

Mental Health Implications for Children of Incarcerated Parents

2022 SRU Student Symposium

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Literature

- Since the war on drugs began in the 1980s, the rate of children with incarcerated parents has increased (Martin, 2017)
 - Estimates suggest that there are between 1.7-2.3 million children have incarcerated parents
 - Children of incarcerated mothers have increased by 100%
 - Children of incarcerated fathers by 75%
- “Hidden Victims”
- Parent-child bond is critical (Martin, 2017)

Mental Health and Other Impacts

- Children face a host of challenges and difficulties (Martin, 2017)
 - psychological and health problems
 - antisocial behavior
 - suspension or expulsion from school
 - economic hardship
 - criminal activity
- Parents have stated that their children don't visit anymore because seeing them in the prison environment is too emotionally upsetting

Health Problems of Children with Incarcerated Fathers

Condition	Percent
PTSD	72%
Anxiety	51%
High Cholesterol	31%
Asthma	30%
Migraines	26%

Source: Turney, 2014

Psychological Problems of Children with Incarcerated Parent

Condition	Percent increase in likelihood of condition relative to other children
ADD/ADHD	48%
Behavioral problems	43%
Depression	43%
Marijuana use	43%
Developmental delays	23%
Learning disabilities	22%
Delinquency	10%

Methodology

- 15 county correctional facilities in Western PA were chosen and contacted for an interview
- 6 county facilities able/willing to answer questions about visitation policies
- Phone calls to facilities and 9 questions asked

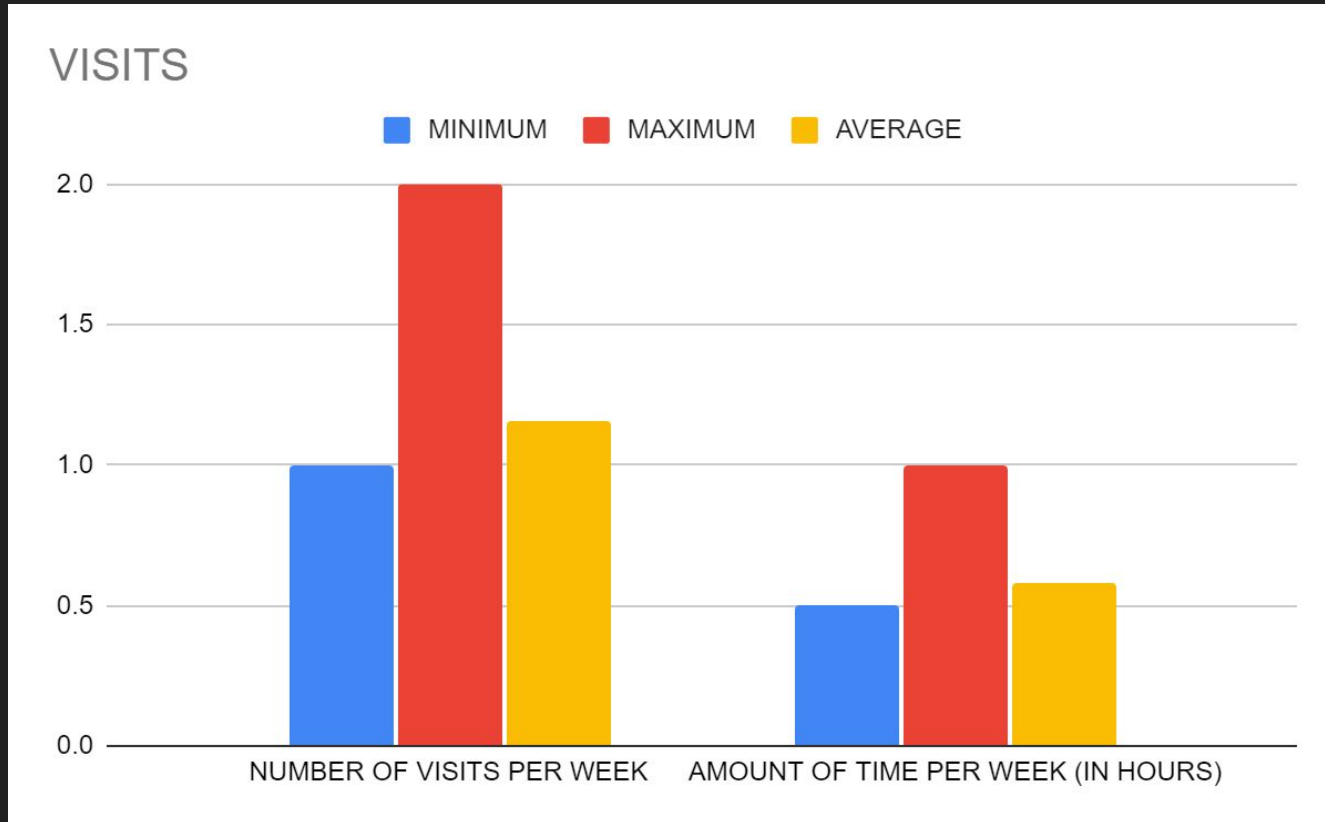
Interviews

- 1. What is the general visitation policy?
- 2. Is everyone eligible? And how does it differ for different inmates?
- 3. How many hours by week does your facility have set for visitation? How many hours per week/month does the average inmate get for visitation?
- 4. Does the visitation policy differ for inmates who have kids? What do typical visits look like for children?
- 5. Does the prison/ jail have a specific family visitation program where children are allowed to interact in different ways with their parents?
- 6. Are there any specific restrictions on contact (hugging, holding hands, etc.) when it comes to children of incarcerated parents?
- 7. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the visitation policies and procedures?
- 8. If the pandemic has affected the visitation policies and procedures, do you foresee a return to prior policies and procedures or do you think these changes will become permanent?
- 9. Is there anything else we should know about your facility's programs/procedures/policies when it comes to children visiting their incarcerated parents?

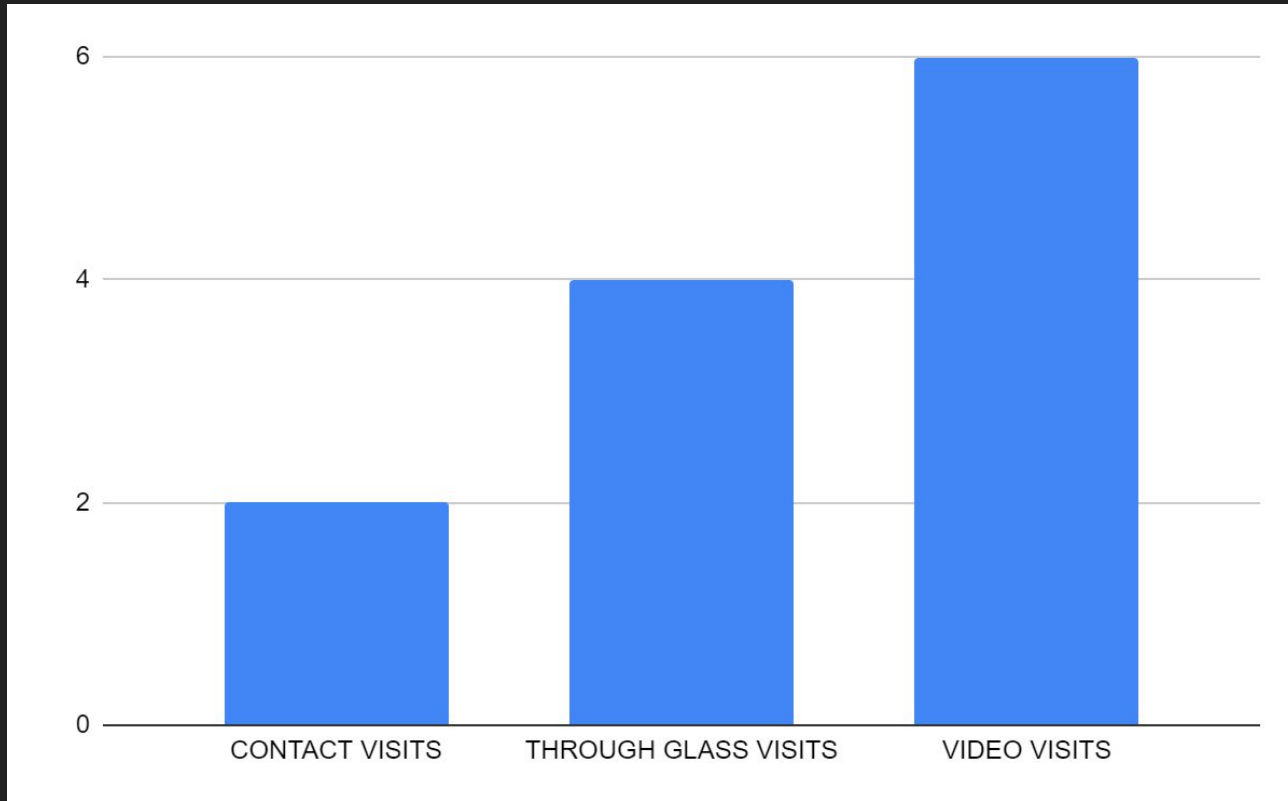
Barriers and Limitations to Interviews

- Many corrections staff unsure if they were able/allowed to answer questions on visitation policies, even though most information that was asked was readily available on websites.
- Unable to get ahold of staff or deputy wardens
- The COVID-19 Pandemic

Results



Results



Discussion

- Parent-bond is critical for children's psychosocial development
- Lack or limited access to visitation is detrimental to that bond
- Through glass visits are convenient for facilities, it is worse for children
- Video visits are safer/convenient and allow children to bond in a different way
- Supporting family bonds might only be helpful if a healthy, prior bond existed

Policy Implications for Corrections

- Increased access to in-person visits in a child friendly environment
 - Revise prison visitation policies and reduce unnecessary barriers to visitation
- Increased access to phone calls and video-conferences
 - Unlimited video-conferences on inmates tablets
- Family visitation programs (exp. Butler County Prison) for eligible parents

Policy Implications for Corrections

- Required training for corrections staff on treatment of visiting children
- Mentoring programs
 - For parents and their children
- Parenting skill programs in prison
 - Skills on how to parent from prison
- SRU's Read to Me program

Future research

- Inquiries to more jails and prisons
- Interviews with children of incarcerated parents in the community and/or with incarcerated parents
- Analysis of visitation policies available online
- How online video visitations are negatively impactful

Thank you!