

Parenting Programs in Correctional Institutions

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Introduction

The purpose of this project was to investigate the state of the literature on parenting programs in correctional facilities. In Canada, over half of all incarcerated individuals have children ([Whithers, 2007](#)). As occupational therapy students, we sought to understand what was being done to help enable the occupation of parenting in correctional institutions, and what has been published on the subject. This poster describes the literature on parenting programs in correctional institutions throughout the world, to act as a guide for the implementation of such programs. Moving forward, we will refer to the incarcerated population as individuals or parents.

Methods

A database was created using a broad search of CINAHL, Psychinfo, Medline, and OTseeker for therapeutic interventions in correctional institutions worldwide. From this database, we found all articles mentioning parenting as a keyword or subject heading, and selected all articles related to running parenting programs for review. Two independent reviewers assessed the quality of the 28 articles using appropriate tools, and then categorised them according to the traffic light coding system. Additional information on each article, and a description of how we appraised and classified them can be accessed in this [table](#).

Findings

Types of Articles Found:

Of the articles found, 14 were quantitative, 12 were qualitative, and 2 were mixed methods. Of these, 4 were randomized controlled trials, 7 were review articles, and 2 were systemic reviews.

Demographic Profile of Articles:

Of the articles reviewed, 74.1% originated from the USA, 7.4% from Australia, 7.4% from Norway, 3.7% from South Africa, 3.7% from the UK, and 3.7% from Northern Ireland.

In terms of gender, 39.3% involved men's prisons, 39.3% involved women's prisons, and 21.4% involved both.

Quality of Literature:

- 3/28 articles met our criteria for a high-quality study, using CASP and JBI quality checklists.
- Some reoccurring barriers to proving the efficacy of these programs were:
 - No control group
 - Small sample size
 - High attrition rate
 - Lack of standardized outcome measures

Some authors explained that working within the prison system posed unique challenges to creating methodologically sound studies ([Cornillille 2006](#); [Shlonsky 2016](#)).

Best Evidence that Parenting Interventions Work:

[Armstrong et. al](#) produced a high-quality systematic review concluding that parenting programs in correctional institutions have a positive impact on recidivism and parent-child relationships, but do not have an impact on parent wellbeing (2018). This review represents the most up to date analysis of parenting programs in prisons and provides moderate support for the effectiveness of these programs.

Types of Parenting Programs

Many of the studies used different parenting programs as interventions. However, most programs were based on the same principles and involved group sessions with some form of parenting training. The following passage provides common themes of interventions with specific titles. However, there were also programs built in-house for specific institutions that are less well described.

Four broad types of interventions were identified. These were Family Therapy, Education, Father-Specific Programs, and Mother-Specific Programs. Under Family Therapy, there were four interventions identified: Family Reunification Therapy ([Harris, 2014](#)), Family Foundations Programs ([Wiewel, 2006](#)), Family Matters Program ([Butler, 2019](#)), and Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT) ([Scrudder, 2014](#)). Under Education, there were three interventions identified: Family Life Education Program ([Bayse, 1991](#)), Parenting Inside Out (PIO) ([Collica-Cox, 2006](#); [Eddy, 2013](#)) and the International Child Development Programme ([Skar, 2014](#)). Under Father-Specific Programs, there were three interventions identified: Filial Therapy ([Harris, 1997](#); [Landreth, 1998](#)), Dads Actively Developing Stable Families (Cornillille, 2006), and Fathers in Prison ([Hansen, 2017](#)). Under Mother-specific programs, there were two interventions identified: Women and Infants at Risk (WIAR) ([Siefert, 2001](#)), and Nursery Programs ([Shlonsky, 2016](#)).

What Makes for a Successful Parenting Program?

- Learning specific and applicable parenting skills ([Donohue, 2009](#); [Eddy, 2013](#); [Harris, 1997](#); [Landreth, 1998](#); [Scudder, 2014](#))
- Having frequent opportunities to practice these skills with their children ([Donohue, 2009](#); [Eddy, 2013](#); [Landreth, 1998](#); [Scudder, 2014](#)).
- Having a safe place to talk about parenting issues with other parents ([Butler, 2019](#); [Hansen, 2017](#); [Landreth, 1998](#))
- Getting support after release ([Armstrong, 2018](#); [Datchi, 2013](#))
- Having gender specific programming ([Buston, 2012](#); [McGee, 2010](#); [Wiewel, 2006](#))
- Allowing for high levels of contact with children (either through increased phone calls, increased visitation rights, or access to video-chatting software) ([Butler, 2019](#); [Harris, 2014](#); [Sparks, 2017](#))
- Consider timing: focus on parenting from prison at the start of the sentence, and focus on a return to parenting roles at

the end ([Armstrong, 2018](#); [Fox, 1995](#))

Clinical Implications

None of the programs in the articles were run by OTs, but OTs are uniquely positioned to deliver parenting programs, as they have the following competencies:

- Understanding of parenting as an occupation
- Understanding of the occupational roles involved with parenting
- Understanding of time-use as a parent and within correctional facilities
- Can aid in developing occupational balance as a parent in prison
- Knowledge and experience with different skills training programs, such as:
 - Life skills (cooking, money management, etc)
 - Social skills
 - Parenting skills

- Experience producing change in meaningful activities through therapy
- Client centered approach to therapy; include patient in determining personal outcomes for intervention
- Use of family-centered and family systems approach

Importance of Interventions

Impact of parental incarceration on children:

- Increases behavioural problems ([Prinsloo, 2007](#); [Scrudder, 2014](#))
- Increases risk of negative encounters with the law ([Eddy, 2014](#); [Prinsloo, 2007](#))
- Increases likelihood of mental health challenges ([Collica-Cox, 2020](#); [Eddy, 2014](#); [Prinsloo, 2007](#); [Young, 2000](#))

Outcomes of parental programs:

- Strengthens parent-child relationship ([Armstrong, 2018](#); [Toews, 2020](#))
- Improves family cohesion ([Datchi, 2013](#))
- Mitigates the impacts of parental imprisonment on children

- Development of life skills and parenting skills ([Harris, 1997](#); [Purvis, 2013](#))
- Reduced recidivism ([Armstrong, 2018](#); [Bayse, 1991](#); [Shlonsky, 2016](#))

Qualitative feedback:

- *“When I was first in jail, my kids were scared of me, but now they are more relaxed and look forward to seeing me...and I think it’s because I’m willing to hold them and play with them instead of ignoring them”* ([Harris, 1997](#))
- *“This program helped me to strengthen the bond with my child; The ability to interact and spend adequate time has made father-child relationship boost to higher levels”*
([Prinsloo, 2007](#))

Future Directions:

1. More high quality randomized controlled trials are required
2. Study the long-term effects, and provide continued parenting support after release

3. Creation of clear program guidelines for large-scale implementation
4. Canadian studies needed
5. Consider different subpopulations of parents, such as Indigenous and LGBTQ+

Recommended Resources:

- Description of the experience of mothers in prison ([Wiewel, 2006](#))
- Description of the impacts of parental incarceration on children ([Armstrong, 2018](#))
- The most evidenced-based intervention ([Harris, 1997](#))

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