

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
Department of Corrections
Office of Planning, Research, Statistics and Grants
Phone: (717) 214-8959

May 11, 2007

SUBJECT: *Research in Review*

TO: Executive Staff
Superintendents
Other Readers



FROM: Gary Zajac, Ph.D.
Chief of Research and Evaluation



Kristofer Bret Bucklen
Senior Research and Evaluation Analyst

Enclosed please find Volume 10, Number 1 of *Research in Review* (RIR). This issue presents a series of reviews dealing with various topics including the correlates of success and failure for female parolees, Virginia's practice of conducting offender risk assessment at sentencing as a vehicle for informing decisions to place offenders into alternative sanctions, and a special section on prison parenting programs and their role in disrupting the intergenerational cycle of crime.

The first two reviews were prepared by Jesse Zortman and Debra Snyder, respectively. Jesse is completing the year long Pennsylvania Management Associate program, where his position is funded by the PADOC. Jesse will join the Office of Planning, Research, Statistics and Grants as a Research and Evaluation Analyst when he completes the PMA program in June. Debra presently serves as a Quality Improvement Auditor within our office and has done reviews for RIR in the past. We appreciate her input again.

Upcoming issues of Volume 10 will continue to present findings from the ongoing study of parole violators and parole successes conducted by Bret Bucklen. RIR will also continue with article reviews and briefing papers on topics relevant to corrections, as well as discussing findings from PADOC evaluation studies as they are completed.

As always, we welcome your feedback on RIR. We also welcome your suggestions for specific topical areas for future issues. While we cannot promise that we can produce an issue in response to all suggestions offered, we are very much interested in knowing what questions and topics are most interesting to our readers.

Thank you for your ongoing interest in *Research in Review* as we begin our tenth year of publication.

Research in Review

Office of Planning, Research, Statistics and Grants

Editors: Gary Zajac and Kristofer Bret Bucklen (717)214-8959

Summary and Major Findings of Articles Reviewed

Pamela J. Schram, et al. 2006. "Supervision Strategies and Approaches for Female Parolees: Examining the Link Between Unmet Needs and Parolee Outcome." *Page 2*
Crime & Delinquency, 52(3), 450-471.

This study explores the treatment needs of female parolees and their relationship to success or failure on parole. Housing, employment and family reunification (especially with children) are identified as key needs for female offenders that impact their ultimate success during reentry. Policy implications and recommendations are discussed, particularly surrounding assessment of these needs at intake.

Matthew Kleiman, et al. 2007. "Using Risk Assessment to Inform Sentencing Decisions for Nonviolent Offenders in Virginia." *Page 4*
Crime & Delinquency, 53(1), 106-132.

This article examines the efforts of the state of Virginia to implement a system of objective and actuarial offender risk/needs assessment at the sentencing phase of the criminal justice system. This assessment informs recommendations for sentencing to prison or to non-institutional diversion options. This study found support for Virginia's mechanism of identifying a pool of low risk offenders for diversion to alternative sanctions.

Special Section on Prison Parenting Programs

The following four articles on the theme of prison parenting programs are briefly reviewed beginning on Page 6. Rather than providing lengthy reviews of each piece, this section summarizes the key conclusions of these studies and discusses the limitations of what we can expect from prison parenting programs in breaking the "intergenerational cycle of crime".

Susan D. Phillips, et al. 2006. "Disentangling the Risks: Parent Criminal Justice Involvement and Children's Exposure to Family Risks." *Criminology & Public Policy*, 5(4), 677-702.

Joseph Murray, et al. 2006. "Evidence-Based Programs for Children of Prisoners." *Criminology & Public Policy*, 5(4), 721-736.

Denise Johnston. 2006. "The Wrong Road: Efforts to Understand the Effects of Parental Crime and Incarceration." *Criminology & Public Policy*, 5(4), 703-720.

Ann Booker Loper, et al. 2006. "Parenting Programs for Incarcerated Parents: Current Research and Future Directions." *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 17(4), 407-427.

Pamela J. Schram, Barbara A. Koons-Witt, Frank P. Williams III and Marilyn D. McShane. 2006. "Supervision Strategies and Approaches for Female Parolees: Examining the Link Between Unmet Needs and Parolee Outcome." *Crime & Delinquency*, 52(3), 450-471.

Over the past two decades, the United States has seen the number of incarcerated females steadily increase. Consequently, the number of female parolees has increased, as well. Of the 750,000 offenders who were under parole supervision in 2003, 13% were females. Several years prior, female offenders represented only 10% of those under parole supervision. Despite this increase in the number of female parolees, there is a substantial lack of research dedicated to needs and concerns of female offenders as they reenter society.

Over the past several years, the changing face of the corrections system has been accompanied by increased community reentry issues for female offenders in the reentry process. Financial constraints and scarce resources have limited the exposure and participation of female parolees to institutional programs that may be beneficial to them once they are released. As a result, dedicated research and insight on female parolee-specific needs, as well as the availability of gender responsive approaches, has become increasingly important.

This particular study by Schram, Koons-Witt, Williams III, and McShane attempts to determine whether the unmet needs of female parolees correlate with failure rates while under parole supervision. In order to test this hypothesis, a sample of 546 female parolees was taken from parole files of a western state. The female parolee population used in the study was limited to those who had just completed their terms of parole or who had been terminated on parole between the period from November 1997 to February 1998. Through an analysis of the needs of the parolees indicated at intake, and an assessment of how these areas were addressed during community supervision, the findings of this study identify several critical aspects of the female parolee reentry process.

According to the researchers, female parolees have several specific needs and concerns that play a significant role in the reentry process. Primarily, the need for secure and stable housing seems to have a significant impact on reentry success. Female parolees who had unstable living arrangements were nearly ten times more likely to fail on parole than women with stable living conditions. Often times, women will leave prison without having any idea where they will reside or how they will pay for their housing. A large majority of institutions lack effective housing education programs, thus accentuating the constant worry and concern shared by many female parolees in regards to finding safe, stable, and affordable living conditions.

Secondly, family reunification seems to have a significant impact on the reentry success of female parolees. Large portions of female offenders have dependent children that become separated from them upon incarceration. Many of the female parolees included in this particular sample indicated that separation from their child or children causes a tremendous amount of anxiety and stress, thus making the reentry process even more difficult. In addition to balancing the requirements and conditions of parole, many female offenders who have children must attempt to reestablish a healthy

and nurturing relationship with their children and other family members. This can be especially difficult if the parolee's relationship with their family was strained prior to their incarceration. Thus, the need for family counseling and assistance with family reunification is an important step in the female parolee reentry process. (Editors' Note: see Special Section on Prison Parenting Programs below for related discussion).

In addition to housing and family needs, the study indicates that employment and job skills training are critical in reducing the failure rates of female parolees. Prior research indicates that female offenders are often unemployed at higher rates than male offenders at the time of their arrest, and are more likely to be receiving welfare assistance. However, very little institutional programming focusing on education and job training is being provided to female offenders. As a result, many of these offenders who are reentering the community have significant, unmet educational and employment needs. Limiting the number of educational and job offerings in many state prisons leaves many female offenders stranded in a competitive job market with a lack of marketable skills. As a parolee, employment opportunities are often difficult to obtain with the proper training. Additional obstacles, such as poor institutional planning and training, only accentuate the chance of parole failure and recidivism.

While housing needs, family reunification, and employment opportunities are all essential elements in successful female parolee reentry, the issue of substance abuse treatment cannot be ignored. Policies enacted as a result of the "war on drugs" have had a profound impact on women in the United States, as overall drug convictions have increased by 27% from 1990-1996. Recent data suggests that drug use has a more profound effect on females than males, but females are less likely to receive treatment during their time of incarceration and subsequent parole supervision. Thus, female drug use often continues and intensifies during their parole if their treatment needs are unaddressed and unmet.

The authors indicate that gender-responsive drug treatment should be recognized as an essential element in the rehabilitation process of those females who have an assessed need for treatment. Many of the problems, needs, and issues discussed earlier may be directly correlated with female substance abuse. In order to cope with many of the stressors and difficulties of reentry, female parolees may be self-medicating with drugs and alcohol. Still, due to financial constraints and other limitations, the treatment needs of the female parolees are unmet. A large portion of female parolees reenter society without having their treatment needs addressed during their incarceration. Furthermore, parole supervision often lacks any type of follow-up substance abuse treatment, although there is frequent substance abuse testing. Almost two-thirds (65.2%) of the sample group in this particular study failed while on parole, and drug offenses accounted for approximately 70% of the overall commitment offenses. However, only 38% (n=206) of the parolees were assessed as having a need for treatment at intake, and less than half (n=98) ended up receiving treatment during their reentry follow-up period. Eighty percent (n=439) of the entire sample reported that they were required to submit to drug testing during their parole supervision, indicating that supervision may have overshadowed actual treatment for the female parolees in this sample.

In summary, female offenders may have numerous programmatic and treatment needs that may differ from the needs of male offenders. The findings of this study suggest that many of these needs often go unmet for female offenders, starting with intake assessment and continuing through parole supervision. Through the methods utilized by the researchers in this study, several specific and critical needs were highlighted. The findings illustrate that many of these needs are directly associated with female offender failure while on parole if they are left unmet. Further research on the assessment process is stressed, as underassessment of critical needs upon intake may be the catalyst in unsuccessful female offender reentry.

Editors' Note: This study relates to findings from the PADOc's own Parole Study, as highlighted in *Research In Review* Volume 9, Number 4 and Volume 8, Number 1.

Matthew Kleiman, Brian J. Ostrom and Fred L. Cheesman II. 2007. "Using Risk Assessment to Inform Sentencing Decisions for Nonviolent Offenders in Virginia." *Crime & Delinquency*, 53(1), 106-132.

In 1994 Virginia abolished parole and adopted truth-in-sentencing, a reform that substantially increases the amount of time served in prison for violent offenders and those with a record of prior violent offenses. As part of this reform, the Virginia Criminal Sentencing Commission (VCSC) began a study of the feasibility of placing 25% of incarceration-bound, nonviolent offenders into alternative sanctions using a risk assessment instrument.

This article assesses the ability of the actuarial risk assessment instrument to differentiate nonviolent offenders with the lowest probability of recidivating from those with higher probabilities of recidivism and the policy implications of using risk assessment to divert offenders from incarceration. The analysis is based on a non-random sample of 555 nonviolent offenders who were sentenced between December 1997 and August 2000 in six pilot sites in Virginia.

Virginia's risk assessment instrument is integrated into the state voluntary sentencing guidelines. For eligible larceny, fraud, and drug offenders recommended for jail or prison terms under the guidelines (probation cases are not considered for diversion), an additional set of factors determines whether the offender is a good risk for alternative punishment. The VCSC found 11 statistically significant factors in predicting recidivism and assigned scores based on their relative importance. Each factor is scored separately, and the sum provides the overall risk score. The following factors are used to calculate the offender's risk score:

- 1) Offender gender, 2) Offender age, 3) Offender marital status, 4) Offender employment status, 5) Whether the offender acted alone when committing the crime, 6) Whether there were additional offenses at conviction, 7) Whether the offender had been arrested or confined within the past 12 months, 8) Offender's prior criminal record, 9) Whether the offender had prior drug felony convictions, 10) Whether the offender had been incarcerated as an adult, 11) Whether the offender had been incarcerated as a juvenile.

Age, prior record, and juvenile incarceration are most heavily weighted. Offenders with any current or prior convictions for violent felonies and offenders who sell an ounce or more of cocaine are excluded from risk assessment consideration.

Eligible offenders scoring below 10 on the instrument are recommended for diversion. Specific types/forms of alternative punishment programs are not suggested, but the decision is left up to the discretion of the sentencing judge. Judges have the option to follow through with the diversion recommendation or incarcerate the offender in accordance with the original guidelines. For offenders scoring more than nine points, the original recommendation for incarceration remains unchanged. The sentencing guidelines inform judicial decision making as well as promoting uniformity, proportionality in sentencing, and coordinating sentencing practices with correctional resources.

Of the 555 diverted offenders during the period under review, 159 offenders (28.6%) were rearrested for a new felony or misdemeanor offense, whereas 76 offenders (13.7%) were reconvicted on a new felony or misdemeanor. Offenders received risk scores ranging from 0-24, with roughly 40% falling below the threshold score of 10, triggering a recommendation for diversion.

This study tracked offenders for an average of 27 months with the actual follow-up time varying from 1-3 years based on the offenders' sentencing date. All offenders were monitored for evidence of recidivism through August 2000.

Results suggest that men are 49% more likely than women to recidivate. However, the likelihood of recidivism for both increases as prior record increases. For example, each additional crime increases the risk of recidivism by 6.9%. Likewise, once diverted, male offenders remain significantly more likely to recidivate than female offenders. Offender age was also significantly related to recidivism, with younger offenders more likely to recidivate. Offenders with no prior arrest or confinement within the preceding 12 months were less likely to recidivate. Offenders with a limited number of prior felony or misdemeanor convictions/adjudications, no prior felony drug convictions/adjudications, had no prior adult incarcerations, who committed fraud and drug offenses were less likely to recidivate. Larceny offenders were found to be the most prone to recidivate. Drug offenders were 30% less likely to recidivate compared to larceny offenders and those convicted of fraud were 20% less likely to recidivate compared to those convicted of larceny. If arrests are used as a primary measure of recidivism, primary offense type should be considered for inclusion in a revised instrument.

With some revisions, Virginia's risk assessment instrument remains a promising and highly innovative approach to sentencing reform. The goal should be additional fine-tuning to more fully incorporate relevant information for efficient differentiation among offenders in terms of the likelihood of recidivism following diversion. From a broader perspective, these results should provide encouragement for those who promote the use of actuarial prediction as a decision-making aid to judges at the time of sentencing. Virginia's experiment with the use of risk assessment in sentencing nonviolent offenders appears to be on solid ground.

Special Section on Prison Parenting Programs

This issue of *Research in Review* highlights four recent articles that focus on the topic of parenting programs in prison settings. Many prison systems have implemented parenting programs over the past decade. These programs were intended to serve a variety of goals, including preparing inmates for reentry and reunification with their families. One common and overarching justification for such programs, though, was to break the “intergenerational cycle of crime (ICC)”. The notion was that criminal deviance is transmitted from one generation to the next through mechanisms of familial contagion and poor parenting skill. Thus, prison parenting programs were designed to enhance the basic parenting skills of inmates and reduce the odds that their children would follow in their criminal pathways. The four articles briefly reviewed below provide some assessment of the success of this ideal and offer insight into the possibilities for breaking the ICC.

In broad brush, these pieces all point to the same set of conclusions. First, the transmission of criminal deviance between generations is complex and not fully understood. Certainly, the incarceration of a parent does impose hardships and some degree of criminogenic risk upon children. The primary risks to children imposed by parental incarceration are the economic strain and family instability that attend the incarceration of a parent. It appears, though, that underlying parental dysfunctions such as substance abuse, mental health problems and low levels of educational and vocational achievement hold greater risk potential for children than do the actual incarceration of the parent or the *parenting skills of the inmate*. Indeed, this research does not seem to support a conclusion that incarcerated parents are universally deficient in parenting skills. Thus, poor parenting is not necessarily inextricably linked to criminal justice system involvement of the parent. An offender may actually have decent parenting skills, and a non-offender may equally be a deficient parent. The same set of factors (e.g. substance abuse) may be implicated in both the poor parenting skills and the criminal tendencies of the offender. Improving their parenting skills may be a matter of addressing their general criminal risk factors, regardless of any parenting-specific interventions.

Second, much remains to be learned about the full impact of parental incarceration upon child development. The second piece in the special section – by Murray et al – especially highlights significant gaps in knowledge about the ICC, about the harm to children from their parent’s incarceration and about the effectiveness of prison parenting programs in reducing subsequent delinquency of inmates’ children or in improving inmates’ parenting skill. Thus, any strong policy recommendations about parenting interventions for prisoners must wait for the development of a much stronger research basis surrounding these questions.

Third, there has been relatively little research on the impact of prison parenting programs on the long term outcomes of children of incarcerated offenders. Studies that do exist have found mixed results in terms of improvements in parenting knowledge, attitudes and behavior. The extent to which such improvements are actually translated into reduced delinquency in offenders’ children is an especially gray area; few studies have attempted to follow these children over an extended period of time. At this point, the best conclusion available seems to be that prison parenting programs as currently structured have limited potential for disrupting the ICC.

To sum up, it is unclear that current prison parenting programs have much impact on the parenting skills of incarcerated offenders, much less on the future criminal justice outcomes of their children. The research reviewed here would seem to suggest that prison programs focusing on offenders' core criminogenic needs (e.g. substance abuse, decision making, anti-social attitudes, etc.) may be just as productive in insulating their children against the development of future criminal behavior as are programs specifically oriented towards improvements in parenting skills. In other words, efforts to make offenders more socially responsible individuals may also make them more functional parents, absent any specialized parenting programs. This is not to suggest that specialized parenting programs have no role to play within a system of correctional intervention, but that corrections policy makers and practitioners should have a realistic sense of what such programs are capable of accomplishing.

Editors' Note: See *Research In Review* Volume 8, Number 2 and Volume 6, Number 2 for a discussion of findings from evaluations of the PADOC's parenting programs.

Susan D. Phillips, Alaattin Erkanli, Gordon P. Keeler, E. Jane Costello, Adrian Angold. 2006. "Disentangling the Risks: Parent Criminal Justice Involvement and Children's Exposure to Family Risks." *Criminology & Public Policy*, 5(4), 677-702.

This study examined the impact of parental involvement in the criminal justice system (particularly incarceration) on risk factors facing their children. The data source for this analysis was taken from the Great Smoky Mountain Study, a large-scale longitudinal study of youth in North Carolina. This study found that the primary impacts of parental involvement in the criminal justice system on child risk factors are in the areas of economic security and family stability. Parental imprisonment in particular can impose serious financial hardships on the offender's family and can lead to disrupted living arrangements. Both factors are linked to an increased risk for delinquency on the part of offenders' children. Parental imprisonment, though, does not seem to be closely linked to risk factors related to family structure or quality of care. Rather, parenting practices seem to be influenced more by underlying dysfunctions of the incarcerated parent, most notably substance abuse and mental health issues. In other words, these parents would exhibit the same parenting problems even if they were not involved in the criminal justice system. The authors conclude that while there is some place for parenting programs within prisons, more attention should be paid to underlying risk factors that contribute both to poor parenting and to criminal deviance. Thus, general prison programs that focus on problems such as substance abuse and poor decision making skills should have positive spin-offs for offenders' relationships with their children. Most prison parenting programs currently in place are unlikely to have significant impacts on offenders' relationships with their children absent a strong focus on core criminogenic risk factors.

Joseph Murray and David P. Farrington. 2006. "Evidence-Based Programs for Children of Prisoners." *Criminology & Public Policy*, 5(4), 721-736.

This article, as well as the following by Johnston, were prepared as reaction essays or commentaries to the primary article by Phillips et al above. This is a common format of the journal *Criminology &*

Public Policy. The current piece by Murray and Farrington serves as a review of the literature on the impacts of prison parenting programs and more broadly on the issue of the ICC. This piece reviews the literature on three primary questions: a) what are the risks for children of prisoners; b) does parental imprisonment cause adverse outcomes for children; c) if so, how does parental imprisonment cause adverse outcomes for children. The authors point out the much research remains to be done before we can claim any definitive answers to these questions. On the first question, the primary gray area in the research is the issue of causal pathways – does parental imprisonment cause problems for children directly, or is it simply an indicator of deeper underlying problems that would be present even if the parent was not in prison. On the second question, the authors review two major longitudinal studies which arrive at different conclusions about the impact of parental incarceration on children. The first study, undertaken in England, finds that parental imprisonment is significantly related to delinquency in the offenders’ children. The second study, undertaken in Sweden, found no significant relationship between parental imprisonment and children’s delinquency; instead, delinquency was better explained by underlying family dynamics and the criminal attitudes of the parents. On the third question, the authors consider factors such as the trauma of parent-child separation, economic strain and poor parenting skill. No clear answers emerge from the literature, though. The authors offer fourteen policy recommendations to guide the development of prison parenting programs, all the while acknowledging the limitations of the current state of knowledge regarding such programs.

Denise Johnston. 2006. “The Wrong Road: Efforts to Understand the Effects of Parental Crime and Incarceration.” *Criminology & Public Policy*, 5(4), 703-720.

This article, as well as the previous one by Murray et al, were prepared as reaction essays or commentaries to the primary article by Phillips et al above. This is a common format of the journal *Criminology & Public Policy*. The current piece by Johnston, like the previous piece by Murray et al, makes the argument that much more needs to be learned about the relationship between incarceration, parenting and long term impacts on children before we can arrive at strong conclusions about how best to structure prison parenting programs. Most notably, this article points out that most prison parenting programs are predicated on the assumption that incarcerated parents are active forces in the lives of their children. A closer examination of the research would suggest that this assumption may not be well founded. For example, studies going back to the mid 1960’s found that only about half of the children of incarcerated women in California were living with them at the time of maternal arrest. Other studies have found that incarcerated fathers often had marginal contact with their children prior to arrest and that while incarcerated had little information about their children’s circumstances. Other studies have documented multiple mother child separations both before and after the incarceration of the mother, and the existence of child behavioral problems that predated the mother’s incarceration and persisted during and afterwards. Another study of the children of criminal offenders found that only 12% had lived continuously with any particular parent since birth and that most were not living with non-incarcerated offender parents at the time of the study. Another study of incarcerated fathers found that 40% of the children of male offenders had *never* lived with their fathers, and that 20% of the children of female offenders had never lived with the mother. Based upon the review of the literature conducted in this article, the author offers a

number of policy recommendations to guide the development of prison parenting programs. One important implication of this research is that prison parenting programs should not be guided by the assumption that all incarcerated parents have played, or will play, an active and direct role in the lives of their children, or that they all face the same parenting needs. Such programs should be directed towards inmates who are likely to have the most direct and ongoing contact with their children upon release (risk principle) and who evidence parenting skill deficits based upon some sort of objective assessment (needs principle). Parenting programs delivered in a scattershot fashion, uninformed by the specific parenting circumstances of the individual inmate, are likely to represent a waste of correctional treatment resources. The author also notes that for those offender parents most in need of parenting services, these services should begin before incarceration through prevention and early intervention services. In conclusion, while prison-based parenting programs may serve some role in disrupting the ICC, they have little hope of breaking this cycle on their own.

Ann Booker Loper and Elena Hontoria Tuerk. 2006. "Parenting Programs for Incarcerated Parents: Current Research and Future Directions." *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 17(4), 407-427.

This article provides a review of existing evaluations of prison-based parenting programs. Seventeen major evaluations of such programs are examined, dating back to 1983. As with the PADOOC's own evaluation of its Long Distance Dads program, most of these studies assessed program impact against parenting-specific indicators such as parenting knowledge, attitudes and skills. Only two studies examined recidivism. At least half of these studies found some evidence that these programs can have a positive impact on parenting attitudes and skill levels. There were relatively few studies that rigorously assessed actual changes in offender behavior towards their children, though. There were almost as many studies that found neutral or ambiguous treatment effects as those finding positive treatment effects. Of the two studies that explicitly looked at recidivism, one found some positive impact on prison misconducts, the other found no treatment effect. On the whole, the evidence for the impact of prison parenting programs is mixed. The author offers recommendations for the design of such programs. One important recommendation focuses on the development of good liaisons with the community caregivers of the inmates' children. Programs that ignore the role of the caregiver may work at cross purposes with the best interests of the child. Most notably, prison parenting programs should also make some assessment of what is in the best interests of the child. In some situations, the promotion of active contact between the incarcerated parent and the child may not be in the best interests of the child.