

Evidence Summary

The Impact of Family involvement in the Criminal Justice System (Non-Imprisonment) on Children's Outcomes

Key findings

- There is a need to respond to the risks that could affect all children whose parents are involved with criminal authorities, not just those whose parents are currently in prison.
- Children whose parents are involved with the Criminal Justice System (CJS) have an intergenerational vulnerability to poor outcomes
- Many of the risk factors associated with CJS involvement are also risk factors for child maltreatment
- There is considerable overlap between families involved in the criminal justice and child welfare systems
- This group of children and families has complex needs that would best be served by agencies developing tailored, whole-family approaches through joined-up partnership working.
- Successful outcomes with multifaceted programmes highlight the possibility of addressing the cycle of dysfunction that often characterises the children of parents involved in the CJS

Introduction

Barnardo's Evidence Request Service (ERS) is an internal service, run by the Strategy Unit, to help colleagues within Barnardo's develop their work, based on reliable evidence of 'what works' in practice. The ERS provides concise summaries of the evidence needed to support things such as funding bids or tenders, the design of new services and interventions, or the evaluation of Barnardo's services.

This Evidence Summary looks at the impact of family offending on children's outcomes (non-imprisonment e.g. suspended sentences, community sentences). It supplements evidence already available on children of prisoners.

The Evidence Summary also looks at evidence of interventions that support children of offenders (non-imprisonment).

However, please note that to date, there is little evidence in this area, particularly from the UK. As a result, some of what follows is based on US and Australian research.

Background

Although there are special considerations in working with families where a parent is in prison, child welfare services should not overlook opportunities to improve outcomes for children whose parents are involved at other points within the criminal justice system.ⁱ Research from the US shows that at any given time, far more adults are on probation or serving community sentences than in jail. Probation is also often a precursor to incarceration, so that intervention at this stage is particularly appropriate.ⁱⁱ

Findings from a US review of child protective services case records indicate that many of the problems associated with involvement in the CJS – not just incarceration – are also risk factors for child maltreatment.ⁱⁱⁱ Children whose parents have extensive histories of criminal justice involvement live in families with a significantly greater number of problems than children whose parents have had limited or no contact with the CJS.^{iv} These families tend to have higher levels of substance abuse, domestic violence, extreme poverty, mental illness and inadequate education than the general population. The number of such risk factors children are exposed to increases the odds of children developing serious problems and hence the likelihood of adverse outcomes.^v

Research shows that children whose parents are arrested (not just incarcerated) are more likely than other children in the general population to develop serious problems, such as psychopathology, drug use, and delinquency. This could, in turn, increase the likelihood of their becoming involved with criminal authorities (although not necessarily incarcerated). These findings support the case for intervention for all children whose parents are involved in the CJS, not just those with parents currently in prison.^{vi}

Practice Implications

The presence of such multiple adversities has implications for practice. Cases where parents have been involved with the CJS are generally the most complex the child welfare system encounters.^{vii} The Families Do Matter (2009) report acknowledges this complexity and argues that children and families of offenders would benefit from

agencies working in partnership to offer a comprehensive service that would identify and address the issues they face.^{viii} The overlap between the criminal justice and child welfare systems is demonstrated by the commonalities in risk factors for criminal justice involvement and for child maltreatment.^{ix} Consequently, both the criminal justice and child welfare systems have a stake in effectively addressing these problems.^x

Despite the clear interdependence of the welfare and justice systems, these agencies currently have little experience of partnership working at a local level.^{xi} Criminal justice and child and family welfare services have traditionally maintained boundaries around their areas of responsibility and expertise. With regard to drug-related crime, for example, the focus of the CJS is on risk and reoffending.^{xii} However, where they exist, criminal justice-based substance abuse treatment programmes have been shown to reduce participants drug and alcohol use and criminal recidivism. The criminal justice system's success in treating substance abuse has the potential to reduce child maltreatment and, in turn, the demand for child protection services. By addressing such problems, agencies can improve outcomes of safety, permanency, and well-being for children of parents involved in the CJS.^{xiii}

Similarly, child and family welfare services have traditionally focused on particular aspects of the child's world without necessarily considering the wider family and community context.^{xiv} Families are often simultaneously involved in the criminal justice and child welfare systems. This means that to be truly effective, each service needs to be aware of the role and function of the other. Child protection workers need to collaborate with probation departments to coordinate service plans and ensure a systems-of-care approach to service delivery.

The lack of such a strategic and joined up approach results in duplication, competition and the emergence of gaps in essential services. The success or failure of both child and family and criminal justice services in addressing parents' problems has implications for both services.

When it comes to developing services and planning interventions to support children whose parents are involved with criminal authorities, it is also important to be aware of the differences that exist within this group.^{xv} As noted earlier, these children have complex family backgrounds, often involving substance abuse, domestic violence, parental mental illness and poverty. However, there is no characteristic or problem that occurs in all of the families.^{xvi} Different subgroups of children and families have very different service needs. Intervention and service development has tended to take a one-size-fits all approach. In order to effectively help these children it is important to understand their differing needs and to develop interventions that match those needs.^{xvii}

Interventions

Parents Under Pressure (PUP): The PUP programme is an intensive, individualised programme, specifically designed for use with multi-problem families with young children under 8 years of age.^{xviii} It includes components found in all parenting



interventions, such as child management skills and enhancing the parent-child relationship; however, these are complemented by a series of modules that focus on helping the parents identify and regulate their own emotional states, manage their substance use and extend social networks. A comprehensive assessment of each family's needs is conducted at the initial session and this forms the basis of an individualised treatment programme where specific targets for change are identified. The programme consists of 10 structured modules with all sessions being delivered in the family's place of residence.

Evaluation research from Australia indicates that participation in the PUP programme is associated with reductions in risk of child abuse, parental psychopathology and child behaviour problems for parents on methadone maintenance. No such reductions were found in families who received standard care, while some slight reductions were found for those parents who received a brief intervention.^{xix} For one sub-group of multi-problem families, those involved in the CJS, participation was associated with significant lifestyle improvements, in particular maternal emotional well-being, reduced stress levels in the parenting role and significant improvements in child behaviour outcomes.

Cost Benefit Factors: The following factors are of note when considering the evaluation of PUP:

- The promising outcomes reported in the evaluation research require considerable therapist input and time.
- The home-based nature of the PUP programme means that additional therapist time is spent travelling to and from family homes. However, this offsets any transportation issues and facilitates regular therapist contact despite unexpected crises and family disruption.
- Parents on home detention are able to participate.
- The average number of therapist hours is considerably higher than the number required for the delivery of more traditional group-based parenting programmes such as Webster-Stratton. However, there is accumulating evidence that for multi-problem families, such as those involved with the CJS, more intensive family interventions are required to address a broader range of issues than parenting competence alone.
- Non-custodial sentences enable the offender to remain in the home environment while completing sentencing requirements. Delivering the PUP programme to families in their home environment ensures that treatment is directed at those systems that are both influencing and being influenced by the behaviour of the families.
- The delivery of multisystemic interventions to young people and their families is proving to be a cost-effective way of addressing serious criminal activity among adolescents.
- Future evaluations of intensive family-based interventions for high-risk families should attempt to obtain measures of cost benefit.
- Successful outcomes with this programme highlight the possibility of addressing the cycle of dysfunction that often characterises families involved in the CJS.^{xx}

The PUP programme has similarities with the approach adopted by the UK's Troubled Families programme where family interventions were set up to work with some of the most troubled and challenging families to tackle anti-social behaviour (ASB), youth crime, inter-generational disadvantage and unemployment. They take an intensive and persistent multi-agency approach to supporting families to overcome their problems, coordinated by a single dedicated 'key worker'.^{xxi}

Eden House: Research shows that community sentences are both more effective in reducing reoffending and significantly less expensive than short term prison sentences. Prison exacerbates rather than reduces the problems which cause women, in particular, to offend. Eden House, based in Bristol, was developed in response to the Corston report,^{xxii} which called for a radically different approach to female offenders. It provides a one stop service that engages women in making positive changes to their lives – reducing their propensity to offend and increasing their access to mainstream services in the community such as health, education and training and drug and alcohol services. Eden House focuses on the wider support needs of women in the CJS and seeing women offenders in their family contexts.^{xxiii}

The role of Children's Centres: A pilot scheme in Swindon enabled offenders' appointments with probation to be undertaken in a local children's centre – providing a child-friendly environment and an opportunity to put the families of offenders in touch with the services on offer. Children attended a play session while the meeting with the offender manager took place. The scheme was open to both male and female offenders and has now been extended to all children's centres in the Wiltshire probation area.^{xxiv}

Summary

It is imperative that child welfare workers respond to the unique needs of prisoners' families. However, the child welfare system should not wait for parents to end up in prison before taking action on behalf of children whose parents have involvement with criminal authorities.

Where there is parental involvement with the CJS, it is important to address the parents' support needs, as these can significantly impact on their children. Contact with the CJS provides an ideal opportunity to alert the attention of welfare services to the needs of the family. Identifying children of parents involved with the CJS can enable the development of a tailored whole family approach, through joined up partnership working.^{xxv} Such timely intervention can be protective against negative consequences for children.

**Strategy Unit
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References

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