The Voices of Children of Incarcerated Parents, an Emotional Intelligence Perspective

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Background

- United States is the leader in mass incarceration with 2.2 inmates, 1.5 million in China, and .9 million in Russia (Shillingford, 2008).
- An increase in parental incarceration is a reality for more than a million children, disproportionately African-American, in the U.S. (Allard, 2012).
- Parental incarceration has become so prevalent that even Sesame Street, one of America's all-time favorite educational shows, has addressed this issue by creating Alex, a blue-haired Muppet who has an incarcerated parent.
- Most recently, there are an estimated 2.5 - 2.7 million American youth under the age of 18 with an incarcerated parent (Covington, 2016).
- The literature indicated that the population of children with imprisoned parents may be at greater risk of developing problems in numerous areas such as mental health, substance abuse, delinquency, school difficulties, and future criminal behaviors (Kjelstrand & Eddy, 2011).
- Scholars agreed that children of inmates are vulnerable to a myriad of negative emotions which could manifest into aggressive behaviors and attention problems causing academic and disciplinary issues in school (Lopez, 2007).
- Parental incarceration affects 3.5 times more children than the amount of youth on the autism spectrum and 10 times more than minors affected by juvenile diabetes (Dallaire & Wilson, 2010).

Problem

The United States is unique in its proportion of children affected by parental incarceration. In review of the macro problem of imprisonment, a surge of incarceration has become so prevalent that even Sesame Street, one of America’s all-time favorite educational shows, has addressed this issue by creating Alex, a blue-haired Muppet who has an incarcerated parent.

Research Methodology

Qualitative Study

Narrative Design

Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test - Youth Research Version (MSCEIT-YRV)

Photo Elicit Interview

Queries

R1: How does the emotional intelligence for a child with an incarcerated parent align with their narrative voice?
R2: What are the emotional needs of children with an incarcerated parent?
R3: What is the role of the school from the perspective of children of incarcerated parents in meeting their emotional needs?

Participants

Conceptual Framework

Results

Conclusion

R1: The children, specifically 87.5% of the sample demonstrated an overall emotional intelligence that was adequate or within the ‘Average’ range. However, a dissonance existed between their emotional ability as indicated by their standardized scores on the MSCEIT-YRV and their self-ratings noted in their narrative voice.

R2: Based on the results of the MSCEIT-YRV and the narratives, children of incarcerated parents need to understand emotions regarding the ability to label emotions, to recognize groups of related emotional terms, and comprehend what leads to various emotions.

R3: During the semi-structured interviews, the children in this sample indicated that they did not believe that the school could do anything to help them deal with their emotions. The participants did not see any relevance in necessarily talking about their situation with teachers or a mental health person because none of these persons could change the fact that their parent is incarcerated.

References


