



The Impact of Parental Incarceration on Latino Youth

**Presented at the
State of Latino Families in New York Conference
June 25, 2009**

**Tanya Krupat, LMSW, MPH
Program Director
The Osborne Association**



“The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons.”

-- Dostoyevsky

- Most people in prison today are parents.
- The United States incarcerates more of its population than any other country.
- On any given day more than 2 million children have a parent behind bars.
- **Criminal justice IS a children's and family issue.**



Background Facts

- There are close to 7.3 million people under criminal justice supervision-- in jail, prison, on probation or on parole in this country.
- This means **1 in every 31 US citizens** is under some form of criminal justice supervision.

What does this mean for Latino families?

- In 2008, 16% of the US population was Hispanic, but **20% of those incarcerated in jail, prison and on probation and parole were Hispanic** (the term surveys tend to use).
- This is an increase of 4% from 2000.
- According to the Pew Center on the States report, in 2007 **one in every 25 Hispanic adults are under criminal justice supervision**; as point of comparison, close to 1 in 10 Black adults and one in 50 White adults are under such supervision.

New York Facts

The following stats are from the NYS Department of Correctional Services HUB report, Jan 2008:

- NYS has 62,599 people in State prisons
- 95.6% are men, 4.4% are women
- 51.3% are African American
- **25.9% are Hispanic**
- 20.8% are White
- **63.5% are from NYC and its suburbs**
- 89.6% are born in US or its territories (which includes Puerto Rico)
- **10.4% (6,530 people) are foreign born mostly from the Caribbean, South and Central America**



New York State

- As of Jan 2007, **78% of women and just under 91% of men in prison for drug related offenses were Latino and Black**, when studies show that Whites use, sell and buy drugs in greater numbers than people of color.
- **Average minimum sentence for women incarcerated in NYS is 9 years**

What does this mean for children?

- **Nationally, one in 42 Latino children has an incarcerated parent (one in 15 black children and one in 111 White children do)**
- **Numbers may be higher for children in NYC where the Latino population is higher than the national average**
- **We actually know very little about this-- no agency currently keeps track of the numbers or asks the question**



Children's Experiences

- Diverse and varied depending on many factors
- 1 in 5 children witness their parent's arrest which places them at risk for their own justice involvement because they associate law enforcement with an assault and removal of their parent.
- Children experience emotions ranging from & including:
 - Confusion
 - Anger
 - Guilt / blame
 - Shame/ embarrassment
 - Sadness, grief, loss, isolation

A letter from Alex to his Dad*

Dear Dad,

I am sorry that I haven't been writing to you. Truthfully I did not want to. I love you a lot but I am really mad. I hope you'll understand. On the bright side I am doing good in school.

Love,

Alex

****actual letter received by father in
Osborne FamilyWorks Program***



Children's Experiences

- Parental loss recognized as trauma & risk factor in other contexts
- Social support & services wrap around in situations of divorce, parental illness, military deployment, or parent's death
- Stigma and judgment more often wrap around children of incarcerated parents



Children Grow into What is Expected of Them

- No research basis for the statistic that children of incarcerated parents are more likely to be incarcerated, themselves.
- Children are at risk if they are viewed as “criminals in waiting” (self-fulfilling prophecy)
- Children are at risk if are left alone to deal with parent’s absence & if their relationship with parent is severed

Children of Promise

-- Emani Davis

- With support, children of incarcerated parents can thrive (as all children can)
- Visits and supporting their relationship with their parent is critical
- Creating nonjudgmental opportunities for youth to talk about their experiences and feelings is important



Children of Promise who are in the Juvenile Justice System

- Need to have opportunities to talk about their parents, including what kind of relationship they would like to have now
- Need access to their parents (letters, phone calls, visits if possible)
- Need to have this aspect of themselves acknowledged and addressed— how do they feel their parent's incarceration has impacted them?



Recommendations for Juvenile Justice System

- Include questions on intake and in assessment
- Include incarcerated parent in youth treatment plan, to extent possible and in youth's best interest
- Include contact with incarcerated parent as part of discharge plan
- Give power back to young people to say what kind of relationship and contact they want with their incarcerated parent



Implications for Services & Programs— What Is Needed

- Programs and services that acknowledge parental incarceration as a significant factor in the lives of Latino children and youth- asking sensitively about it on intake forms, and providing resources and supports to families
- Start with ourselves— examine our own biases and assumptions about those in the criminal justice system
- Respond with sensitivity and openness/ nonjudgmental response

Implications for Services & Programs– What Is Needed

- Staff training on the impact of criminal justice on children and families
- Coordination and collaboration with immigration/ deportation advocates
- Data that is collected to better understand the impact of parental incarceration on Latino youth & their families
- Include youth and families in policy-making and collect qualitative data-- *“no decision about us, without us”* (Annie E. Casey Fdt.)



Implications for Services & Programs— What Is Needed

- Programs and providers can help youth and families “make, mend, maintain, and manage” relationships through **separation** (Ann Adalist-Estrin, National Resource Center for Children of Incarcerated Parents)
- Visits and contact with parents—
supportive visiting programs



Implications for Programs & Services- What is Needed

- Financial assistance for caregivers—subsidized guardianship (outside child welfare)
- Build on strengths of families and fact that all parents love their children (even if they don't know how to—they do the best they can with what they have)
- Staff trained to be culturally sensitive and respectful of family differences and privacy



Implications for Services & Programs– What Is Needed

- Peer support programs
- Counseling and mental health professionals who are trained in this issue as well as culturally competent
- Mentoring programs that are culturally aware and include visiting as a Mentor activity

Conclusion

Children of Incarcerated Parents Bill of Rights*:

1. I have the right to be kept safe and informed at the time of my parent's arrest.
2. I have the right to be heard when decisions are made about me.
3. I have the right to be considered when decisions are made about my parent.
4. I have the right to be well cared for in my parent's absence.

*Developed by youth in San Francisco, see www.sfcipp.org.



Children of Incarcerated Parents *Bill of Rights:*

5. I have the right to speak with, see and touch my parent.
6. I have the right to support as I face my parent's incarceration.
7. I have the right not to be judged, blamed or labeled because my parent is incarcerated.
8. I have the right to a lifelong relationship with my parent.



NY Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents

A project of the Osborne Association
(www.osborneny.org),
the NY Initiative is
a collaborative of agencies and
organizations who work together to
reform policies and practices to better
support children whose parents are in the
criminal justice system.



**For more information or
to get involved:**

Please contact the
NY Initiative for Children of
Incarcerated Parents at
718-637-6595 or
email Tanya Krupat at
tkrupat@osborneny.org

Thank you.