experienced the opposite. Makariev and Shaver (2010) state that a history of abuse or neglect, experience of parental loss, or placement in multiple foster homes lead to insecure attachment styles in adulthood. The association between insecure attachment in infancy and adult behavioral outcomes has been researched through longitudinal studies (Makariev & Shaver, 2010). In brief, notable social and emotional problems including depression, heightened anger, psychopathology, and difficulties maintaining romantic or marital relations are a direct consequence of early insecure attachments.

More specifically, the relationship quality between the incarcerated individual and their partner impacts the incarcerated individuals' connection with their children and their capacity to be included in their children's rearing (Beckmeyer & Arditti, 2014). Families are the most substantial influence on positive youth development, determine socialization, and are a protective factor in preventing delinquency and reoccurring criminal behavior (Ruch & Yoder, 2018). During incarceration, a large majority of romantic relationships end (Western et al., 2004). Here, the trauma and disruption (including family instability, parental tension, and father absence) extend into entire family systems. This can have an intergenerational impact, disproportionately harming marginalized communities (Harman et al., 2007). The social bond theory proposes that familial attachment can be marked by the regularity and quality of family communication, which can aid in promoting a plan for successful reentry (Ruch & Yoder, 2018).

In addition, these results align with Social Control Theory and attachment. As mentioned, SCT explains how individuals involved in institutions of informal social control (i.e., friend groups, school, and family) are less likely to pursue delinquent acts (Andreescu, 2019). Further, a strong emotional relationship with caregivers fits into this narrative.

Lastly, we hypothesized that attachment is moderated by fathers' race and ethnicity and this was supported. Prior research finds socioeconomic, racial, and gender differences in how individuals react to peer influence. Steinberg and Monahan (2007) concluded lower resistance to peer influence amongst individuals of higher socioeconomic backgrounds. Asian-American individuals self-reported lowest resistance to peer influence, with White and Hispanic individuals reporting slightly higher resistance, and African-American individuals reporting greatest resistance. In addition, men were more likely to succumb to peer influence than women. Here, women stated that they

did not feel the need to alter their behavior nor conform to peer expectations. However, the validity of these findings should be interpreted with caution given that the data are self-reported.

Clinical Implications

Although peer influence is prevalent throughout childhood and early adolescence, it does not end there. Even for adults, peer influence continues to remain a valid social experience. As an individual grows and develops, the need for acceptance may be altered, but is still present. Given that father involvement is a key proponent of children development, facilitating workshops in assisting active communication with family members during incarceration would promote attachment (Roettger & Swisher, 2013). For children, encouraging enrollment into counseling or mentorship programs would provide early intervention for healthy coping, increasing the quality of living for those who have a current or formerly incarcerated father. Romantic or marital relationships would benefit from Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT), specifically discussions over ways to involve the father in child and familial responsibilities.

We recommend that MFTS have an understanding of the cultural factors involved in the experience of peer influence. In doing so, they can provide effective tools in learning to resist the influence of their peers. In addition, incarcerated fathers would benefit from more substantive family contact during incarceration, as a means of securing attachment with their children and partner. Family contact can include letters and phone calls; however, in-person visitation with loved ones is the most tangible communication method among incarcerated individuals and their families and is vital to reinforcing essential family attachments (Beckmeyer & Arditti, 2014; Harman et al., 2007). Restrictive prison environments such as no contact visits inhibit natural family interactions that can lead to attachment insecurity in children who experience traumatic separations and unsuccessful in-person family visits, including those where children exhibit behavioral problems during visitation, causing family members to reduce the number of visits (Arditti & Savla, 2015; Beckmeyer & Arditti, 2014). Visiting loved ones in prison may be difficult to navigate due to the intersecting barriers in place for in-person visitation, including creating scheduling conflicts between the caregiver and children, reliving traumatic separations, lack of physical contact, lack of childcare, and aggressive behavior in children during and following in-person visits (Arditti & Savla, 2015; Beckmeyer & Arditti, 2014; Dyer et al., 2018). In-person visits are more common when incarcerated individuals live closer to their family if the family members are legal residents when visitation is perceived to have few difficulties, for incarcerated mothers and when incarcerated individuals have shorter sentences (Arditti & Savla, 2015; Beckmeyer & Arditti, 2014). However, visitation issues arise when visits are too infrequent or short if children do not wish to visit the facilities, if transportation is an issue, if scheduling conflicts arise, and if children exhibit poor behavior during or following the visit with their incarcerated parents (Arditti & Savla, 2015).

Limitations

This study contained a multitude of strengths, but is not without its limitations. As expected with using the secondary data from the MFS-IP, there were typical limitations observed. Researchers are not allowed the flexibility to ask questions in the way they want to, how, when, where, etc. Also, because the data collection occurred between December 2008 through April 2014, the data may be considered a bit more aged than preferred by researchers. There is a possibility for newer challenges, developments, and issues prevalent in this population that the data does not currently reflect, based on the time of data collection. For example, results may have been different in the current political climate and/ or COVID-19 pandemic (Tadros & Ansell, 2022; Tadros & Gregorash, 2022). Further, because the sample is limited to five states, it does not represent issues that may be present in other states. In addition, this study did not include incarcerated women, who have their own unique challenges because they are even more underserved within an already underserved population. Thus, including incarcerated women in the study would have been a great benefit. Lastly, it is also imperative to mention that the sampling design for the original study was created for program assessment purposes, not representativeness.

Future Directions

Consistency in coparenting is associated with security in child attachment (Coyl et al., 2010). When examining co-parenting and attachment, data suggests that coparenting can affect attachment within the family and outside the immediate family. Positive coparenting behavior by the parents is associated with higher levels of attachment between parents and adolescents and is associated with higher levels of peer attachment (Zou et al., 2020). Therefore, it is vital to study attachment in terms of incarcerated coparenting as well as studies have shown the importance of this particular relationship (Tadros & Durante, 2022; Tadros et al., 2022; Tadros, Fanning, et al., 2021).

While most of the sample in this study consisted of Black and White men, there is need for future research to delve deeper into the experiences of Hispanic men. More specifically, Tadros et al. (2023) state that Hispanic children are more than twice as likely to have a parent that has been incarcerated, as compared to White counterparts. In addition, Latinx individuals tend to embody collectivism as a cultural group, and are therefore more inclined to be involved within their families prior to incarceration. For this reason, gaining additional insights into coparenting styles of Hispanic/Latinx individuals will prove beneficial in determining coparenting reliability trajectories and bridging research across racial and ethnic groups.

There are key policies that can foster sustainable family relationships, specifically those who suffer the consequences of parental incarceration within prisons. These include expanding accessibility to visitation and communication in-person and virtually (e.g., telephone, video), as well as tailoring the provision of services to account for the specific needs of families (Charles et al., 2019). In addition, policies should target

employment by increasing opportunities for incarcerated individuals. Here, restrictions placed on those with a felony may be re-evaluated, and career-related counseling and education should be offered within prisons to prepare individuals for employment. Families of the incarcerated parent would also benefit from affordable housing. Restrictions imposed on housing for these individuals may be re-evaluated, and assistance can be provided to locate housing options that are safe for the family. Taken together, these policies would provide short- and long-term relief to families of current or formerly incarcerated individuals. By restoring environmental factors post-incarceration such as housing and employment, familial relationships have the opportunity to thrive. Lastly, for future studies we recommend using an incarcerated informed lens to conceptualize how the criminal justice system impacts individuals, couples, and families (Tadros, Hutcherson, et al., 2021). An incarcerated informed lens means conceptualizing incarceration in terms of the various collateral damages endured by this population. This can be, but not limited to health, relationships, racial disparities, employment, socioeconomic status, and quality of life. We argue that the many intended and unintended consequences of incarceration be explored.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Eman Tadros  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8224-5391>

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