First-Generation Symposium

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The Resilience and Success Of Adult College Students Who Have Been Impacted by Parental Incarceration

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The Resilience and Success of Adult College Students Who Have Been Impacted by Parental Incarceration

Flying First
First Generation Symposium
February 2020 - Rowan University
Children of Incarcerated Parents Statistics

➢ More than **2.7 million** children in the U.S. have at least one incarcerated parent, equivalent to **1 in 28** children in the U.S.

➢ Approximately **10 million** children have experienced parental incarceration at some point in their lives.

➢ About **half the population** of children of incarcerated parents are under the age of 10 years.

➢ There are **1.1 million fathers and over 120,000 mothers** incarcerated in the U.S. that are parents of minors (17 years and younger).
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

➢ ACEs are traumatic experiences that a person experiences before adulthood.
➢ They have a profound impact on self-development, health, and wellbeing outcomes.
➢ If a child witnesses a household member get arrested, they are then **57% more likely to suffer from PTSD** than their peers who have never witnessed the arrest of a household member.
➢ **Resilience** is the result of a dynamic set of interactions between a person’s adverse experiences and his or her protective factors.
  ○ Resilience is positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity.
Factors Promoting Resilience Among Children of Incarcerated Parents

● **Protective Factors**- “a characteristic at the biological, psychological, family, or community (including peers and culture) level that is associated with a lower likelihood of problem outcomes or that reduces the negative impact of a risk factor on problem outcomes.”
  ○ **Social Support** - “the emotional, psychological, physical, informational instrumental, and material assistance, provided to others to either maintain well-being or promote adaptations to different life events” (Luther, 2015, p. 507).
    ■ From parents or positive role models
  ○ **Turning points** that help transition to be more resilient:
    ■ Healthy relationships, employment, and religion
Presence of Role Models

- The presence of role models and caring adults, “has frequently been found to be a protective influence for children in adverse situations” (Luther, 2015, p. 507).
  - Provide:
    - a. Emotional support - comfort and advice
    - b. Instrumental support - money and housing
- Role models present new, useful opportunities
Presence of Role Models

“I met my godmother in church and she has influenced my life tremendously. In my junior year of high school, she sat me down and asked me, “How are we getting you to college?” At the time, I was oblivious to the college process. I did not know what a FAFSA was or how to apply for it. I didn’t even know what I wanted to do in college.”

Female/Senior/Law & Justice
Resilience models have been made focusing on factors that promote success in children such as interpersonal relationships with caregivers, incarcerated parents, mentors, teachers, and engagement in extracurricular activities (Luther, 2015).

“These activities took the form of athletics, day camps, religious activities, and community programs such as Upward Bound and the Boys and Girls Club” (Luther, 2015, p. 511).

Participants in Luther’s study concluded that involvement in extracurricular activities “connected them to prosocial individuals, kept them motivated, and helped them feel a sense of normalcy in their lives” (Luther, 2015, p. 514).
“Coming to college my freshman year having both of my parents incarcerated was tough because I felt like I had no support system, but joining different clubs on campus made me feel like I had a purpose here, sparked new interests of mine, and connected me to an amazing support group”.
Female/Senior/Law & Justice Major

“When I first got here it was just me.”
Female/Sophomore/Law & Justice Major

“Running [cross country] and just being away for different meets, also just seeing how other people lived and I would just know that I don’t know none of these people from these other towns.”
Female/Grad Student/Public Relations
In our findings, as well as in other studies, **spirituality** and **faith** played a major role in resilience.

“Church **offered an immediate support group** while their faith helped them feel that their struggles have deeper meaning.” (Nesmith, 2008, p. 1127)

Church community allowed individuals to feel **welcomed**, and gave them an opportunity to meet friends.

Church also allowed children to have “**normal**” **childhood experiences** like going to summer camp, youth groups, and participating in Big Brother, Big Sister programs.
“Out of the pie, 60-70% was my church family in the support.”
Female/Alumni/Adjunct Faculty/Sociology Major

“Being completely honest with myself, I know that if I were not lucky enough to find this church I would be a delinquent on the street. Members of my congregation saw potential in me that I did not see in myself. They encouraged me to become someone great in life instead of a statistic.”
Female/Senior/Law & Justice

“My church family is very close-knit, we’re a smaller church, but they’re constantly in my life, and constantly there.”
Female/Senior/ Liberal Arts
Sense of School Belonging

➢ “School connectedness has also been associated with students’ positive school adjustment, achievement, and overall positive psychosocial outcomes” (Nichols et al. 2015, p. 1094).

➢ Being engaged in school is a chance to **occupy children** and **help them avoid getting involved in delinquent behavior** outside of school.

➢ School gives students an opportunity to make new friends and have an **outlet from the potential stress** of their home life.

➢ Guidance counselors, teachers, and caseworkers give a sense of a stable adult in their lives.
“College was my escape. I didn’t have to worry about the lights being out, or the hot water not working.”

Female/Senior/Law & Justice Major

“I was always good at it. I always had good grades, so that motivated me to keep going.”

Female/Junior/Law & Justice
Powerful Quotes from Interview Participants

“I’ve never been the type to shut down.” “I’m very like, ‘I’m gonna get it’.
Female/Junior/Law & Justice Major

“I’m just gonna strive for success, I’m gonna be the best me, and I put forth my all into other people. And that’s what kept me pushing; the fact that not only can I do well for myself, that I can go and inspire others”.
Male/Senior/Communication Studies Major

“I just wanted to help people because I know how it feels be somebody who didn’t mean to do what they did, and when they come out they don’t have any credentials. So it makes me wanna help people more”.
Female/Sophomore/Law & Justice Major
Youth Empowerment Program (YEP)

- Launched in October 2018 at Rowan University
- This program is organized to serve Rowan students who have been impacted by the incarceration of one or more parent/guardians at some point during their lifetime.
- Our group meets twice a month and offers peer support, mentoring, social and educational events, hosts guest speakers, and participates in research efforts to bring attention to the issues and challenges confronting the children of incarcerated parents.
- We have grown from 3 people (faculty advisor and 2 students) at our first meeting to approximately 20 people, including 14 undergraduate students, as well as 2 grad students, 1 alum, 1 staff member, and 2 community members.
What We’ve Done

➢ Organized holiday **toy drive** for children of incarcerated parents
➢ Attended **bowling outing** as a way to destress before finals
➢ Sponsored event during Black History Month, in which **MOVE members Mike Africa Jr. and his parents** (recently released political prisoners Mike Sr. & Debbie) **visited Rowan** to speak to the student body about the challenges of being separated over the last 40 years of the parents’ incarceration
➢ Went on field trip to Wilmington, Delaware to attend a community panel event, titled **“Surviving Mass Incarceration”**
➢ **Began research study** focused on the resilience of adult college students who have been impacted by parental incarceration
What We’ve Done (cont’d)

- **Presented research** at the National Children of Incarcerated Parents Conference in Phoenix, Arizona.
- Went to Philadelphia to attend a **book signing** of Albert Woodfox from the Angola 3.
- Gathered for an all day **retreat** that included a yoga session, preparing and eating a meal, and planned for next semester's activities.
- Participated in **5k walk/ run** in Prospect Park to earn money for Children of Promise NYC, who focuses on the mental health of children impacted by parental incarceration.
- Took a day trip into New York City to watch a **live taping of the Daily Show** with Trevor Noah.
Toy Drive
Bowling With YEP
“Surviving Mass Incarceration” Wilmington, Delaware
The National Children of Incarcerated Parents Conference
Phoenix, Arizona
Solitary Book Signing by Albert Woodfox
Youth Empowerment Retreat
Children of Promise NYC 5K Run
NYC Trip to See the Daily Show
TIME: Tackling Issues Minorities Experience
National Suicide Awareness Week Student Panel
Alternatives to Violence Workshop
Just Mercy Movie Trip
Future Plans for YEP

➢ Travel to local middle schools and high schools to advocate for children of the incarcerated and promote hope and inspiration to pursue higher education.

➢ Plans to volunteer for Petey Greene Program, as one YEP member has been actively involved in the program.

➢ Community service projects to connect incarcerated parents with their children (i.e. recording children’s books, baking with moms).

➢ Go on tours at men and women’s correctional facilities.

➢ Guest speakers from a former juvenile lifer, Echoes of Incarceration, We Got Us Now Campaign, and Osborne Association

➢ School Supply Drive for children directly impacted by parental incarceration