Coming Home from Prison: Family Matters

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Family issues

- Incarceration not just an individual matter
- Most prisoners are parents.
- Many mothers and fathers had sole responsibility for children’s care prior to incarceration.
- Visits between incarcerated parents and their children infrequent, sometimes not at all
- Female of prisoners primary source of support during incarceration and reentry
- Male-female intimate relationships difficult to maintain, hard to reunify

Study of family matters during reentry

Study methods

- Group interviews (6)/Tennessee, Wisconsin, and New York
  Incarcerated men – To be released within 1 year
  Men on parole – Less than 2 years
- Group interviews (5)/Tennessee, Minnesota, and New York
  Wives and girlfriends of incarcerated men and women on parole
• Individual interviews with 24 men and 20 women
• All participants African American
• Structured questions for groups and individuals

Challenges and stresses

Rebuilding trust
Economic pressures
Secret lives
Promises and expectations/challenging to do right/carrying own weight
Parenting and family life
Parole restrictions

Prison impact

Prison norms not conducive to family life
Prison mentality/hypervigilance, paranoia, violence, no trust
Prison marks a man

Managing the stresses of reentry and reunification

Some don’t manage very well

Resort to violence
Return to street life/drugs, other women, crime, hanging out

Some manage more successfully

Avoid violence through conscious efforts
Walk away
Let her have the last word
Let bygones be bygones
Renegotiate roles and relationships

Build social capital

Pitching in and helping out
Keep your nose clean
Being a good client

Social policy and program recommendations

- Family maintenance during incarceration
- Jobs/job preparation/benefit hookups during incarceration
- Family stipends
- Graduated release/not more time
- From the families

  Preparation for men about family changes

  Information/briefing sessions for families

  Parole contact with family

  Support group for couples