

Coming Home from Prison: Family Matters

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Family issues

- Incarceration not just an individual matter
- Most prisoners are parents.
- Many mothers and fathers had sole responsibility for children's care prior to incarceration.
- Visits between incarcerated parents and their children infrequent, sometimes not at all
- Female of prisoners primary source of support during incarceration and reentry
- Male-female intimate relationships difficult to maintain, hard to reunify

Study of family matters during reentry

Study methods

- Group interviews (6)/Tennessee, Wisconsin, and New York
 - Incarcerated men – To be released within 1 year
 - Men on parole – Less than 2 years
- Group interviews (5)/Tennessee, Minnesota, and new York
 - Wives and girlfriends of incarcerated men and women on parole

- Individual interviews with 24 men and 20 women
- All participants African American
- Structured questions for groups and individuals

Challenges and stresses

Rebuilding trust

Economic pressures

Secret lives

Promises and expectations/challenging to do right/carrying own weight

Parenting and family life

Parole restrictions

Prison impact

Prison norms not conducive to family life

Prison mentality/hypervigilance, paranoia, violence, no trust

Prison marks a man

Managing the stresses of reentry and reunification

Some don't manage very well

Resort to violence

Return to street life/drugs, other women, crime, hanging out

Some manage more successfully

Avoid violence through conscious efforts

Walk away

Let her have the last word

Let bygones be bygones

Renegotiate roles and relationships

Build social capital

Pitching in and helping out

Keep your nose clean

Being a good client

Social policy and program recommendations

- Family maintenance during incarceration
- Jobs/job preparation/benefit hookups during incarceration
- Family stipends
- Graduated release/not more time
- From the families

Preparation for men about family changes

Information/briefing sessions for families

Parole contact with family

Support group for couples

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