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Parenting While Incarcerated: Tailoring the Strengthening Families Program for Use with Jailed Mothers

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Abstract

Most incarcerated women are mothers. Parenting programs may benefit women, children and families, yet effectively intervening in correctional settings is a challenge. An evidence-based parenting intervention (the Strengthening Families Program) was tailored and implemented with women in a jail setting. Goals were to assess mothers' needs and interests regarding parenting while they were incarcerated, adapt the program to address those needs, and establish intervention delivery and evaluation methods in collaboration with a community-based agency. Women reported wanting to know more about effective communication; how children manage stress; finances; drug and alcohol use; self-care; and stress reduction. They reported high program satisfaction and reported reduced endorsement of corporal punishment after the intervention. Barriers to implementation included unpredictable attendance from session to session due to changing release dates, transfer to other facilities, and jail policies (e.g., lock-down; commissary hours). Implications for sustainable implementation of parenting programs in jail settings are discussed.

Keywords

incarcerated mothers; jail setting; parenting intervention; intervention tailoring; service delivery

1. Introduction

Women have been incarcerated at increasingly rapid rates in the United States in the past two decades. The majority of incarcerated women are parents of minor children and over one-third are mothers of multiple children (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Incarcerated mothers report significant concerns about separation from their children and that maintaining a bond with their child is one of the most challenging aspects of incarceration (Kazura, 2001;

Poehlmann, 2005). Incarcerated mothers may experience greater distress in this arena than incarcerated fathers (Roxburgh & Fitch, 2013) because mothers tend to be children's primary caregivers. Furthermore, incarcerated women who report child-related stress tend to experience more difficulties during their time in the correctional system than women who do not (Houck & Loper, 2002). Child well-being, maternal adjustment, and the mother's likely need to resume the primary care giving role once released make incarcerated mothers a unique and important population to engage in parenting programs. The current report describes a pilot implementation of a parenting intervention tailored for use with incarcerated mothers in a jail setting in partnership with a community agency that serves families of children with incarcerated parents (primarily mothers).

1.1 Parenting Interventions in Correctional Settings: Challenges and Opportunities

Parents who are incarcerated clearly face many challenges. They are (typically) separated from their children, so it can be difficult to maintain an active parenting role (Boudin, 1998; Kazura, 2001). Parents, particularly mothers, in the correctional system have also often experienced poor parenting role models and experience multiple associated challenges (e.g., abuse histories, dysfunctional family relationships; Kjellstrand, Cearley, Eddy, Foney, & Martinez, 2012) that make it difficult to break the intergenerational cycle of incarceration. Incarcerated mothers report greater distress than non-parent inmates and more anger than incarcerated fathers (Roxburgh & Fitch, 2013). There are also incarceration-specific stressors around parenting such as worries about how often one may have contact with children and emotional dynamics around visitation (Houck & Loper, 2002). Mothers may lose confidence in their parenting, which may limit their ability to act effectively (Poehlmann, 2005). After being released, mothers indicate that meeting child needs and managing behavior significantly add to stress (Arditti & Few, 2008; Frye & Dawe, 2008; Severance, 2004). While incarcerated, however, mothers can be motivated to develop and/or maintain a positive relationship with their children even if they cannot see them regularly (Houck & Loper, 2002; Poehlmann, 2005). This period may thus provide a “teachable moment” of opportunity to intervene and support and strengthen parenting skills. Offering a parenting program in a correctional setting gives mothers a way to focus on their relationship with their children despite being behind bars and can teach mothers effective strategies to manage child behavior that may ease their transition into parenting once released.

The number of parenting programs available for inmates has increased in recent years. A national survey of wardens of state-run correctional facilities found that parenting programs existed in 90% of female-only facilities; most did not involve visitation (Hoffmann, Byrd, & Kightlinger, 2010). Programs vary in their approach and quality (e.g., whether evidence-based or not) and are rarely rigorously evaluated (Burgess & Flynn, 2013). Recent evaluations of corrections-based programs have shown improved parenting attitudes (Palusci, Crum, Bliss, & Bavolek, 2008); decreased parent stress and depression and increased positive child interaction (Eddy, Martinez, & Burraston, 2013); increased knowledge of child development, less endorsement of corporal punishment, and a more mature view of the parenting role (Sandifer, 2008); and reduced distress around visitation (Loper & Tuerk, 2011). Such results are encouraging, yet challenges remain. Most extant

parenting interventions in correctional settings are in prisons, where the population is relatively stable. From a prevention and family reunification perspective it would be ideal to intervene with high-risk parents prior to their entry into prison in order to break the cycle of incarceration.

Jail is the point of entry into the correctional system and can cause significant family transition and stress. Jail settings are challenging for program implementation primarily due to the transient nature of the population. They often do not offer rehabilitation or other programs (Katz, 1998). Yet, jail settings provide an opportunity to reach incarcerated mothers, as the great majority of women in local jails have children (Cho, 2010) and jailed women are more likely than men to participate in programs (Meyer, Tangney, Stuewig, & Moore, 2013). There are many potential benefits of working in a jail setting. First, jail stays are typically shorter than prison sentences, so inmates may be able to return home sooner and enact behavioral changes with their children more quickly. This could increase motivation to engage in the intervention and enhance retention of what was learned. Another benefit is location; jails are often situated in the communities where inmates' families live whereas prisons can be hours away (Christian, 2005). Females are often in prisons even farther away from their families than males due to the smaller number of women's prisons (Hoffmann et al., 2010). Thus, it may be more possible for women in jail to receive visits from children, and/or to effectively coordinate with alternate caregivers to maintain a relationship and connections to family and community (Cecil, McHale, Strozier, & Pietsch, 2008). Finally, a jail stay may function as a "wake up call" for some mothers, offering a chance to prevent them from falling deeper into the system.

1.2 Translating Parenting Programs to the Jail Context

Implementing a parenting program in a jail setting creates a number of challenges both of a conceptual and logistic nature. Conceptually, one must consider issues that may be uniquely salient. For example, many incarcerated mothers are experiencing drug addiction (Kjellstrand et al., 2012; Mumola, 2000), so addressing this issue is often warranted. Because mothers tend to be primary caregivers it is also vital to consider alternate care arrangements for their children and the quality of the relationship with the alternate caregivers, who may be family members (Loper, Carlson, Levitt, & Scheffel, 2009; Strozier, Armstrong, Skuza, Cecil, & McHale, 2011). Issues of custody and anticipated future caregiving needs also may be relevant. Parenting programs with mothers in jail may need to be adapted to accommodate such concerns.

There are also numerous logistical challenges to implementing such programs in jail. First, many evidence-based parenting programs are delivered over about 8 to 14 weeks, which can be longer than many jail sentence lengths. Therefore it is important to identify which topics may be most helpful if women can only attend a few sessions (or a single session). Second, as in prison, mothers are separated from children. Research on parenting programs in correctional settings (Block & Potthast, 2001; Perry, Fowler, Heggie, & Barbara, 2010) as well as on the outside (Kaminski, Valle, Filene, & Boyle, 2008) suggests that programs are most effective when they include a practice component. Yet, child visits can be stressful for mothers (Loper et al., 2009) and benefits of visitation may vary with child age (Burgess &

Flynn, 2013). Although not all jails have regular child visitation, they are located closer to families, which could make it feasible for women could practice new skills with their children. Understanding how to best integrate visitation as a component of parenting programs in jail settings may be helpful.

Finally, although outcome evaluations have been conducted for some parenting programs in prisons (Eddy et al., 2013; Loper & Tuerk, 2011), most programs are still not evaluated (Burgess & Flynn, 2013; Hoffmann et al., 2010). The transient nature of the jailed population highlights the challenges to both effective implementation and sustainable evaluation. Many participants may not receive much intervention dosage, and it may be difficult to conduct pre- and post-test assessments. Gathering process data to evaluate how evidence-based programs are delivered in real-world contexts is important in order to build a database of “practice-based evidence” (Barkham & Mellor-Clark, 2003; Green, 2006) that can inform adaptation. Given the very limited resources in jail settings, it is also vital to document the process of implementing a parenting program with jailed mothers to inform future efforts to deliver such programming.

1.3 Current Study

In the current investigation, a parenting program was implemented with jailed mothers on a pilot basis. Content and logistics were tailored to address mothers' interests and the nature of this setting and parenting attitudes were assessed pre- and post-intervention. The “Parenting While Incarcerated” (PWI) curriculum was based on an existing evidence-based parenting intervention (the Strengthening Families Program; SFP; Kumpfer, DeMarsh, & Child, 1989) previously used with caregivers of children with incarcerated parents (Miller et al., 2013). This work was conducted in partnership with a community agency serving families with an incarcerated parent. Study goals were twofold: 1) use an iterative, participatory process to tailor and implement a parenting program with jailed women; and 2) evaluate the implementation process and program outcomes.

2. Study Design and Methods

The study was designed to gather “practice-based evidence” by implementing PWI with successive cohorts of jailed mothers. The program was tailored using an iterative process to address mothers' needs and the constraints of the jail setting. After each cohort completed the program, group leader process notes and qualitative feedback from participants were each reviewed in order to adapt program content and delivery details. Process data were analyzed to examine participant satisfaction and attendance. Outcome data were gathered for a subset of participants to assess initial program effectiveness.

2.1 Recruitment and Participants

Community partner staff publicized the study and ran intervention groups. University partner research staff conducted informed consent procedures and administered evaluation protocols. The study was approved by the IRB of the university partner. PWI was advertised through flyers and by word of mouth (e.g., at visitation sessions run by the community partner). All mothers of children under 18 at the local county jail were invited to attend.

Women were provided an incentive for completing pre- and post-test questionnaires (not for participating in the intervention), either in the form of a \$ 10 gift card for their child's caregiver or a deposit in their jail commissary account. The PWI intervention was conducted with three cohorts (total: 45 women) over a period of one year. Demographic information collected during PWI sessions ($n=38$) indicate that 26% of participants were African-American and 63% Caucasian, with ages ranging from 21 to 48 years old ($M=31$, $SD=6.8$).

2.2 Implementation Procedures

PWI was implemented weekly during a designated 1-hour time slot at the jail. Sessions were delivered in a group format in a private visitation room. Guards were located at a guard station outside the room, and could observe (but not hear) groups via an internal window. Women were seated at tables arranged in a circle to promote discussion. At the meeting prior to the start of the curriculum, participants completed consent forms and pre-test questionnaires. After the final week of the curriculum and graduation ceremony, participants completed post-test questionnaires and satisfaction surveys. Surveys were read aloud to reduce concerns about literacy. Group leaders were interns from a local university and community partner agency staff who had been certified in delivery of the original SFP intervention by the program developers. They had each run SFP groups with fidelity with alternate caregivers of children outside the jail setting.

2.3 Iterative Adaptation Procedures

The Strengthening Families Program, upon which PWI is based, was developed for families of substance-abusing parents with school-aged children (Kumpfer et al., 1989). SFP has previously been tailored to address the needs of specific populations and developers have noted the importance of maintaining the program structure and components (Kumpfer, Alvarado, Smith, & Bellamy, 2002). In the current study, adaptations concerned the content and process of intervention delivery in the jail setting. The tailoring process was iterative in nature and dependent on participant feedback. Content adaptations primarily involved creating materials and expanding discussion of certain SFP topics and adding new topics that were important to mothers. PWI facilitators took detailed process notes after each session that indicated which lessons from the SFP manual were covered, how mothers responded to the material, and other overall observations from the session. Group leaders were instructed on what to include in their process notes and received weekly clinical supervision from a PhD-level Social Worker who aided in synthesizing information from the sessions for adaptation. Topics or methods that did not resonate with the participants given that mothers were separated from their children were noted as such and covered in less depth in the next PWI cohort. When participants expressed interest in topics not covered by SFP, PWI facilitators recorded the areas of interest and sought out the information to bring back to the group. In this way, participants who attended the group during the study period were influential in the process of tailoring the PWI curriculum.

2.4 Implementation and Adaptation Measures

Participant satisfaction and attendance were gathered to assess the implementation process. Satisfaction was measured using an SFP survey (Kumpfer et al., 1989; Miller et al., 2013).

Questions included whether the participant would recommend the program, whether the group leader cared about the participant, and how much participants believed the class had helped them. Certain questions (e.g., “how often did you do home practice”) were eliminated or adapted for the jail context, resulting in an 11-item survey. Participants were also given the option to complete free-response sections of the questionnaire which asked why they took the class, the most valuable thing they learned, what they liked most and least, and what would make the class better (21 participants provided feedback). Attendance was recorded each week.

The process of adaptation was measured using group leader process notes. PWI group leaders recorded which topics were discussed during the meeting (and which were not discussed), which materials and handouts were used, and how the women responded to the session. These notes were used to document the evolution of the PWI program, specifically which topics were covered and which topics were requested, and any adaptations made to the original SFP curriculum based on content or implementation process specific to the jail setting.

2.5 Outcome Measure: Parenting Attitudes

Parenting attitudes were measured using the Adult Adolescent Parenting Inventory (AAPI-2; Bavolek & Keene, 2001), which assesses attitudes that are associated with risk for child maltreatment. Subscales are *inappropriate developmental expectations* (e.g., “parents spoil babies by picking them up when they cry”; 7 items; Cronbach's α in this sample = .71); *lack of empathy* (e.g., “children cry just to get attention”; 10 items; α = .72); *endorsement of corporal punishment* (e.g., “mild spankings can begin between 15-18 months of age”; 11 items; α = .71); *role reversal* (e.g., “children should know when their parents are tired”; 7 items; α = .61); and *restriction of independence* (e.g., “rewarding child's appropriate behavior is a good form of discipline” reverse-coded; 5 items; α = .44). Parents rated strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1) for 40 statements about parenting (higher scores reflect greater risk). The AAPI-2 has been used with incarcerated parents in previous work (Palusci et al., 2008; Sandifer, 2008).

2.6 Analysis Plan

The systematic analysis of program adaptation began with a detailed outline of the original SFP manual, highlighting discussion topics, activities, role-playing exercises, handouts, and homework assignments included in each SFP session. The same information was collected from PWI process notes, including whether or not handouts were used, which topics from the SFP manual were discussed, and/or any additional materials or topics that were incorporated. Process notes and participant feedback generated information on both content adaptations (e.g., discussion topics added) and process adaptations (e.g., scheduling changes in response to jail policies). Process notes were reviewed to determine how discussion topics and material covered compared to the original SFP curriculum and how it varied across the three PWI cohorts. For parenting attitude outcomes, paired *t*-tests were conducted to examine change on each subscale of the AAPI-2 from pre-test to post-test.

3. Results

3.1 Program Implementation: Attendance and Satisfaction

Of the 45 women who attended PWI, 12 women attended only one session (27% of sample), with jail release being the primary reason for attrition. Across the implementation period, 32 women were released before the program ended (71%). This contributed to a variable dose of the program for participants. Attrition due to release was considerable yet expected given the largely short-term nature of the jail setting. Seven of the 45 PWI participants did not complete any surveys. Thirty-eight participants completed pre-test surveys and 22 women completed post-test surveys (58% retention rate). For the 22 women who completed post-test surveys, 13 surveys were collected in the jail and 9 were collected from the women post-release.

Women reported uniformly high levels of satisfaction with PWI. The top-rated lessons covered how to discipline children without spanking (Behavior Rewards; see Table 1 for list of lesson topics), improving communication skills (Better Relationships), and how to build strong parent-child relationships despite separation (Communicating from a Distance). When asked to share their motivation for attending PWI, 19 of 21 women reported participating in order to learn more about parenting and to improve as mothers. Remaining responses included, “incarcerated, wanted to see child”, and “to get out of cell originally, but I liked the class”. Regarding what was liked least and could be improved, 15 women reported that there was nothing they liked least about PWI, and suggestions that were made reflected overall satisfaction, recommending more sessions and extending session length (3 women). The jail setting and the challenge of separation from children appeared in 2 participant responses, as one woman reported what she liked least about PWI was, “that [she] had to do it in jail”, and another said the program would be better, “if [she] had both [her] kids with [her]”.

3.2 PWI Content Adaptations

Table 1 presents a side-by-side comparison of PWI and original SFP sessions. Group leader process notes indicated that many existing SFP topics were well received by PWI participants, in particular lessons on clear communication and understanding how to set and maintain developmentally appropriate expectations for children (SFP weeks 2, 6 and 7). For the most part, SFP session order was maintained but topics were inserted in the PWI curriculum to address salient needs and concerns of mothers during their incarceration.

New content that was generated for PWI included sessions on behavior change (setting realistic expectations, finding motivation); coping with addiction; and how to manage one's own stress and anger (see Table 1; examples of topics discussed in these sessions are in italics). Women reported experiencing different stressors while in jail than what they experienced at home (e.g., separation from children compared to stresses of caring for children). Review of process notes indicated that women often discussed challenges of parenting that were specific to the jail context. Topics included whether or not mothers would have custody of children after leaving jail; whether they would go on to prison; what would happen once they were released; and how to manage their relationship with the

person caring for their children (their own mother in some cases). In response to such concerns, PWI group facilitators and their clinical supervisor developed lessons and handouts on Depression, Self-esteem, Controlling Emotions & Behaviors, Grief & Loss, Peer Pressure, Bullying, Diversity & Tolerance, Stranger Danger, and Budgeting.

Women requested that facilitators provide supplemental information for certain SFP sessions. These included What Kids Can Do and How to Manage Stress (Developmental Expectations); Communication; and Alcohol, Tobacco, Drugs and Families. The lessons on communication were specifically adapted to include how to manage and maintain communication with family and children when on the inside (e. g., letters, pictures, calls, visitation). The SFP lesson on substance use and families was expanded in PWI to include the effects of addiction on sentencing and how parents can prevent their children from developing addictions. Mothers also requested more information about how to talk with children about addiction. SFP components that were not covered in as much detail were those that focused on reviewing occasions since the last meeting where parents practiced new techniques (e.g., child behavior tracking, setting limits, rewards, child behavior changes).

These adaptations of program content from original SFP material to the resulting PWI program were reflected in the changes in handout use over the course of the study period. PWI cohort 1 incorporated the most original SFP handouts into sessions (60 handouts), cohort 2 used the fewest (36), and cohort 3 used the greatest number of additional handouts (8 additional; 50 total), including information that was not originally covered in SFP. Additional handouts were generated in response to requests from mothers in the group and typically covered material relevant for mothers who were separated from their children. Most of the handouts were simple by design to limit the need for literacy, and women greatly appreciated the information (they had no internet access).

3.3 PWI Process Adaptations

Numerous process adaptations were made due to the nature of conducting PWI in the jail setting. These included managing attendance, group dynamics, coping with separation from children, different developmental stages of children, and materials.

Attendance—The major challenge to PWI implementation was the unstable nature of attendance. Because women were admitted, released, re-admitted, transferred, or sentenced to prison on an ongoing basis, weekly group attendance was unpredictable. This is similar to what other studies have found even in prison settings, which have a more stable population (Eddy et al., 2013; Loper & Tuerk, 2011; Sandifer, 2008). Other barriers to attendance included jail-related events or policies (e.g., loss of permission to leave one's cell, facility lock downs, or other activities). For example, Cohort 1 attendance notably declined on the day of the month that the commissary was open because participants were purchasing goods. PWI was not scheduled on commissary days for subsequent cohorts. Irregular attendance affected group leaders' abilities to prepare for sessions (e.g., providing requested supplemental information), to build on the content of the prior week's lesson, and to anticipate group dynamics each week. To address these issues, PWI group facilitators

tailored some lessons to function as stand-alone sessions with brief reviews of previous content that was central to the new concepts. Variability in attendance also prevented reliable collection of program evaluation data using a pre-test/post-test design, resulting in limited outcome data.

Group Process—Consistent with SFP philosophy and practice, jailed women came up with their own ways of managing the PWI sessions. One of the SFP traditions they did adopt was the use of a touchstone that individuals could hold to indicate that they had the floor to talk. An important element that the women developed was opening each session by reviewing group rules and saying a prayer or reading a poem or story. Women also suggested starting sessions with individual word searches or puzzles rather than group icebreaker activities. Inmate comments in the process notes indicated that starting the sessions in this way helped to calm and center the women, preparing them to engage in group discussion. Practicing techniques for calming down (e.g., visualizing a peaceful scene) were also well-received. Because the group was sometimes different for each session, developing activities that helped women feel comfortable and safe appeared to be important for effective group process. Observing rituals at the beginning and closing of each session may have served to create a shared psychological group space despite rotating participants.

Separation from Child/Family—The original SFP program includes separate sessions for all family members as well as family group sessions. Certain strategies (e.g., doing behavioral “homework” with the child, holding family meetings) were of course difficult to address in PWI. Adaptations to involve family included providing stationery and stamps so that mothers could write (with help as needed) and/or send home worksheets to children and families (including the caregivers for their children) about the skills they were learning, as letter-writing has been found to be beneficial for incarcerated mothers (Loper et al., 2009). Mothers also sent home their certificates of graduation from PWI so that their children could see they had completed the program. An advantage of conducting PWI in this community was that the community partner agency facilitated child visitation sessions at the jail, which allowed physical contact between parent and child (e.g., hugging, sitting on lap). Mothers attending visitation sessions were thus able to practice the skills learned during PWI. Although this was not always possible, mothers who did so found it rewarding. The PWI group facilitators were often in attendance at these sessions and could provide PWI mothers with positive feedback about how they saw them using their new skills. They also met the mothers' children, which was rewarding to both parties.

Child Age Range—Another important area of adaptation was addressing the needs of mothers with children of different ages, given that there were resources to run only one group at a time. SFP is designed to address parenting across specified developmental periods (Kumpfer et al., 1989), so PWI facilitators used existing examples but also needed to be knowledgeable across a wide range of developmental stages and flexible enough to incorporate information relevant for mothers in the room. Group leaders also needed to be ready to manage discussions of parenting strategies among inmates whose children differed in age (e.g., mothers of older children giving advice to mothers with younger children). Across the three cohorts, PWI facilitators developed additional materials that addressed

parenting children from infancy through adolescence, and were thus able to tailor some of the discussion for the PWI mothers.

Materials—Finally, there were challenges with materials in the jail setting. Some mothers were very interested in journaling about what they had learned in PWI, but it was difficult to accommodate these requests due to jail policies. Mothers also reported preferences for reviewing and completing worksheets on their own time and using group time for discussion. Yet, mothers could not always take handouts or writing implements to their cells. In response, PWI facilitators maintained folders and journals for participants to use each week but this compromised group discussion at times. Although the jail staff allowed certain accommodations (e.g., having juice at the graduation celebration), this was not always possible. The experience of the community partner agency has been that increasing accommodations have been made over time as jail staff members have gained experience with agency staff and activities. Thus, it may be possible to generate additional creative solutions to address these issues in the future.

3.4 Outcome Evaluation of Parenting Attitudes

Results from the paired *t*-test analysis of the AAPI-2 were that mothers showed a statistically significant reduction in one AAPI-2 subscale. Specifically, they showed lower endorsement of corporal punishment attitudes at post-test compared to pre-test (see Table 2).

4. Discussion

Implementing and evaluating parenting programs in a correctional setting is complicated and challenging. Collecting practice-based evidence on implementation and adaptations can inform the ability to sustain such programming. The current study used an iterative, participatory process to tailor and implement a parenting program with jailed women, and assessed changes in parenting attitudes in a subset of the women. The intervention was delivered to three small cohorts and intervention content and implementation strategies were adapted based on feedback from each cohort. Findings and lessons learned are discussed below.

4.1 Parenting While Incarcerated: Addressing Mothers' Concerns

In the curriculum modification process, participant feedback was solicited in order to adapt the program to address mothers' needs. As in previous adaptations of SFP (Aktan, 1999; Kumpfer et al., 2002), the goals of the program were maintained, but alterations were made to both the content and process of the original SFP intervention. Such adaptations to an evidence-based program can result in increased participant engagement and may enhance outcomes among individuals who may not otherwise participate in such programming (Aktan, 1999; August, Gewirtz, & Realmuto, 2010). Current adaptations primarily reflected the context-specific challenges of implementing a parenting intervention in a jail setting. Overall, mothers were satisfied with many SFP sessions. They requested additional information on SFP topics (e.g., how children manage stress; improving communication; drug and alcohol use) that appeared to reflect concerns regarding how their children were coping with their own difficult emotions during their mother's incarceration. Mothers also

appreciated the need to improve communication with the alternate caregivers of their children and how to talk with their children about difficult issues (e.g., drug and alcohol abuse; custody; sentencing). Interestingly, these topics mirror those addressed in prison-based intervention trials that have been shown to have positive effects on parent-caregiver communication and maternal distress around parenting while incarcerated (Loper & Tuerk, 2011).

Clearly, a major challenge to implementing parenting programs in almost all correctional settings is managing the issue of parent-child separation and distance (if not physical, often psychological) from family. If children are residing with an alternate caregiver during jail terms when the length of stay is relatively brief, it is critically important for the mother to maintain a healthy co-parenting relationship with this person (Strozier et al., 2011). Effective cooperation and communication between the parent and the caregiver provides a consistent environment for children and can help in the transition when the parent is released (Cecil et al., 2008; Loper et al., 2009; Poehlmann, Shlafer, Maes, & Hanneman, 2008). Purposefully connecting PWI activities (e.g., active listening and praising child; effectively communicating with caregiver) with in-person child visits and/or caregiver interactions occurred at times during this pilot study and is an ongoing focus of the community partner agency's work. The agency not only facilitates child visitation days at the jail, but also holds tutoring sessions for children and family sessions for caregivers outside the jail facility. A few mothers did participate in the family sessions after being released, although data were not routinely collected regarding how many PWI mothers participated in the outside programs. Historically, mothers who have participated in the child visitation program at the jail have contacted the agency after being released either to enroll their child in tutoring programs or to seek other resources, sometimes even years later (S. Cochran, personal communication). Learning more about the circumstances and motivations for ex-inmates' engagement in programming outside of the correctional setting released is important for understanding the reentry process. Future research should systematically examine the integration of parenting programs like PWI, child visitation, and activities to enhance the inmate-alternate caregiver relationship as well as the child-alternate caregiver relationship. This may improve understanding of how each component may foster positive parent, child, and family outcomes.

Importantly, many of the topics mothers requested beyond those covered in SFP (e.g., depression, self-esteem, grief and loss) addressed their own self-care and stress reduction. Information on budgeting and financial stress management was also requested. This suggests the importance of directly attending to jailed mothers' needs. Incarcerated mothers (compared to fathers) tend to have higher rates of drug use, unemployment and poverty (Kjellstrand et al., 2012; Mumola, 2000); more mental illness and higher distress (Dallaire, 2007; Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Kjellstrand et al., 2012); and worse family histories in terms of child abuse, trauma, and simply poor models of parenting (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Katz, 1998). Mothers who end up in the correctional system are thus often coming from very high-stress, disorganized, and dangerous backgrounds. Jail may at some level provide – if not a respite – an opportunity to reflect. Process notes from this study summarized discussions in which mothers endorsed jail as less stressful than regular life. If mothers are not able to care for themselves and have few positive experiences or social

supports to draw on, they are likely to be limited in the quality of their parenting. If mothers could use this time (even if it is short) to gain self-care skills and reflect on their relationships it might benefit their parenting. This is clearly a complex issue in many ways, including the fact that many of these mothers' children were being cared for by their own mothers, which may raise concerns about attachment, caregiving quality, and difficulties negotiating with the alternate caregiver (Strozier et al., 2011). A further complicating issue is the matter of addiction. Incarcerated mothers tend to have high rates of drug use/abuse; indeed, one reason PWI mothers gave as to why they were less stressed in jail was that they were sober. Given that females are highly likely to participate in programs (Meyer et al., 2013), parenting interventions for jailed mothers that include counseling and treatment for addiction, mental health, trauma, and/or other medical conditions (Belknap & Whalley, 2013) may be beneficial.

4.2 Outcome Evaluation: Change in Parenting Attitudes

Outcome evaluation results indicated some evidence for positive change in mothers' attitudes regarding corporal punishment. These results should be interpreted with extreme caution given the very small sample size of 22 women with pre-test and post-test data, and given that this was the only subscale that showed statistically significant improvement. A prison-based intervention study that included a control group found similar changes in mothers' attitudes regarding corporal punishment as measured using the AAPI-2 (Sandifer, 2008). The PWI curriculum covered alternative approaches to discipline in detail, so this result may reflect this focus. It is also critical to note that the AAPI-2 assesses parenting attitudes and not behavior, which may or may not relate to parenting attitudes. Yet, other studies have found that scores on this measure are associated with parenting behavior (Combs-Orme & Cain, 2008) and child abuse potential (Bavolek & Keene, 2001). Thus, parenting attitudes as measured by the AAPI-2 may have implications for parenting behavior and possibly later child outcomes.

4.3 Challenges to Implementing Programming in Jail

Many lessons learned about implementation in the current study concerned not only content adaptations, but also numerous logistical modifications to curriculum structure and process of program delivery in order to implement PWI in the jail setting. Such adaptations included presentation of program information in an understandable way that did not require consistent attendance from session to session; adjusting lesson formats to account for separation from children and also occasional interaction during visitation; developing handouts that did not assume high literacy levels; and arranging for use of handouts and writing materials in accordance with facility rules for what inmates were allowed in their cells.

One important set of adaptations, in part logistic and in part content, concerned the developmental stages of the children of PWI mothers. PWI facilitators developed materials to respond to mothers' requests across a wide age range (e.g., handouts on developmental milestones and expectations for a toddler, and on how to talk about drug use with a 10 year old). Importantly, children of different ages may respond to parent incarceration and to contact with incarcerated parents in different ways (Burgess & Flynn, 2013). The impact of maternal incarceration on a child can also vary based on a child's age as well as gender

(Cho, 2010). Not all PWI mothers wished for their children to visit because they did not want the children to see them in jail, and not all children knew their mothers were in jail, sometimes due to the child's age. Understanding and addressing the needs of incarcerated parents and their children based on the age(s) and other characteristics of the children is an important area for future work.

One of the most significant challenges to implementing programming in a jail setting is the inability to predict length of stay before transfer to another jail, to serve a prison sentence, or release. The transient nature of the population creates inherent difficulties for a program where lessons are designed to build upon one another in a linear fashion like SFP (and PWI). Although many PWI mothers attended multiple sessions, attendance remained a challenge. Group leader preparedness and flexibility was very important because facilitators often did not know who would attend a given PWI session. Building in brief reviews of topics from the previous week and flexibly responding to inmate concerns in a given week was helpful. Inmate-developed routines such as the opening and closing poem or prayer may have helped establish the PWI meetings as a safe place for discussion despite inconsistency in group composition. Instability in attendance also presents difficulties in collecting data to evaluate program effectiveness. A majority of PWI participants (71%) were released or transferred before the program ended. This is notably higher than in prison-based interventions, where the attrition rate due to transfer or early release has been reported as one-third (Eddy et al., 2013) to one-half (Sandifer, 2008) of participants. Intervention dropout rates in studies of mothers in prison also range from about one-third (although only half of mothers completed follow-up evaluations; Perry et al., 2010) to one-half (Loper & Tuerk, 2010), but the number of participants released or transferred prior to the end of the intervention was not reported in these studies. In the current study, 58% of women were successfully contacted for post-test assessments, with 9 of these 22 assessments conducted outside of the jail setting. The attrition rate in the current study was thus fairly comparable to other studies, despite higher rates of release during the intervention period than prison-based intervention studies.

4.4 Future Directions: Partnering to Enhance Family Connections and Sustainability

Implementing a parenting program in a jail setting requires considering a number of factors including interest and availability of the incarcerated population, relevance and adaptability of existing program material, and program sustainability. Partnerships between community agencies and jail staff are vital in maintaining programs. Gathering “practice-based evidence” in the form of implementation adaptations and process data is critical in meeting the challenges for jailed parents. Community agencies may be able to provide staffing resources for running programs that are typically not available through jail personnel. The community partner in the current study is a grassroots agency with a long history of working with families of incarcerated mothers in the intervention community. The agency delivers programming for children, caregivers, and families at their site and facilitates visitation at the county jail where PWI was implemented. Such connection with the families of inmates is likely important for the ultimate success of jail-based parenting and other rehabilitation programs, as such programs may be more effective when there is a child visitation or family connection element, in addition to parent education alone (Loper et al., 2009; Perry et al., 2010; Poehlmann et al., 2008). More broadly, an organization located in the same

community as the jail can help to manage the many logistical details that arise for families when a mother is incarcerated, such as alternate child care arrangements and new school enrollment. Local agencies can also facilitate the transition back to family life for women once they are released by helping them to connect them with services, seek secure housing, or apply for jobs. Such an integrative approach could make it easier for families to manage the stresses of maternal incarceration (Katz, 1998).

4.5 Limitations

A small sample size of participating women in the current study limits the ability to assess external validity of the PWI program. In addition, although the current study assessed women's satisfaction with program elements and change in parenting attitudes, there was no assessment of behavior change after participation. This important limitation is shared by many intervention programs in correctional settings, and should be addressed in future work (Burgess & Flynn, 2013). Inconsistent family and child involvement in PWI is a limitation that could affect program potency, as mothers could not regularly practice new parenting techniques with their children. Finally, the current study focused on mothers. Given that mothers and fathers can be differently affected by incarceration, results may not be generalizable to fathers.

4.6 Conclusion

Although challenging, implementing parenting programs in jail settings represents an opportunity for high-risk mothers to focus on and develop their parenting skills. Although the setting may prevent practicing new skills with children, offering parenting sessions in jail may be an effective way to reach this vulnerable population of women. Such programs allow mothers an opportunity to reflect on their parenting and their relationships with their children and the alternate caregivers of the children. Programs may also reach mothers at a critical point before they go deeper into the correctional system. Gathering “practice-based evidence” on parenting programs like the one described in the current report is important in order to understand how implementation of such programs works in real world settings. Developing effective parenting programs for correctional facilities is unfortunately of growing importance due to the high number of parents (particularly mothers) currently incarcerated; the unique parenting challenges associated with incarceration for parents, children, and families; and the potential power of parent-child relationships as a motivator for successful reentry after incarceration.

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Abbreviations

PWI	Parenting While Incarcerated
SFP	Strengthening Families Program

Table 1
Comparison of PWI Cohort 3 and Original SFP Curriculum Sequences and Topics

Week	PWI	SFP
1	Introduction to PWI; Behavior Change (<i>"Two Choices," story about including child with a disability; unrealistic expectations for change; thinking positively and believing it is possible to change</i>)	Introductions and Group Building
2	Addiction (<i>how to know when you've hit "rock bottom"; signs of addiction; family and children can be a motivator to change but you must want it for yourself to have lasting change; there will always be temptation</i>)	What Kids Can Do (Developmental Expectations) and How to Manage Stress
3	What Kids Can Do (Developmental Expectations) and How to Manage Stress and Anger (<i>how different people manage stress and anger; how to spot children's stress; managing anger around children; managing the stressors of jail; when home is more stressful than jail</i>)	Behavior Rewards
4	Behavior Rewards	Goals and Objectives
5	Goals and Objectives	Noticing and Ignoring
6	Noticing and Ignoring	Communication I: Better Relationships
7	Communication I: Better Relationships	Communication II: Family Meetings
8	Communication II: Communicating From a Distance and Parent Impact on Children (<i>praising from afar; 90 ways to say "good job"; pros and cons of visitation, letter writing, and phone calls; how to spend limited family time together; preparing for child visits and phone calls</i>)	Alcohol, Tobacco, Drugs and Families
9	Alcohol, Tobacco, Drugs and Families	Solving Behavior Problems and Giving Directions
10	Solving Behavior Problems and Giving Directions; Setting Limits I: Behaviors You Can't Ignore	Setting Limits I: Behaviors You Can't Ignore
11	Setting Limits II: Practice Setting Limits, Building and Using Behavior Programs, Getting / Keeping More Good Behavior	Setting Limits II: Practice Setting Limits
12	Graduation Celebration	Setting Limits III: Solving Behavior Problems
13		Building and Using Behavior Programs
14		Getting / Keeping More Good Behavior
15		Graduation Celebration

Note. Sessions in bold were new topics that were added or adapted for PWI. Information in italics gives examples of discussion topics during these adapted sessions.

Table 2
Parenting Attitude Outcomes: Means and SD's at Pre-test and Post-test ($n = 22$)

AAPI-2 Subscale	Pre-test	Post-test	<i>t</i>
Inappropriate Developmental Expectations	22.64 (5.03)	20.68 (3.21)	-1.97 [†]
Lack of Empathy	14.55 (3.47)	16.45 (5.40)	1.90 [†]
Endorsement of Corporal Punishment	22.95 (6.10)	19.77 (4.47)	-2.86*
Role Reversal	17.05 (4.17)	16.95 (4.51)	-0.13
Restriction of Child Power and Independence	9.82 (2.82)	10.36 (3.20)	0.98
AAPI-2 Total	87.00 (11.39)	86.82 (12.46)	-0.79

Note.

[†]
 $p < .10$,

*
 $p < .05$.

Standard deviations appear in parentheses beside means. Higher scores indicate endorsement of attitudes associated with riskier parenting.