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The process of adolescence in the context of parental incarceration

Abstract: For several years there has been growing interest in the issue of child development and the occurrence of behavioral disorders in the context of parental incarceration. Researchers are attempting to determine whether parental incarceration is a symptom of global family dysfunctionality or rather an independent risk factor a child may be exposed to? This paper presents an analysis of the major research to date on adolescent children of incarcerated parents, recommendations for future research, and examples of interventions intended for this group.

Key words: adolescent, incarcerated family, model of human development.

Introduction

In Poland, there are no official statistics on the number of children under care of incarcerated parents. Researchers and NGOs conservatively estimate that 50,000 – 100,000 children in Poland experience parental incarceration (Barczykowska 2008; Chojecka 2013). The offspring's response to parental incarceration is complex and depends on a number of internal and external factors (cf. Murray, Farrington 2008; Eddy, Poehlmann-Tynan 2019). A child under these circumstances may develop externalized reactions such as tantrums, aggression, disobedience, lying, stealing, and violence. Or quite the opposite, withholding emotions, such as depression, anxiety, neurosis or withdrawal and accumulating them. While some of these behaviors are normative during certain periods of child development, during

adolescence they are the strongest predictors of the onset of adaptive problems, including criminal behavior. It seems that youth who engage in delinquent behavior at a young age are particularly at risk of continuing such behavior into adulthood¹ (cf. Jurczyk 2013, pp. 92–96; Kołakowski 2014, pp. 15–57).

In their meta-analysis of 34 longitudinal studies on the development of antisocial behavior, M.W. Lipsey and J.H. Derzon (1998) (quoted from: Eddy, Reid 2002, pp. 22–24) found that having an antisocial parent or parents was one of the strongest predictors of a child's involvement in criminal behavior during adolescence and early adulthood. Although the criminal behavior of the parent appears to be related to the onset of antisocial behavior in the adolescent child, it is less clear whether incarceration itself as a result of this criminal activity could also be a cause. To date, there are no longitudinal studies on adolescent children of incarcerated parents. Antisocial behavior is more likely to affect adolescents than younger children. The purpose of this article is to provide an analysis of contemporary research on the situation of adolescent children of incarcerated parents as well as to identify recommendations for future research and examples of interventions designed for this group. My deliberations will include both boys and girls whose one parent (mother or father) is serving a prison sentence.

Opportunities and barriers to the adolescence process in the context of parental incarceration – a review of contemporary research

When analyzing the situation of children of incarcerated persons from a developmental perspective, it is important to note that reactions to parental incarceration depend on the child's developmental stage. Development tasks change over time. The point at which a father or mother is convicted and incarcerated will be crucial to the developmental processes of their offspring. It is this stage

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¹ As an example, let us refer to the deliberations of T.E. Moffitt, who proposed distinguishing two groups of offenders: those who exhibit behaviors that violate the social order throughout their entire life, i.e., life-course persistent offenders, and those who violate it only during adolescence, i.e., adolescent limited offenders. In the case of the first group, the author finds the causes of criminal behavior in the neurodevelopmental disorders. According to her theory, these disorders are caused primarily by heredity and disruptions in prenatal brain development (e.g., due to maternal alcohol or drug abuse), and may be exacerbated by the social context. This can lead to neuropsychological disorders including attention deficits, impulsivity, and poor self-control, but also problems with verbal function or difficulties developing relationships and social skills. Individuals in this group of offenders begin committing crimes at a very early stage of life, well before adolescence, and continue this type of behavior well into adolescence and beyond.

The second group is the one that engages in delinquent behavior sporadically and for a short period of time – most often engaging in this type of activity in early adolescence, around the age of 14, and ceasing it around the age of 19–20. – Moffitt 1993, pp. 674–701; Piquero, Moffitt, pp. 51–72.

that will also dictate the types of interventions and supports recommended for the child. Adolescence is characterized by significant changes in cognitive, social and emotional skills. How is this crucial life stage affected when a parent is incarcerated?

This section of the article shall present the research on the situation of adolescents in the context of parental incarceration carried out thus far. R. Shlafer and J. Poehlmann (2010) singled out the developmental areas that, on the one hand, are exposed to the negative consequences associated with parental incarceration and, on the other hand, can be used by the child as a resource to survive this difficult experience.

Cognitive aspects of adolescence in the context of parental incarceration

During adolescence, children experience a significant increase in cognitive and language skills. By acquiring these competencies, they learn to discern right from wrong, can anticipate the consequences of their actions and understand laws in force. A number of adolescents are able to understand why their parent was incarcerated, while younger children at earlier stages of development do not associate their parent's failure to follow the law with the reason for their incarceration. J.B. Folk et al. (2014) examined how children of incarcerated individuals conceptualize their parent's incarceration. The study included 106 participants aged 9–14. The older of the children gave a more detailed description of their experiences with the justice system. However, there was an exception here. In case of younger children, the more often their parent had dealt with the justice system, the more accurately they were able to recount their experience with their parent's incarceration, up to the same level of detail as the descriptions of the older children. (Eddy, Pehlmann-Tynnan 2019, p. 102–103).

Children in adolescence often ask questions about their parent's prison sentence, express feelings about it and communicate how and if they want to keep in touch with their parent at all. In a study by, i.a., Enos 2001; Poehlmann, Shlafer, Meas, Hanneman (2008) (quoted from: Eddy, Poehlmann 2010, p. 123) the child's guardians were assigned the role of "gatekeepers" because they controlled the quality and amount of contact between the child and the incarcerated parent. However, this situation occurs with young children. In contrast, we know little about adolescents' communication preferences. In a study by R. Shlafer and J. Poehlmann (2010), some adolescents reported that they contacted their incarcerated parent without the knowledge and sometimes without the consent of the other parent or guardians. Most often, this contact takes the form of correspondence.

The circumstances surrounding the commission of a crime, arrest, and conviction are difficult and complicated even for adult relatives of the incarcerated

person, and as R. Szczepanik and K. Miszewski pointed out: “(...) can permanently sideline them from active social life and cause or perpetuate social inequality.” (Szczepanik, Miszewski 2016, pp. 61–62). For adolescents, they often prove to be overwhelming and become a source of severe stress (Shlafer, Poehlmann 2019, p. 104). Dallaire, Ciccone and Wilson (2010) observed in their study based on a sample of 32 children (aged 7–17) reduced verbal skills among the older children compared to their peers. Researchers believe this is a consequence of witnessing a parent’s crime, their arrest, and participating in the court proceedings. Exposing a child to these types of events is perceived by them as a trauma that threatens their cognitive and linguistic development. There is a need for in-depth research on how adolescents understand the process of a parent’s incarceration and their preferences regarding their contact with the incarcerated parent and how it affects their development.

Social-emotional development of adolescents

Maintaining a relationship with the child during the parent’s incarceration is difficult for a number of reasons: the physical distance between the prison and the family home, the cost of travel or telephone cards as well as family conflicts that may separate the father or mother from the offspring (Dzierżyńska-Breś 2016). Infrequent, irregular contact with the incarcerated parent is the reason the adolescent begins to recognize their parent as emotionally unavailable. Unfortunately, there are no Polish studies that would analyze this problem not only quantitatively, but above all qualitatively.

A.D. Trice and J. Brewster (2004), in their study of adolescent children of incarcerated mothers, found that those who communicated more frequently with their mothers were less likely to be suspended at school and incidentally drop out of secondary school compared to those who did not have such contact. Interestingly, there were no significant differences between the two groups when it came to following rules such as coming home at the set time. R. Shlafer and J. Poehlmann (2010) studied a group of children of incarcerated parents aged 9–15. They found that children who had contact with an incarcerated parent were less likely to report feelings of alienation and anger toward both the incarcerated parent and their general situation than those who had no such contact. The researchers found no differences in their study group regarding feelings of trust in relation to the incarcerated parent. D.H. Dallaire, J.L. Zeman and T.M. Thrash (Eddy, Poehlmann-Tynan 2019, p. 103) examined what type of contact adolescents had with their incarcerated mothers (i.e., mail, telephone, visiting the parent at prison) as well as how and if it correlated at all with their manifestation of behavior disorders. It was discovered that children who had the opportunity to meet their mothers face-to-face, while visiting them at prison, were more likely to be diagnosed with depression and anxiety disorders. According to the authors:

“children may form their own subtler vision of reality concerning their mother’s incarceration, and direct contact with her brings them brutally back to earth” (quoted from: Eddy, Poehlmann-Tynan 2019, p. 103). Their idealized vision of their mother and the crime she committed is shattered.

Relationships with parents provide a key context for an adolescent’s development of social and emotional competences. For children in adolescence whose parent is serving a prison sentence, the role of guardians (usually the other parent) who remain by their side during this difficult situation is of extreme importance. And it is important both before the situation of incarceration in terms of the quality of the relationship, the sense of security, good parenting practices, and during it in terms of the reliability of the parent/guardian remaining with the child and the consistency with which they perform their role as a parent/guardian. The psychological and material resources that the parent/guardian has are important to the adolescent’s development. As research has shown, it is most common for a single parent with limited financial resources, low education levels, and poor mental health to become the child’s guardian (Poehlmann 2005). Cumulatively, these risk factors are very likely to have an adverse effect on an adolescent’s functioning and relationship with those around them.

L. Aaron and D.H. Dallaire (2010) analyzed a dataset of 874 children aged 10–14 belonging to the risk group to assess the impact of family dynamics on the children of incarcerated individuals. In this group, 18% of adolescents had experienced parental incarceration at some point in their lives, and in 4% of them, the situation occurred during the first 2 years of secondary school. Parental incarceration was the factor that negatively affected relations within the family: it exacerbated existing conflicts or sparked new ones, in response to the stigmatization and isolation that the remaining family members usually faced. Incarceration was associated with negative processes in family dynamics, but was still not one of the factors that predicted the child’s onset of antisocial behavior including delinquency. In another longitudinal study, J. Kjellstrand and M. Eddy (2011) traced and compared parenting strategies and parental health status in families of incarcerated persons and in families without such a problem. Their study concluded that families with a background history of incarceration had higher rates of mental and physical health problems for both parents and higher rates of inadequate and inconsistent parenting strategies, and these were more likely to influence the onset of behavioral disorders in children than incarceration itself.

The social and school aspect of adolescence

During adolescence, children spend most of their time at school. It provides an important context for studying adolescent children of incarcerated persons. A growing body of research deals with the impact of a parental imprisonment on the child’s interactions with teachers, fellow students, and

educational achievements. According to numerous researchers, children of incarcerated individuals face a significant deterioration in the quality of these relationships or even termination of them. This is confirmed, i.a., by a study by A. Nesmith and E. Ruhland conducted in a qualitative paradigm on a group of 34 children aged 8–17. Respondents were aware of the negative consequences that crime and subsequent incarceration of their parent had on their school life. This group has experienced social isolation and stigmatization from peers and, what should never occur, teachers (cf. Dzierżyńska-Breś 2016, p. 57–64). This is a serious social problem that needs to be addressed. On the one hand, children of incarcerated individuals feel a strong need to talk about their parent's incarceration, on the other, they are afraid of the consequences of revealing this fact. This mechanism of disenfranchisement specific to families of persons deprived of their liberty is related to their loss of the right to experience the emotions and pain associated with separation from the incarcerated parent (cf. Szczepanik, Miszewski 2016, p. 81). A. Nesmith and E. Ruhland found that children who suffered from stigmatization and social isolation were rarely able to find support. They generally lacked role models, their relationships with others were complicated and they found it difficult to identify trustworthy people to help them feel better (quoted from: Eddy, Poehlmann-Tynan 2019, p. 107).

D.H. Dallaire, A. Ciccone and L.C. Wilson (2010) set out to examine the problem in the context of teachers' work with children of incarcerated parents. They interviewed 30 teachers about their experiences in this aspect. They perceived that there were numerous risk factors in these children's lives, one of the most severe being unstable family situation. According to them, it was this factor that contributed to this group's difficulty in achieving school success. They also noted characteristic emotional reactions such as difficulty concentrating, withdrawal and depression that the children manifested in class. Most of the teachers expressed a need for information on how to work with and support children of incarcerated parents. They also were eyewitnesses to other teachers' behaviors that were neither professional nor supportive and only served to ridicule the child in the eyes of their peers. C. Wildeman et al. (2017) also found evidence of teacher stigmatization of children of incarcerated individuals. Their study group consisted of adolescents whose fathers were incarcerated. Researchers provided teachers with fictional descriptions of new students in order to compare teachers' expectations of the behavior of adolescent children of incarcerated fathers versus those whose fathers were absent from their lives for no particular reason. In case of the first group, teachers' expectations for behavioral problems exhibited by children were 10–40% higher than in case of the second group. This effect was stronger relative to boys than girls (Eddy, Poehlmann-Tynan 2019).

Experiencing stigmatization and feelings of isolation due to the parental incarceration can have a negative impact on adolescents in a school context. Their interactions with peers, teachers, and other adults become hindered. It is not

easy for them to find a sense of acceptance in a group, which affects their lack of a sense of belonging to the school environment and poor educational outcomes. We know little about the processes that influence the school success or failure of children of incarcerated parents. This is very likely due to cumulative factors, such as: stigmatization, school interactions with risks directly related to functioning of the family, which contributes to these children inability to stand being within school walls. Additionally, it is not known whether and to what extent these adolescents experience prenatal trauma-related problems or cognitive delays earlier in their lives that affect their short- and long-term educational outcomes.

Using administrative justice statistics on education, employment, welfare, and child care of incarcerated mothers, R.M. Cho (2010) studied: the timing (at what stage of family development), length and frequency of mothers' incarceration in relation to the emergence of their children's risk of dropping out of school. Results indicated that adolescent boys were more sensitive than girls and exhibited more negative behaviors during their mother's incarceration. Those who experienced this in early adolescence (ages 10–14) were at the highest risk of dropping out of school compared to boys in preadolescence (ages 5–10) and late adolescence (ages 15–17). Another interesting point is the discovery made by R.M. Cho, which shows that as mothers' incarceration rate and the length of their sentences increases, the percentage of adolescents at risk of dropping out of school decreases. The author explains that the long-term incarceration of the antisocial mother stabilizes the child's living conditions, giving it a chance to achieve educational success.

In his analysis of fragile families, A.R. Haskins (2016) (quoted from: Eddy, Poehlmann-Tynan 2019, p. 108) looked at paternal incarceration as a factor that has a negative impact on the development of cognitive skills during preadolescence-stage, such as: verbal ability, reading comprehension, math skills, memory and focus of attention. The presented results led to the conclusion that children who experienced parental incarceration before the age of 9 are characterized by less developed cognitive abilities. These results are consistent for both boys and girls. R. Shlafer, T. Reedy, and L. Davis (2017) used data from an extensive interstate report on adolescents attending public schools, alternative education centers, and schools at correctional facilities to examine the correlation between parental incarceration and students' educational outcomes, including: grades, adherence to school discipline, and engagement in school life. They found a strong and negative relationship between the educational outcome of children who attended public schools and parental incarceration. In alternative education centers and schools at correctional facilities, this relationship did not exist. It also was of no relevance to the children's school life. In conclusion, the results of the presented research showed that parental incarceration may carry the risk of problems at school and with education in general during adolescence. However, more scientific evidence is still needed on who (age, gender, developmental stage,

personality traits, experiences) is most affected by parental incarceration and what mechanisms influence the adjustment of children of incarcerated individuals to school life.

Relationships of adolescent children of incarcerated parents with their peers

Unlike preadolescents, for adolescents the relationships with peers become more meaningful. One of the defining characteristics of adolescence is the need for gaining acceptance and belonging to a group of peers. The group of peers influences the formation of self-esteem and is a very important area for the acquisition of social skills. Parental incarceration can disrupt this developmental stage and result in effects contrary to the sense of acceptance and belonging, in isolation and stigmatization. However, there is still a lack of viable empirical data on this matter. In a study conducted by A. Nesmith and E. Ruhland (quoted form: Eddy, Poehlmann-Tynan 2019, pp. 104–105), adolescents reported problems with their social relationships changing for the worse after a parent's arrest, trial, and conviction. They reported that it was harder for them to interact with their peers, they felt rejected, and were abandoned by the friends they had prior to parental incarceration, causing further problems and lowering their self-esteem.

E.I. Johnson and B.A. Easterling (2015) conducted 10 in-depth interviews with adolescents. Their qualitative analyses revealed three strategies through which adolescents cope with the experience of parental incarceration:

- deidentification, not identifying with the incarcerated parent,
- desensitization, indifference,
- strength through control.

The first strategy is for adolescents to distance themselves and dissociate from the situation when interacting with their peers. Through the second strategy, adolescents attempt to minimize their negative emotions associated with parental incarceration. In contrast, the third strategy enables them to maintain control over their lives and focus on other non-parent-related goals.

Behavioral disorders

There is a growing body of research aimed at establishing a link between parental incarceration and a high risk of internalizing and externalizing behaviors in preadolescents and adolescents. Internalization-related problems include: anxiety disorders, various types of depression, mood disorders, withdrawal and somatic symptoms without a clear health cause (Jurczyk 2013, pp. 92–97). Externalizing behaviors include: aggressive behaviors and antisocial behaviors (Jurczyk 2013, pp. 92–97). Behaviors falling into the first group carry the risk of reduced self-esteem, inferior position in the group of peers and disturbance of the child's

social development. The second group of behaviors are a significant factor in the development of persistent antisocial behavior.

The Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development conducted by J. Murray and D. Farrington (2008) found that separation due to parental incarceration in boys under the age of 10 results in the emergence of antisocial tendencies and internalizing behavior symptoms during adolescence and adulthood relative to a group of boys who experienced separation from a parent for other reasons. For example, 61% of boys who experienced parental incarceration before the age of 10 exhibited antisocial personality traits by the age of 14, while the percentage in the other group ranged from 16% to 33%. Furthermore, boys who were separated during the first ten years of life due to parental incarceration presented the highest rates of co-occurrence of internalizing and antisocial behaviors during adolescence. These results were compared using data from a Swedish study – the Metropolitan Project (Murray et al. 2007), intriguingly this study did not produce similar results. J. Murray explains that Sweden provides care of the family and children of the incarcerated individual at the moment of the arrest and continues to do so during incarceration. Swedish programs providing support to families of incarcerated persons and readaptive programs for convicts are also highly effective (Murray, Farrington 2016).

D.H. Dallaire, A. Ciccone, and L.C. Wilson (2010) found a relationship between parental incarceration and the onset of symptoms related to externalizing and internalizing behaviors in their adolescent children. Children exposed to their parent's criminal activity, arrest, trial, and incarceration report symptoms of anxiety and depression, low self-esteem, problems with emotion regulation and aggression. In a follow up to their study, with a larger study sample of 151 children aged 9–12, the researchers found that children exposed to the experience of parental deprivation exhibited symptoms of externalizing and internalizing behaviors regardless of the presence of other risk factors in their lives such as low socio-economic status. These findings suggest that specific, traumatic experience of parental incarceration contributes to the onset of behavioral disorder in children as early as the time of incarceration.

Laurel Davis and R. Shlafer (2017) (quoted from: Eddy, Poehlmann-Tynan 2019, pp. 109–111) took an interest in the mental health of adolescents a parent of whom is or has been incarcerated. Using U.S.-wide data involving 122,180 adolescents aged 12–19 attending public schools across the country, they found that adolescents with a parent currently serving a prison sentence or with a parent who has just served a prison sentence were more likely to report incidents of self-harm, suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts related to the occurrence of internalizing behaviors. This correlation remained strong even after subsequent verification of key socio-demographic characteristics of the study group (race, family structure, financial status). It was also explored whether the closeness of the relationship with the incarcerated parent can positively influence the adolescent's

psychological state. In all cases, this relationship was a significant moderator of lowering the risk of internalizing behaviors.

Parental incarceration in the context of “paths” to delinquency or abandonment of delinquency.

In 2006, D. Farrington and J. Murray (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of studies on the relationship between the parent’s criminal behavior and an increase in the child’s behavioral disorders. Among those most crucial (adequate research sample, longitudinal study, control group), they distinguished 4 groups of theories corresponding to mediators of parental incarceration. These include:

1. Theories of trauma. Parental incarceration has a negative impact on children because of the trauma of separation from a parent. The idea that trauma caused by the absence of a parent plays a role in the child’s life originates from J. Bowlby’s attachment theory. Separation caused by parental incarceration is a particularly harmful form of separation because it is often unexpected, sudden and unexplained.

2. Modeling and social learning theories. According to the social learning theory, parental incarceration can cause antisocial behavior in children because they are more likely to imitate their parents’ antisocial behavior. In addition, the children of incarcerated parents are exposed to harmful and incompetent parenting practices (harsh discipline, violence, neglect) compared to other children, and their parents lack basic parental competencies and adequate parenting skills.

3. Theories of stress. Economic losses and poor social capital can have a negative impact on children. There are two types of stress theories. The first focuses on economic stress. Parental incarceration can have adverse effects on children because it reduces family income, which is one of the risk factors for antisocial behavior in children. In the long run, incarceration can also result in unemployment and reduced educational opportunities among former convicts, which consequently expose their children to further economic burdens. The second type relates to child care-related stress. Individuals who take custody of an incarcerated person’s children often experience severe stress that interferes with their ability to care for, control, and nurture the children, significantly reducing the quality of care.

4. Theories of stigmatization and labeling. Parental incarceration causes children to experience stigmatization, bullying and teasing, making them more likely to develop antisocial behavior and mental health issues in the future.

In their work, J. Murray and S. Besemer (2014) presented three alternative perspectives indicating that parental incarceration does not always result in negative impact on the lives of affected children. The first is that it is not incarceration alone that results in the development of antisocial behavior in children, but the

criminal lifestyle of their parents. The incarceration of the antisocial parent in this situation can have positive impact on the family. The second perspective focuses on both economic and social stress which the children of incarcerated parents face. These are factors that they consider to be the cause of their engagement in criminal behavior. In the face of parental incarceration, the economic and social conditions in which the child lives may stabilize and improve, which positively influences its further development. According to the third perspective, incarceration of an antisocial and violent parent who employs inadequate parenting techniques is a protective factor that reduces the likelihood of occurrence of behavioral problems in these children's lives. The manner in which a child copes in the face of parental incarceration is based on a complex combination of both individual and contextual factors that moderate the relationship between risk and well-being. While many of the antisocial individuals who engage in a life of crime display problematic and antisocial behaviors permanently throughout the entire life, relatively few children and adolescents who display these behaviors continue them into adulthood (Kjellstrand, Yu, Eddy 2019, quoted from: Maughan, Rutter 1998).

Longitudinal studies conducted over the past 5 years have reconstructed and described the developmental pathways of externalizing behaviors during adolescence (Kjellstrand, Yu, Eddy 2019). Some of these trajectories are correlated with multiple problems e.g., crime, social maladjustment or mental illness. Others link to healthy child development and positive outcomes, such as good social relationships, mental health or having the ability to recognize one's own emotions and needs. The model that J. Kjellstrand, G. Yu, and M. Eddy (2019) adopted in their study included 4 trajectories for the emergence of these behaviors:

- *Low-Stable*, a stable developmental trajectory with a low risk of the above-mentioned behaviors and 3 more problematic trajectories:
 - *Mid-Increasing*, a moderate risk trajectory with a bias toward high risk. The adolescents in this group had low levels of aggressive and antisocial behavior at the beginning of adolescence, but by the time they reached the age of 16, the levels were already high
 - *Borderline-Stable*, where the level of risk is high but still below the limit of classifying these behaviors for clinical treatment
 - *Chronic-High*, here the risk level is high throughout the child's adolescence.

Furthermore, the results highlighted the significance of the relationship between the development of adolescents, and the parenting competencies of their parents and their mental health. Individuals exposed to traumatic events during adolescence were more likely to develop substance abuse problems and engage in criminal behavior. The results of this study underrepresented the children of incarcerated parents in the first trajectory, i.e., *Low-Stable* and overrepresented in the second trajectory, i.e., *Mid-Increasing*. Individual and family influences play an important role in explaining the development of externalizing behavior during

adolescence. The absence of a parent due to incarceration was a significant predictor of externalizing behavior only for the second trajectory.

A number of the families of incarcerated persons before, during and after the incarceration of one of the parents experience: poverty, frequent changes of place of residence and thus of schooling of children, problems related to addiction, violence or mental illness, as well as criminal lifestyle (cf. Chojecka 2013; Eddy, Reid 2002; Dzierżyńska-Breś 2016; Matysiak-Błaszczuk 2010; Szczepanik, Miszewski 2016). It is these types of factors that result in the children having adjustment problems. However, they are only the context in which the family functions. Some of the children of incarcerated parents, in spite of the difficult situation in which they find themselves, develop properly and without any problems, others become socially invisible and withdraw from social life, and still others fail by going down the criminal path. Although there are many hypotheses as to why this happens, research on the “resilience” of the children of incarcerated parents is in too early of a stage to wield any concrete results (Eddy, Reid 2002). For this group, the imprisonment of a parent has positive overtones, facilitating an increase in social capital and a reduction in economic stress. It is when a problematic parent is incarcerated that family members may first receive help and support from state agencies and NGOs. Although this perspective offers a relatively positive view on the family situation, J. Hagan and R. Dinovitzer believe that “it is more likely that parental incarceration is highly detrimental to the child, even in dysfunctional families, because incarceration is far more likely to exacerbate than alleviate preexisting family problems.” (Hagan, Dinovitzer 1999, p. 125).

Resilience and ecological approaches in the context of research on adolescent children of incarcerated parents

The research that has emerged over the past decade has provided important information about the development of children of incarcerated parents. However, they are mostly focused on the problems and deficits found among this group (Eddy, Reid 2003). There is a lack of research based on the concept of “resilience”, which explains the phenomenon of positive functioning of individuals despite traumatic events that affect them (Muskala 2016; Konaszewski, Kwadrans 2018; Masten 2001). What is important is that researchers studying the functioning of children of incarcerated parents try to understand how and through which factors some of them successfully adapt, despite the numerous risk factors, adversities and adverse conditions in their lives. This is important for practice as well, so that support programs designed for children of incarcerated parents are evidence-based and use truly impactful factors to protect this group from following in to the footsteps of the incarcerated parent. Research involving adolescent children

of incarcerated persons should incorporate protective factors suggested by human development theories, e.g., positive family relationships, supportive relationships from significant others and a sense of agency (Shlafer, Poehlmann 2010). In order to fully understand the factors contributing to building resilience, research should consider multiple contexts of development of adolescents. It is important to analyze child development as much in the context of home or school as in the context of the justice system, as is the case with children of incarcerated individuals.

The ecological model² (Bronfenbrenner 1986) may be particularly valuable in identifying protective factors and needs of adolescents. According to this model, future research should consider the situation of adolescent children of incarcerated individuals in the period before, during and after their parent's incarceration. J. Arditti (2005) used the ecological perspective to discuss both protective and risk factors in a variety of systems in which the child functions, and the impact of incarceration on the entire family system. Under the microsystem, J. Arditti pointed out the importance of the quality of the parent-child relationship and social support for family members during the incarceration. With respect to the mesosystem, she addressed issues related to visiting parents in prison and the family-(un)friendly environment of these visits. Social stigmatization and isolation in the context of parental incarceration can affect the functioning of adolescents in the school system: their educational outcomes, educational failures, problems with behavior and contacts with fellow students, which frequently results in dropping out of school and abandoning further education. The ecological approach is equally valuable in examining cases of positive adaptation and functioning of children falling in this group, e.g., a stable relationship between the adolescent and the non-incarcerated parent can help the adolescent combat the stigma of incarceration and positively affect relationships with their peers. Researchers studying the impact of parental incarceration on adolescent children should consider both resilience theories and the ecological model of human development in their research.

Best practices in working with an adolescent child of an incarcerated parent

Children of incarcerated persons, including preadolescents, adolescents or even adults, carry a heavy burden of risk. Their incarcerated parents have an

² The starting point of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development is an interest in the issues of the social and physical environment from the perspective of the policy of shaping child development and guiding social change. This theory is all about holistic research which Bronfenbrenner refers to as systemic research. The problems he postulates include: the macrosystem, the exosystem, the mesosystem, and the microsystem (Bańka 2018, pp. 62–65)

enormous, often indirect, impact on their lives before their conviction, while serving their sentences, and for a number of years after their release. Despite the fact that the offspring of incarcerated individuals belong to the group at risk, there is no effective measures addressed to them. Research on the effectiveness of programs for children of incarcerated persons remains a neglected area of social rehabilitation pedagogy. J.M. Eddy and J.B. Reid (2002, p. 31–33) believe that it is possible to adapt the existing research-based programs for parents and children, which have been in use for a number of years, to the specific needs of this group. In the case of adolescent children of incarcerated individuals, these programs include:

1. Parent Management Training
2. Multisystemic Treatment
3. Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care

Each of these programs addresses both the needs of some incarcerated parents as well as their families and children.

The Parenting Management Training (PMT) focuses on hands-on instruction and intensive practice of parenting skills: providing positive encouragement for the child, discipline, and family problem solving (Eddy 2001; Sanders, Dadds 1993, quoted from: Eddy, Reid 2002, p. 32). In this program, parents are the primary focus. Its duration is between four weeks and several months, with meetings usually scheduled once a week. PMT has been subjected to numerous evaluation studies that have shown a significant reduction in a wide variety of problems: children's antisocial behavior (Webster-Stratton, Hammond 1997; Webster-Stratton 1998, quoted from: Eddy and Reid 2002), problematic behavior at school (Forgatch and DeGarmo 1999, quoted from: Eddy and Reid 2002), physical aggression (Reid et al. 1999, quoted from: Eddy and Reid 2002, p. 32) and use of psychoactive substances (Eddy 2001). Longitudinal studies on the effects of this program have shown that it continues to yield benefits for up to 3 years after its completion (Eddy et al. 2001, quoted from: Eddy, Reid 2002, p. 32). Moreover, the results of several of the research studies clearly showed that changes in the child's behavior were entirely dependent on changes in the parenting practices of their parents (Eddy, Chamberlain 2000; Forgatch, DeGarmo 1999, quoted from: Eddy, Reid 2002, p. 32).

The Multisystemic Treatment (MST), developed by S. Henggeler et al. uses a variety of therapeutic techniques, combines both elements of systemic therapy, ecological approach, solution-focused therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy as well as parent management training. The purpose of MST is working with minors engaging in antisocial behavior. Its scope encompasses working in multiple environments: family, school, community, assistance institutions and justice system institutions. The family has a 24-hour access to a therapist, and the duration of the entire program is 3 to 5 months (Barczykowska, Dzierżyńska-Breś 2013, p. 141). Therapeutic sessions usually take place at the adolescent's home. At

various stages of the therapy the sessions may be attended by other people, such as parents, teachers, neighbors and peers. What is important, there are no limits as to how often the sessions may be conducted, if necessary, they may even take place every day (Eddy, Reid 2002, p. 32). Evaluation of the program indicated its positive impact on juvenile offenders and adolescents with antisocial behavior. Only 22% of adolescents receiving MST became repeat offenders within 5 years of completing the therapy compared to 71% of adolescents who completed programs focused on individual therapy (Henggeler et al. 1992, quoted from: Eddy, Reid 2002, p. 32).

The Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC) was developed by P. Chamberlain et al. The program is designed to provide alternative family care to young people whose parents, by court order, are unable to care for them (such as incarcerated parents). In addition to providing care, support and mentoring to adolescents, MTFC is aimed at reuniting separated families. Therapists work with the child and their biological family, while foster parents are referred for training, receive supervisor support and 24-hour access to a therapist for consultation. The aim of the program is also to eliminate the influence of the child's relationship with antisocial peers, to strengthen pro-social behavior and reduce antisocial behavior, as well as to equip their natural family with parenting skills (cf. Barczykowska, Dzierżyńska-Breś 2013, p. 144–145). Evaluation studies have demonstrated significant effects of MTFC on change in behavior for both minors and their biological parents. For example, in the group of serious juvenile offenders, only 59% of boys were arrested again within a year after completing the program, compared to 93% of boys who did not participate in it (Chamberlain and Reid 1998, quoted from: Eddy, Reid 2002, p. 33).

Conclusion

Questions such as: Does parenting from behind prison walls significantly shape the life of an adolescent? Is constructive and skillful parenting from prison able to offset the harmful effects of other risk factors on adolescents? Do the children of offenders become criminals themselves? – still remain unanswered. Foreign and domestic literature lacks, above all, research based on an individualized approach to children of incarcerated individuals. These studies are necessary in order to identify the resources of the children themselves, their family and the environment in which they function. Such data, based on resources rather than deficits, are crucial for designing prevention and intervention programs that would support adolescents and their families.

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