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Adapting Parent Programs for Families Impacted by Incarceration: Community Providers' Perspectives

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Adapting Parent Programs for Families Impacted by Incarceration:
Community Providers' Perspectives

Submitted by Hilary Fasbender
May 2015

MSW Clinical Research Paper

The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/ University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota, and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present their findings. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

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Abstract

Parenting programs are an essential component in assisting mothers and fathers to be effective providers for their children. These programs are important within the community, as well as the parent population within the jail or prison setting. This study explored the perceptions of parent education providers that work within community-based settings, and whether or not these programs can be adapted for incarcerated individuals. Using a qualitative method, interviews were conducted and themes were developed. These themes were compared to the findings from the literature review. This study interviewed two women, ages twenty-two and forty-six, both of which work in community-based parenting programs. The data gathered from interview transcriptions was analyzed and themes were developed. The themes that arose were the importance of being aware of parent needs and getting to know your clients. Findings revealed common themes in the importance of adjusting to your audience, and in the importance of understanding how a parent's childhood can often influence their current parenting habits. Further resource would be helpful on the effectiveness of parenting programs, as this is an area of limited study.

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Introduction

The rising rates of incarceration in the United States is a growing problem in this country for many reasons, many of which have a strong impact upon the family members of the incarcerated individuals. The detrimental affects of incarceration impact both the imprisoned individual and their families in ways that include financial burdens, stigma, and difficulty maintaining relationships.

Financial burdens that impact families of incarcerated individuals are seen through lost wages or absence of income, as well as expenses associated with maintaining relationships with family members while in jail or prison. These expenses can be illustrated through looking at the cost of one prison visit by one family member: An average visit costs about 80 dollars, which includes bus tickets for travel, money for food and drinks, and money to give the inmate for commissary (Christian, Mellow, & Thomas, 2006).

In addition to financial burdens, the social stigma associated with maintaining a relationship with an incarcerated individual can often be overwhelming. While an individual is working to maintain a relationship with the prisoner, they may be sacrificing social outlets for themselves due to the stigma that is related to a relationship with an inmate (Christian, et al., 2006). Incarceration also has extreme effects on the children of these individuals. For example, children of incarcerated mothers are considered one of the most vulnerable and at-risk populations due to the disruption in attachment they

experience when one of their caregivers are taken away from them (Dallaire, 2006). In recent years, incarceration rates in the United States have continued to rise. In 2014 there were 2.2 million people in jails or prisons, a 500% increase from 30 years ago (The Sentencing Project, 2014). Over the past 12 years, incarceration rates have risen among both males (6.1% per year), and females (11.2% per year) (Dallaire, 2006). In 2008, break down of incarceration rates indicated a great deal of racial disparity for the incarcerated population. African Americans made up one million of the 2.3 million incarcerated populations, and they are incarcerated almost six times more often than whites. African American and Hispanics made up 58 percent of prisoners in 2008, despite the fact that they only make up about 25 percent of the United States population (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 2009).

The incarceration of a family member is considered an adverse childhood experience (ACE). The Minnesota Department of Health defines an ACE as “a traumatic experience in a person’s life occurring before the age of 18 that a person remembers as an adult (www.health.state.mn.us, 2013).” There are nine types of adverse childhood experiences, and they are: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, mental illness of a household member, alcoholism of a household member, illegal street or prescription drug use by a household member, divorce or separation of a parent, domestic violence towards a parent, and incarceration of a household member (www.health.state.mn.us, 2013).

Abuse makes up 59.6% of all adverse childhood experiences (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 1997). 10.6% of this abuse is emotional, 28.3% is physical, and

childhood experiences, comprising 87% of all ACEs. 12.7% deal with mother treated violence, 26.9% is household substance abuse, 19.4% involve mental illness within the household, 23.3% involve parent separation or divorce, and 4.7% deal with having an incarcerated family member. These percentages do not add up to 100% because many households suffer from multiple ACEs (CDC, 1997).

In addition to the trauma that can arise from having an incarcerated parent, social stigmas associated with incarceration may arise prior to, during, or after a family member's incarceration. The process of maintaining contact with family members in jail or prison can hinder a family's social capital because they may have to sacrifice time with other family members, and may also be seen in a negative way because they are associating with someone who is incarcerated (Christian, Mellow, & Thomas, 2006).

Incarceration impacts loved ones of the incarcerated in many ways, including increased potential for children to be incarcerated and difficulty in maintaining a relationship with the incarcerated individual. Nearly one in 40 children in the United States are impacted by incarceration (Barr, Brito, Zocca, Reina, Rodriguez, & Shauffer, 2011). Parental incarceration can also lead to a future in the corrections system for the children. One study indicated that of 1,427 incarcerated parents with an adult child, 21% of mothers and 8.5% of fathers had an adult child who had been incarcerated (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008).

In addition to the aforementioned challenges, there are specific considerations that factor into whether and to what end each family member can or should maintain relationships with a parent who is incarcerated (Christian et al., 2006). It goes without saying that having an incarcerated family member impacts each family member to some

end and can be a very traumatic experience for each family member (Komorosky, 2004). This emotional trauma—while hard to liken to other trauma—has been compared to what it is like for a family member to die (Komorosky, 2004). Unfortunately, there are even more considerations and possible downfalls specific to allowing children to maintain a healthy relationship with a parent who is incarcerated. One of the downfalls mentioned is the high cost visitations can bring for the family. When looking at the positive aspects they dealt mostly with the benefits for the individual who is incarcerated. The research states that family visits are an inmate's link to the outside world, as well as a way for the incarcerated individual to gain emotional support (Christian, et al., 2006).

Other downfalls to maintaining a relationship with incarcerated family members include the fact that a prison environment is not ideal for children. Although visitation has been a feature of prisons for a very long time, it is not always embraced by the corrections staff, which can make it an uncomfortable environment for children (Mears, Cochran, Stennick, & Bales, 2011). If prison staff members are not fond of visitation times for inmates, they will most likely neglect any efforts to make the environment welcoming for family members. Children are often placed in one room, and only able to make contact with their parent through a glass window. Children are also forced to be in an unfamiliar place, and most of the time there are no toys or games for the visitation, which can also make the situation very uncomfortable or scary (Barr, Brito, Zocca, Reina, Rodriguez, & Shauffer, 2011). The ambience of the prison atmosphere can further contribute to children's sense of discomfort when visiting their parents (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008).

Optimistically, visitations and some resources available can help children maintain their relationship with an incarcerated parent, and can also help mitigate some of the negative outcomes and secondary trauma associated with a parent being incarcerated. Komorosky (2004) discussed therapeutic interventions utilized with families to help children overcome past and current trauma that is brought on by having an incarcerated parent, while some federal institutions implement parenting programs that work to assist parents in developing the skills necessary for maintaining a healthy relationship with their children during and after incarceration (Barr, et al., 2011).

Currently, programs and resources aimed to support ongoing visitation as a means for incarcerated parents and their children to stay connected are limited. There are several programs within the correctional setting that have been implemented to assist in developing parental skills for the inmates, as well as providing a safer and more welcoming environment for family visitations. One of these programs is the Baby Elmo Program. This program, aimed at juvenile parents who are serving time in a detention center, was specifically designed for facilities with limited financial resources and minimal outside staffing (Barr, Brito, Zocca, Reina, Rodriguez, & Shauffer, 2011). First, the program works to provide parenting resources and classes to teach young inmates how to become better parents for their children. Parents are allowed to visit with their children after the classes are completed. The Baby Elmo Project also works to turn the correction setting into a more comfortable environment for the children. This involves providing toys and games, and making the visitation rooms look more welcoming. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the resources available for individuals who are trying to maintain a relationship with loved ones who are incarcerated.

In addition to the resources available for incarcerated parents and their children, it is also important to consider the types of resources available to parents who are not in jail or prison, but also need some additional assistance with parenting skills. Child maltreatment is not only a risk in households with incarcerated parents. In fact, the children with the highest risk of being maltreated include those in low-income families, those with mothers who have mental illness, those with one or more siblings, and those with developmental delays (Fujiwara, Kato, & Sanders, 2011). All of these factors can also have comorbidity with the experience of parent incarceration. In order to address these issues, it is necessary to incorporate prevention strategies comprising those that are population based, and focus on high-risk families. However, since child maltreatment is such a serious issue, strategies that target high-risk parents are considered the most efficient means of helping distressed parents or parents with difficult children in the short term (Fujiwara, Kato, & Sanders, 2011).

Literature Review

In order to have a better understanding of the importance of parenting programs and whether or not they can be adapted for a jail or prison setting it is necessary to examine the literature regarding these topics. The literature will be used later on to provide a comparison tool when analyzing data gathered and discussed in the methods section. The literature review will examine the areas of: 1. incarcerated parents, 2. community-based parenting programs, 3. prison-based parenting programs, and 4. perceptions on incarceration's impact on the development of healthy attachment. The research gathered will reveal a deficit in the amount of research currently available regarding parenting programs in general. This will later be discussed in the strengths and limitations section of the paper.

Key Concepts Defined

In order to better understand the focus of the literature, the following concepts will be defined: incarceration, jail versus prison, and visitation versus parenting programs.

The first definition is for the term "*incarceration*." The Law Dictionary defines incarceration as "imprisonment; confinement in a jail or penitentiary (thelawdictionary.org). In addition to this, it is important to understand the difference between jail and prison. *Jails* are locally operated places of incarceration, usually ran by the county. There are about 3,600 jails in the United States. The state or federal government operates prisons, and there are only about 100 federal prisons in the United States. A jail serves either as a place for an individual awaiting trial, or for people convicted of a relatively minor crime, and a stay in jail is rarely longer than one or two

years. Individuals who commit federal or state crimes or more severe crimes will serve their time in a federal or state *prison* (criminal-law-lawyer-source.com). A *parenting program* is a program that does not deal with parents interacting directly with their children. Instead it is a program that “helps parents focus on their relationship with their children despite being behind bars and teaches parents effective strategies to manage child behavior that may ease their transition into parenting once released (Miller, Weston, Perryman, Horwitz, Franzen, & Cochran, 2014).” Parental *visitation* is defined as “an official or formal visit (Oxford Dictionary, 2014).”

This literature review will focus on three main components. The first section examines various visitation programs that are already in implementation for individuals with incarcerated family members. The second section focuses on the pros and cons to maintaining a relationship with a parent who is incarcerated, and the third section examines how maintaining a relationship with an incarcerated parent impacts a child’s attachment. This literature review analyzes eight empirical studies that are qualitative and quantitative in nature.

Incarcerated parents. Empirical research specific to incarcerated parents is not well supported by research studies over the past fifteen years (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Without a strong understanding of the incarcerated population it is difficult to understand the specific needs of both the detained individuals and their families. In regards to the individuals being held in jail or prison, maintaining a relationship with family members can be very beneficial for them, and can be a crucial link to the outside world (Christian, Mellow, & Thomas, 2006). There are currently over two million individuals in the correction system at both the state and federal level (Nesmith &

Ruhland, 2008). As of 2007 there were 890,000 parents in jail or prison, which is a 79% increase since 1991 (Barr, Brito, Zocca, Reina, Rodriguez, & Shauffer, 2011). Below is a chart that includes a breakdown of the current population of individuals incarcerated within a federal prison.

With the significant amount of diversity amongst inmates it is important to be aware of how factors such as race, age, gender, and inmate offenses can impact the incarcerated individual's ability to participate in visitation with family members. For example, some incarcerated mothers may be drug dealers. It is in the mother and child's best interest to determine whether the mother is in the right frame of mind to be present in her child's life through parental visitation (Miller, Weston, Perryman, Horwitz, Franzen, & Cochran, 2014).

In recent years the amount of visitation programs in prisons has increased significantly. In a survey conducted in 2010, 90 percent of state-run correctional facilities had parenting programs in female-only facilities; although most of them did not include visitation opportunities (Miller, et al., 2014).

Many of these inmates who have children will participate in a parenting program to help them with their parenting skills when they resume this role upon release from prison or jail.

Table One
Inmate Demographics

Inmate Age	
Under 18	0%
18-21	1.3%
22-25	6.0%
26-30	13.4%
31-35	18.8%
36-40	18.0%
41-45	14.9%
46-50	10.6%
51-55	7.6%
56-60	4.6%
61-65	2.6%
Over 65	2.1%
Inmate Race	
Asian	1.5%
Black	37.4%
Native American	1.9%
White	59.1%
Inmate Ethnicity	
Hispanic	34.5%
Non-Hispanic	65.5%
Inmate Gender	
Male	93.3%
Female	6.7%

Table Two
Inmate Offenses

	Inmate offenses
Banking/embezzlement	0.4%
Burglary, larceny, property offenses	3.9%
Continuing criminal enterprise	0.2%
Courts/corrections	0.4%
Drug offenses	48.8%
Extortion/fraud	6.2%
Homicide, aggravated assault, kidnapping	2.9%
Immigration	10.1%
Miscellaneous	0.8%
National security	0.0%
Robbery	3.7%
Sex offenses	6.6%
Weapons, explosives, arson	15.9%

Community-Based Parenting Programs

Empirical research specific to visitation programs is not well supported in regards to the benefits or drawbacks for the children because they focus mainly on either the benefits for the inmates (Mears, Cochran, Siennick, & Bales, 2011), or the burdens they cause for the non-incarcerated parent to maintain such a relationship (Christian, Mellow, & Thomas, 2006). Although this research is not well supported, there is overall research that finds parenting programs to be extremely beneficial to families. Research on the process and outcome of parent education or training programs over the past twenty years finds that when compared to other psychotherapeutic interventions, parenting programs yield more consistently positive outcomes. These programs are also more beneficial of professional time and cost (Wolfe & Hirsch, 2003).

Listening to Children. Listening to Children (LTC) is a parent education program that implements parent education, parent training, and parent therapy. Although not directly related to incarcerated parents, this program works with parents who are struggling to parent effectively based on various factors (Wolfe & Hirsch, 2003). This program is based around the reevaluation counseling theory, which suggests that people are born with a very strong ability to be cooperative and adaptive. This theory suggests that these abilities diminish when there is an accumulation of distress from an early age. If individuals are able to discharge their emotions in ways such as laughing or crying, they will recover from past trauma and become more effective in looking out for themselves and their loved ones (Wolfe & Hirsch, 2003). The Listening to Children program emphasizes the important of social supports, addressing the emotional roots of children's misbehavior, and the parents' ability to self-reflect (Wolfe & Hirsch, 2003).

The parent group met weekly for two and a half hours on a weekday meeting for eight meetings. The average attendance for participants was seven out of eight classes. The curriculum consisted of readings, in-class activities, and homework assignments. Studies yielded positive results for individuals who participated in the LTC group. Parents who participated in this program had a mean of 23.69 on the parental distress scale, in comparison to a mean score of 32.42 for those who did not receive the treatment (Wolfe & Hirsch, 2003).

Nurturing Parents Program. The child welfare parenting program is designed to work with families who are experiencing high-risk stressors, such as violence, substance abuse, and mental health problems. The program is an intensive, fifteen-week therapeutic parenting program for individuals who are involved in or at risk of becoming involved in the child welfare system. The meetings take place in a group setting, and adults meet every week for about two and a half hours. Topics covered include empathy, effective communication, problem solving, addressing and managing anger, expectations of children's behavior and child development, and different types of discipline. During this time a children's group also meets (Estefan, Coulter, VandeWeerd, Armstrong, & Gorski, 2013).

To analyze the effectiveness of this program, data was obtained through file review and individual interviews. The demographics of this study indicated that most parents were referred to the program for physical abuse towards their children (25% fathers; 20% mothers). Neglect came in second, with 18% of fathers being referred for this reason, and 20% of mothers for this reason. Other referral reasons include intimate partner violence, substance abuse, incarceration, sexual abuse, emotional abuse,

homelessness, and medical neglect (Estefan, et al, 2013). Co-occurring issues for these parents include mental health (18% fathers, 49% mothers); substance abuse (27% fathers, 43% mothers); teen parent (11% fathers, 30% mothers). Other co-occurring factors include violence/conflict, criminal activity, depression, sex offender, Prior TPR, developmental disability (Estefan, et al, 2013).

Standardized scores and paired-samples t tests were used to analyze data in regards to improvements made while in the parenting group. The results showed that parents in all sub-groups improved on each sub-scale. However, even though fathers in the violence and substance abuse sub-groups improved in the oppressing power sub-scale, they were not significant improvements. Mothers in the substance abuse sub-group had the highest scores for oppressing power, and lowest on the sub-scale that measured empathy for child needs (Estefan, et al, 2013).

Triple P-Positive Parenting Program. This is another parenting program that is not related to incarcerated parent, but it does have some valuable components that could be applied to visitation programs for incarcerated parents. The Triple P-Positive Parenting Program is a multilevel system of parenting intervention that aims at improving the quality of resources available to parents. This comprehensive program has five levels of intervention: Promoting self-sufficiency, increasing parental self-efficacy, using self-management tools, promoting personal agency, and promoting problem solving (Sanders, 2008). This program also bases its interventions on five core positive parenting principles: providing a safe and engaging environment, providing a positive learning environment, using assertive discipline, setting realistic expectations, and implementing parental self-care (Sanders, 2008). This program aims to allow parents to use a self-

regulation framework when going through the program. This helps parents to select meaningful goals for themselves and their children. This study discussed problems in keeping members; including, but not limited to, lack of motivation, feeling overwhelmed from too much information, information not being culturally appropriate, and programs not being specific enough to a family's individual needs (Sanders, 2008).

Prison-based Parenting Programs

Parenting While Incarcerated. The first parenting program addressed is the "Parenting While Incarcerated" program, which is based on the existing evidence-based parenting intervention, the Strengthening Families Program. The work was done collaboratively with a community agency that served families with an incarcerated parent. This program assists incarcerated mothers in improving their relationships with their children through a parenting program (Miller, et al., 2014). This specific program implements a curriculum called "Parenting While Incarcerated" with various groups of jailed mothers. The program worked to address the specific needs of a group of mothers, and group leaders gave qualitative feedback that was used to better develop the program.

The participants were various mothers participating in the intervention groups. The group was advertised through fliers and word of mouth, and the group was open to mothers who had children eighteen years of age and under. Women were provided an incentive to participate in the form of a ten-dollar gift card for their child's caregiver or through a ten-dollar credit towards their jail commissary account. 26% of participants were African-American and 63% were Caucasian, with ages ranging from 21 to 48 years old (Miller, Weston, Perryman, Horwitz, Franzen, & Cochran, 2014). Overall, women who participated in this program reported high levels of satisfaction with the program.

The top-rated lessons focused on how to discipline children without spanking them, improving communication skills, and building a strong parent-child relationship even though they are away from one another (Miller, et al., 2014).

Baby Elmo Program. The Baby Elmo Program is geared towards teenage fathers who are currently detained in a juvenile facility (Barr, Brito, Zocca, Reina, Rodriguez, & Shauffer, 2011). A study done in 2007 indicated that of the 890,000 parents who were incarcerated, 92% of them were fathers (Barr, et al., 2011). In order to ensure that these children have a healthy development, it is imperative they maintain a healthy relationship with their parents. A study done by the National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated indicated that one in five children with incarcerated parents showed very significant problems with internalizing problems. These problems were manifested as anxiety, depression, etc. One in three of these children also exhibited problems with externalizing behaviors, such as attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder and aggression (Barr, et al., 2011).

The Baby Elmo Program assists parents in developing the skills necessary for being an effective parent. Some of these skills include discipline, child development, and the ability to parent in the absence of parent-child contact. This program is unique in the fact that it focuses on both parent education and visitation with children (Barr, et al., 2011). Once the parenting classes are completed the inmates can begin the process of setting up visitations with their children. This program's study participants consisted of twenty parent-infant dyads from detention centers in four California counties: Fresno, Yolo, San Bernardino, and Sacramento. The teenage father participants were ages fifteen to eighteen, and the infants were ages six to thirty-six months. Fifteen of the teens were

Hispanic; four were African-American and one was of mixed racial descent (Barr, et al., 2011)

To assess the effectiveness of the program, a case study was conducted at Fresno county Juvenile Justice Campus. This campus was opened on July 22, 2006 as a state of the art juvenile facility that houses 390 minors, 184 of which are in the commitment facility where the Baby Elmo Program is housed (Barr, et al., 2011). The study involved a 17-year old father and his 12-month old daughter. The grandmother served as guardian while the father was incarcerated. For the first three sessions the grandmother stayed close to the child and was the main person who calmed the child down when she became upset. By the fourth session there seemed to be shift in the sense of togetherness. The child was sitting on the father's lap as he read to her, and the communication seemed to be strengthened as well (Barr, et al., 2011).

Similar to the Baby Elmo Program, Crawford County jail in Pennsylvania worked to implement a visitation program aimed towards providing a safe, welcoming environment for visiting children. The jail turned an old library into a room with child-friendly features to help family visitations become more relaxed and welcoming for family members (Fekos, 2014). The visitation program at Crawford County jail has guidelines for the inmates allowed to participate in the program. Inmates must have a record of good behavior and attend all of their required programs, such as drug and alcohol or mental health counseling (Fekos, 2014).

In contrast, there are some programs that take the visitation component to a higher level, implementing an overnight visit for children. An article written by Rachel Costa (2003), states that this type of visitation would cause more harm than benefit for a child,

and that the non-incarcerated parents suffer during these visits because they have constant fear that the incarcerated parent may do something to the child during the overnight visitation.

According to the article, female incarceration has increased 500% since 1980, with an average sentence length of three years and three months. There is a substantial amount of mothers among this population. According to the article a typical female inmate is “a woman of color, in her thirties, and has at least one child (Costa, 2003).” The article discusses the pros and cons of overnight prison visits for children. One side argues that the need to essentially put a child behind bars in order to maintain a relationship with their mother will cause extensive trauma for the child. The counterargument states that children that are given the opportunity to see the parent’s punishment firsthand may have a decreased likelihood of committing a crime because they have been exposed to what could happen to them if they ever became incarcerated (Costa, 2003).

Overall it appears that the programs that incorporated parenting classes and visitation programs were perceived to be the most successful for the inmates. This data can be used to improve other parental visitation programs by possibly incorporating parenting classes into the program.

Maintaining Parent Child Relationships During Incarceration

This section will focus on the data found in the empirical studies regarding necessary interventions in maintaining a parent child relationship during incarceration. This section will discuss settings and strategies that are most ideal for maintaining this relationship.

There is a significant amount of data regarding whether or not a relationship with an incarcerated family member is believed to be a positive thing. Some researchers argue that a child's development can be greatly impacted if the relationship with a parent is interrupted during incarceration. This is supported by Bowlby's theory, which states that secure attachments develop when sensitive and consistent care is present. If separation occurs early in a child's life the child-mother relationship can be severely disrupted (Dallaire, 2006).

In one study conducted by Christian, Mellow, and Thomas (2006) quantitative data was used to examine the pros and cons of a family maintaining a relationship with an incarcerated family member. The study involved over two hundred hours of observations at a support group for family members of inmates, as well as some observations done during bus rides taking family members to prison visitations. This study found mainly negative outcomes for family members who are trying to maintain a relationship with loved ones who are incarcerated. Maintaining this type of relationship can often cause family members to spend less time with other non-incarcerated family members. Maintaining this type of relationship can also cause a great financial burden on the family, which can often result in more stress for the members of the family (Christian, Mellow, & Thomas, 2006).

In another study conducted by Nesmith and Ruhland (2008) 34 children who were directly affected by incarceration and had a parent who was in either prison or jail were interviewed. Qualitative study used open-ended interview questions, and consistently collected data from each family over a yearlong period. Part of the interview involved

asking the children to share their experiences on what it is like to have a parent who is incarcerated (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008).

The interviews yielded five common themes among all the children interviewed. The first theme was social challenges. Children who had an incarcerated parent struggled to form bonds and relationships with individuals outside their family because of the interruption in parental relationship. Relationships are also difficult for the children because they are often stigmatized when someone finds out they have a parent who is incarcerated (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008).

The next theme in the article is child's awareness of adult needs. When a parent is incarcerated it often puts a great deal of stress on the non-incarcerated parent. Sometimes it is very difficult for the child to understand this, and they struggle to be compassionate and understanding towards the additional stress their parents are going through (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). A third theme deals with the caregiver being held responsible for maintaining the relationship between the child and the incarcerated parent. This can be difficult for the children because their perceptions will go one of two ways. Either the child will internalize and reciprocate the feelings of the non-incarcerated parent, or they will develop their own feelings towards the incarcerated parent, and these feelings may be completely different than those of the non-incarcerated parent (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008).

The fourth theme deals with the child's perception of prison and sentencing. Children were asked what came to mind when they heard the word "prison." Fifty-seven percent of the children interviewed stated that they had never visited their parent in prison. One child's perception was that "It wasn't safe there because there were a lot of

people that just looked like, just looked real bad and this and that. There was a lot of arguing with other people (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008).” The final theme highlighted resiliency and coping. The interviews indicated a high level of resiliency amongst the children who participated. Overall, most children spoke in a positive light, and spoke lovingly about their family and friends. Despite this, all the children also experienced a level of stress resulting from having a parent in prison. Some experienced it directly, as one of their parents were missing from their life, and others experienced in a more indirect way, because the incarceration caused a great deal of stress on the non-incarcerated parent (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008).

Through the information obtained in the study mentioned above, we learn that all children are impacted differently from parental incarceration. For some children it can be considered a positive thing to have their parents locked up, while some children are impacted in a negative way when they have a parent in jail. Because this study examined such a small group of children, it would be dangerous to make generalizations from this study (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008).

Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. The Bedford Hills Correctional Facility and the Taconic Correctional Facility find it very important for mothers to maintain a relationship with their children, even while behind bars. These facilities house thirty-two women and their babies. This program allows mothers to be with their children overnight, and provides a daycare center for the children during the day. During this time the mothers are working or taking classes within the prison. The babies are allowed to stay in this program up to eighteen months (Libman, 1990). Supporters of this program believe that it is in the child’s best interest to spend the beginning of his or her life with

their mother. Supporters also believe that there are many positives to keeping mothers out of prison. Most importantly, it would allow children to be raised by their parents (Libman, 1990).

Perceptions on Incarceration's Impact on the Development of Healthy Attachment

Bowlby was a very important individual in the theory of attachment. In 1984 he proposed the idea that infant attachment relationships determine how working models of self and others are formed and that these working models play a role in a child's ability to regulate themselves and develop positive personalities (Fairchild, 2009). Haught, Kagle, and Black (2003) did a study on how parental visitations can impact a child's ability to develop healthy attachment patterns. They found that when parent visitation is scheduled face-to-face, it is considered the primary intervention for maintaining and enhancing the development of the parent-child relationship so that they can continue a positive relationship once they are reunified (Haught, Kagle, & Black, 2003). Having a parent absent for a portion of a child's life can have many negative effects on their life. A child who is unable to have a consistent relationship with their parent can have problems developing healthy attachment patterns. This is no exception for children with incarcerated parents. They are at an increased risk for insecure attachment, which results from a relationship with a main caregiver who is inconsistent, insensitive, or unresponsive to the child's needs (Shlafer, Gerrity, Ruhland, & Wheeler, 2013).

According to John Bowlby separation from parents is traumatic regardless of what age a child is. Separation from a primary caregiver for long amounts of time during infancy and childhood is especially detrimental for a child's attachment (Dallaire, 2007). Specifically, children separated from their mothers and placed into foster care indicate

that these children are especially at risk for developing disorganized attachment (Dallaire, 2007). Dallaire's (2007) article analyzed individuals at the following stages: infancy to young child, school-aged child, and adolescents. One study done on children from infancy to young adult stated that 63% of the children who had incarcerated mothers did not have secure attachments to their current caregiver or the incarcerated mother (Dallaire, 2007).

School-aged children experience a difficulty to establish a familiar and helpful academic environment because of the displacement they experience. It can also make it difficult for them to succeed academically, and also cause them to have behavioral issues within the school setting (Dallaire, 2007). Adolescence is a time when it is very important to develop the ability to maintain a balance between being an individual and being able to maintain relationships with others. Adolescents with incarcerated parents struggle with these skills, and are much more likely to exhibit deviant behaviors and participate in gangs (Dallaire, 2007).

Conceptual Framework

The theories used as the conceptual framework for this project are the attachment theory and the object relations theory. These theories serve as the lens through which the paper will be analyzed and provide a basis for the research study. These theories will be used to understand the impact of incarceration on the parent and child dyad.

Attachment Theory

From a professional standpoint I feel I am extremely aware of the importance of healthy attachment. My experiences working with youth in a residential treatment setting have shown me that when a child's attachment is disrupted at an early age, the long-term effects can be detrimental. I have witnessed firsthand that youth at every age struggle to form healthy relationships when one of their caregivers have been removed from their lives. I have also witnessed residents who only get inconsistent visits from parents. I see the acting out that ensues after a parent cancels a visit, or simply chooses not to show up. At this point it seems like the child would benefit more from having the parent completely absent, instead of putting the child through the agony of wondering when they will see their parents again. This can also be related to visits with parents who are incarcerated. It is important to ask whether or not visitations are beneficial to the child.

From a personal lens I do not feel like I have a great deal of experience with unhealthy attachment. I am fortunate enough to have both of my parents present in my life, and they have been since the day I was born. I have a very close friend whose father was absent from her life between the ages of seven and fifteen. I watched her grow up and seek out attention from males in any way she could, even negative attention that came from promiscuous behavior. It appeared that since she was unable to form a

healthy attachment with her father she instead formed unhealthy attachments with other men. When I was a teenager I had no idea why she chose to behave the way she did, and now that I have taken classes and worked in residential treatment I have a very strong understanding of why she behaved the way she did. It is important to remember that unhealthy attachment manifests itself in different ways based on factors such as age, gender, culture, etc.

In order to have a sense of understanding regarding the effects parental incarceration has on a child, it is important to view it from a theoretical standpoint. Attachment theory provides a framework for gaining a better understanding for this situation. Bowlby (1991) spoke of attachment as something that was essential for a long, healthy life. In 1990 he wrote about Charles Darwin's chronic illness. He attributed these illnesses to the fact that his mother had passed away when Charles was very young. Bowlby believed that Darwin became ill because he was never fully able to mourn his mother's death. This rationale can be related to the idea that children who experience a loss early on in life will struggle to fully cope with this loss.

This conceptual framework focuses on the *attachment theory*, and how visitation and parenting programs within the jail or prison setting influence a child's attachment. Bowlby defined attachment as "any form of behavior that results in a person attaining or maintaining proximity to some other clearly identified individual who is conceived as better able to cope with the world. It is most obvious whenever the person is frightened, fatigued, or sick, and is assuaged by comforting and caregiving (Bowlby, 1982, p. 668)." Bowlby's first article regarding attachment appeared in 1969, and explained the idea that having an attachment figure available provides a sense of security, and encourages a

person to continue to pursue a relationship to the individual who is providing the secure feelings. It is most obvious during a child's early year, but is present throughout an individual's entire life, especially in difficult times (Bowlby, 1982).

Bowlby worked with two other individuals who greatly aided in the development of the attachment theory. Hinde published many of his own works about development, and also helped Bowlby with his works. Mary Ainsworth began her studies in the late 1950s and had been pioneering studies of attachment behavior both in Africa and the United States (Bowlby, 1982). Bowlby summarized attachment theory in the paragraph below:

“To say of a child (or older person) that he is attached to, or has an attachment to, someone means that he is strongly disposed to seek proximity to and contact with that individual and to do so especially in certain specified conditions. (Bowlby, 1982, p. 669).”

There is a significant amount of data regarding whether or not a relationship with an incarcerated family member is believed to be a positive thing. Some researchers argue that a child's development can be greatly impacted if the relationship with a parent is interrupted during incarceration. This is supported by Bowlby's theory, which states that secure attachments develop when sensitive and consistent care is present. If separation occurs early in a child's life the child-mother relationship can be severely disrupted (Dallaire, 2006).

Attachment in today's society is perceived much differently than it was when Bowlby first introduced the theory in the 1960s. At this time Bowlby explained that food was the primary necessity for children, and the personal relationship was considered secondary (Bowlby, 1982). Currently, attachment is considered the most crucial component in ensuring a child's healthy development. Children who experience the

absence of a parent experience extreme trauma including anxiety, shame, and sadness. As the child develops into a teenager they often search for attention in negative ways such as acting out (Costa, 2003).

Optimally, it would be beneficial for children to live a life where healthy attachment is present throughout. According to Bowlby, healthy attachment occurs when a child “experiences a warm intimate and continuous relationship with his mother...in which a mother had to care for her child 24 hours a day, day in and day out, with no respite (Bowlby, p. 667).” When a child knows that an attachment figure is available and will respond to him or her it provides a deep feeling of security, and encourages the child to continue the relationship (Bowlby, 1982)

When a child experiences the absence of a parent, due to incarceration or another contributing factor, they endure negative effects, including a disruption to their attachment. Since secure attachments form through care that is consistent and nurturing, a separation early in a child’s life can cause severe disruption to the formation, development, and maintenance of parent-child relationships (Dallaire, 2006). In addition to this, children of incarcerated parents also have an increased risk of depression, anxiety, behavior problems, cognitive delays, and problems in school (Shlafer, et al., 2013).

It is crucial to make a strong attempt to maintain a relationship between parents and children during the incarceration period, in order to assist youth in continuing to develop healthy attachment. In these types of situations it is often up to the caregiver to serve as a connection between the child and the incarcerated parent. The caregiver is often responsible for deciding whether or not the child should receive phone calls or mail from the incarcerated parent, and whether or not visitations would be beneficial for the

child (Shlafer, et al., 2013). Approximately 54 percent of incarcerated individuals with a minor child have not seen their children since incarceration (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). It is important to determine whether or not it is in the child's best interest to maintain a relationship with a parent during incarceration. Nesmith and Ruhland (2008) conducted a study that interviewed children with an incarcerated parent. In this study nearly all children indicated that they wished to maintain an active relationship with the incarcerated parent, even when they experienced hurt, angry, or fearful feelings towards them. These desires are often contradicted by the caregiver's attitudes towards visitation. Often, caregivers feel that visitations will cause the children more harm than good. This can cause children to have feelings of resentment towards the caregivers, as indicated in the following quote by a child who was interviewed: "I would like to see my mom more but my auntie don't like me seeing her... she's clean, but I don't know why my auntie don't want me seeing her (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008, p. 1125)."

Parent-child visitation is not only beneficial for the child, but also has positive effects for the parent who is incarcerated. Post-release success is higher among inmates who have maintained family ties during the incarceration, and the ability to maintain contact with a parent during the separation period will alter the parent-child relationship. This will result in an easier adjustment for the child (Barr, et al., 2011)

Object Relations Theory

Although I have not had much experience working with the object relations theory from a social work perspective, I have encountered it quite often from a professional lens. I immediately think of one of my students when I reflect on the theory and its components. This student has made great gains this year in regards to his

academics and his social skills. He no longer exhibits aggressive or unsafe behaviors, both of which were extremely prevalent last year. When staff praises him he is unable to accept the positive comments. Instead he finds something negative to point out about himself. He also has an annoyed tone to his voice all the time, regardless of whether he is happy, sad, angry, etc. After meeting his mother everything becomes validated. His mother has the same annoyed tone in her voice regardless of her mood, and she always has something negative to say, even if we are reporting good news. It is crucial to remember that our clients are a product of their environment. We need to be mindful of the fact that we will be unable to effectively assist our clients without an understanding of where they are coming from.

In regards to my personal lens I reflect on the fact that I am a lot like my mother. My mother is a teacher, and I became a teacher because of what I saw her doing. She wears her heart on her sleeve and tends to be very emotional at times, and I know I inherited those tendencies from her. I am fortunate enough to perceive myself as having positive outcomes in regards to the object relations theory. It is important for me to have an understanding of how I can work with clients who are living in an environment with a lot of negative external factors.

In addition to the attachment theory lens that is used to interpret the effects of parent incarceration, object relations theory can also provide us with a framework for interpreting this relationship. The theory of object relations refers to interpersonal relationships. The term *object* refers to things that will satisfy a need (St. Clair, 2004). Object relations formulations share the idea that human beings are social animals and that relationships greatly impact our development. The term object relations originally

referred to the quality of a person's external relationships, but was later used to describe the internal images we have of ourselves and others (Goldstein, 2001).

In an optimal situation children would have exposure to positive external relationships so that the development of their internal skills would be positive and beneficial. Family is extremely crucial in the development of such skills. They are the fundamental unit responsible for health, education, and well being of a child. In order to develop healthy attachment a child needs an appropriate social environment, which includes a supportive social network, the ability to make a living, and a sense of community and belonging (Hamburg, 1992).

Children with incarcerated parents are automatically placed at a higher risk for the development of negative behaviors because their circle of security is interrupted. There is a great deal of controversy regarding whether the positive outweighs the negative when it comes to parent-child visitation within the jail or prison setting. Some skeptics believe that by allowing children to visit parents in prison it could potentially desensitize them to prison, which would reduce the preventive effect of incarceration (Costa, 2003).

Children with incarcerated parents are at risk of developing disorganized attachment because they do not have the skills needed to gain and maintain the attention of the caregiver. Once study done by Dallaire (2006) found that 60 percent of children within the population sample did not have secure attachment to their caregivers or their incarcerated mother (Dallaire, 2006).

Optimistically, if visitation programs are implemented effectively there is hope that the parent-child dyad can be strengthened, and the child's attachment abilities improved. One study concluded that over the course of multiple visitation sessions the

emotional responsiveness of a child increases, and the strength of the parent-child dyad increased as well (Barr, et al., 2011).

In order to function successfully a child needs an environment where they feel safe and taken care of. Bowlby described this type of environment as a place where parental interaction plays a huge role in the development of the child's personality. These interactions are influenced especially by early experiences with the child's parents (Bowlby, 1989). This safe haven becomes strained, or often non-existent when a child loses his or her parent to incarceration. Studies show that incarceration disrupts the structure of the family because the imprisonment creates an emotionally unstable environment (Christian, Mellow, & Thomas, 2006). Although a safe haven cannot be completely saved through parent visitation, it can be greatly improved for a child because it can often reduce a child's tendency for internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Dallaire, 2007).

Security is present when children have a consistent caregiver, particularly in the first years of life. Research shows that if parents take the time to evaluate how they care for their children, they will find the significant impact that experiences from early years have on the child (Stavans, 1999). Security is often disrupted when a parent is taken away from them during incarceration. This occurs emotionally, but there are also many physical burdens that ensue, including loss of income and childcare assistance, and the addition of new expenses (Christian, Mellow, & Thomas, 2006). An attempt to preserve this secure base can be achieved through an awareness of the type of relationship that will be most beneficial for family members. If visits are becoming too much of a financial or

emotional burden, it is important to reevaluate them and make changes if necessary (Christian, Mellow, & Thomas, 2006).

Method

The qualitative research explored providers' perspectives regarding the ways which community parenting programs can be adapted for families impacted by incarceration. For this study, information regarding community-based parenting programs was utilized to determine effective ways to help incarcerated individuals improve their parenting skills. The data gathered from community service providers was used to implement parenting programs within jails or prisons.

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to gather information regarding community-based parenting programs to determine whether or not these programs can be implemented for parents who are in jail or prison. The research design for this study was qualitative, and information was obtained through interviews containing open-ended questions. The open-ended responses provided a great deal of in-depth responses from participants.

Sample

The sampling technique for this study was snowball sampling. Subjects were obtained through investigation into some the parenting resource organizations in implementation throughout the state of Minnesota. Emails of inquiry were sent to various organizations, and organizations that expressed interest were pursued to determine whether or not employees were willing to participate in the survey. During the interview the researcher inquired to see if the interviewee had any recommendations of individuals who would be beneficial to pursue for an interview. Through snowball sampling additional individuals were obtained. Data was collected from the interviews and analyzed to determine whether or not it correlated with the research study.

Protection of Human Subjects

The study was approved by the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board (IRB). In order to protect human participants, an informed consent was reviewed and signed by each of the participants. The researcher reviewed the informed consent form with each participant to ensure they understood the process they were participating in. The consent form complied with the University of St. Thomas IRB and Protection of Human Subject guidelines, including the thorough explanation of confidentiality of the respondent during the interview process. Password protected files are used to ensure the information was kept confidential, and the researcher is the only person with access to the passwords and information. The confidential information will be destroyed in January 2018, and the paper contains no names or other identifying information for the case study participants.

Overall, risk was minimal in this study. Care was taken to reduce risk by seeking out professionals working within parenting programs, instead of seeking out parents or children involved with these programs. Also, participation in this study was voluntary, and care was taken to make sure that these interviews remained confidential. Participation was also kept secret from the other individuals who worked at the agency. Emails were sent to individual workers, and a response was given directly to the researcher to avoid other staff members knowing about the interviews.

Data Collection

The data was collected through a semi-structured questionnaire in the form of a face-to-face interview. The questionnaire consisted of twelve open-ended interview questions. During the interviews some of the questions were modified for follow-up

questions, or to clarify information that the participant found unclear. The interviews were recorded using a recording device, and participants were notified that they would be recorded during the interview. The interviews lasted approximately thirty minutes long. The interviews took place in private locations with no other individuals around, to ensure confidentiality for the participants. Following the interview recordings of the interview were transcribed and this information was analyzed. There are no incentives offered for participation, and the participants will be informed that there will be no direct benefits or risks in participating in the research.

The questions were designed to gather information regarding participants' experiences working with parenting programs, and their impressions about their effectiveness. Respondents were also asked to provide thorough information regarding the type of work they have done with community-based parenting programs. The questions also addressed the participants' opinions on the positive and negative aspects of parenting programs, as well as the benefits and drawbacks these programs have for the children involved. Other questions were aimed at gathering information regarding the ability to implement these programs within jail or prison settings.

Data Analysis

All interview responses collected were thoroughly examined. The responses were coded, and the researcher found common themes among the responses. These themes were drawn from the interview, and some subthemes were identified as well. The findings will focus mainly on the themes that were present in both interviews. The themes will be compared to previous literature related to this topic.

Sample

The recruitment process yielded two participants for the survey. Both work within community-based parenting resource center settings, the pseudo-names of Maria and Liz are used. Maria is a 22-year old female who has been working with the program for years, and Liz is a 46-year old female who has been with the program for twenty years.

Findings

The interviews resulted in the development of two main themes: 1. The importance of being aware of the parents' needs and 2. Getting to know your clients. Within the theme of parent needs there were three subthemes including self-care for parents, adjusting to your audience, and providing the parents with tools for their "parenting toolbox." Within the theme of getting to know clients, three subthemes also arose. These subthemes are: gathering information about the past, helping parents set goals, and being aware of parent challenges.

Although the participants were from the same agency, both had different roles within the organization. The following is a breakdown of the themes that emerged within the interviews.

The Importance of Being Aware of the Parents' Needs

Self-care for parents. Both interview participants indicated that one of their first priorities when working with a parent is making sure they are taking care of themselves. Both women shared about times that they encouraged their clients to make sure they are taking care of themselves to ensure they are in the appropriate state to care for their children. Liz discussed several examples of strategies that are given to parents to assist them in regulating their emotions and helping them keep their composure during times of stress.

My favorite thing to do is give glasses out, because we would tell parents if you're feeling frustrated, if you go take a drink of water it actually lowers your body core temperature and by doing that you're calming yourself and you're able to regulate yourself. Whatever is making you frustrated; you can come down from there.

Some of the self-care involves things that the agency can provide, such as glasses to teach parents coping skills that can help them improve their anger or anxiety, while some of the

self-care involves encouraging parents to do things for themselves. Marie provided several examples of situations in which she encouraged parents to find their own ways to provide themselves with self-care.

We have clients who have mental health issues or chemical dependency issues and if they're in that survival mode they aren't in learning mode and won't pick up on what we are saying. I always try to focus on helping them get to a good spot first, so that they can actually take care of themselves. This week a mom came in and she had dyed her hair because I told her to do something for herself. I asked her how she feels and she said I look better and feel better. So now that she feels better and her self-esteem is higher I feel like I can actually help her.

Regardless of the level of involvement the organization has in helping parents with self-care, both participants indicated that it is very important to make sure the parents are taking care of themselves before they can adequately take care of their children.

Adjusting to your audience. Another subtheme that arose from both interviews is the importance of adjusting the content and information so that it is relevant for the group of people in the program. Liz works predominantly with parents in extreme cases, where they are very close to losing custody of their children. Marie goes into jails and does parenting classes for the inmates, as well as parenting education classes for the community. Both respondents indicated that it is very important to be aware of the group you are working with, and to adjust the group content to these individuals. Marie mentioned the importance of not overwhelming your audience, but also making sure that it does not seem like you are trying to simplify the content too much. Marie shared that causing clients to feel overwhelmed or belittled will often result in complete disengagement from the program.

The other day I was talking about the MCA and they were like, "Well, the teachers give us the graphs and I don't know what they are." And that's when I notice sometimes we know what things are but our clients don't know what they are. Like I said, we really need to take our audience into consideration, but we also don't

want to undermine them. I work with a lot of Latinos and a lot of people unfortunately say, "They're not gonna know it in English so we won't talk about it." But if you don't expose them to different things they aren't gonna learn different things. You need to find a balance. You don't want them to feel ignorant but you also don't want to overwhelm them.

Marie indicated that it is very important to find balance in the way you interact with your clients to minimize the amount of discomfort and anxiety they endure during the process of parenting assistance.

In addition to this, Marie also brought up the fact that a lot of the parents she works with struggle with severe and persistent mental illness. In these cases she works with them to establish what their basic needs are before addressing their parenting needs. Marie stated that *"If they are in survival mode they aren't in learning mode and won't pick up on what we are saying so I always try to focus on helping them get to a good spot first."* In addition to this, Marie also discussed the fact that curriculums are often ineffective for a group of parents, especially when she goes into the detention centers. She stated that often she will have parents with children in their 20s and 30s, meaning that a lot of the parenting skills curriculums would be irrelevant.

Even though both women work with significantly different groups of parents, Liz also expressed the importance of adjusting to your audience when delivering a parenting curriculum. Liz works with clients who are going through extreme cases, in which Children in Need of Protection (CHIPS) petitions have been filed, and there is a high likelihood of losing parental custody. Liz referenced the fact that parents are often being faced with poverty or other financial hardships, which makes it impossible to parent effectively when their basic needs are not being met. In these cases Liz says that it is important to help this audience address their own needs first:

If they don't have enough food, or if their energy is being shut off or things like that, then they're not going to be able to do all the other things to be a good parent for those children, so we will help them tap into various resources.

Liz reiterated the fact that regardless of the client group you work with, it is always important to see people as individuals. Both Liz and Marie addressed that people are not going to be engaged in the parenting program if they feel it does not benefit them.

Marie illustrated this point when she discussed the program she works in, and explained that when a program provides valuable and relevant information for clients, they are more apt to remain engaged and committed to participation.

I do not focus so much on how to discipline. I focus more on actually establishing a relationship because that is what I was doing when I brought a curriculum and they were like, "well my kids are 18 and this doesn't apply to me." I was setting myself up for failure so I don't do that anymore and I just focus on having a positive relationship.

Liz went on to share about times when she used to work in the detention centers, and the importance of being aware of the group you are working with. She advised not to throw out information containing lots of statistics at parenting groups, because this is an easy way to cause most parents to disengage.

Providing clients with a valuable parenting toolbox. The final subtheme for parenting needs is the importance of providing clients with tools and resources to add to their toolbox. Both interview subjects indicated multiple times that a parent who is in survival mode will not be able to use effective parenting skills for their children. Both Marie and Liz discussed the fact that most clients that seek parenting help are also struggling with poverty, mental health issues, and a lack of knowledge of available resources. Both women brought up the fact that in each session with clients, they encourage the parents to verbalize any needs they might have. They always ask the

clients what they can do to be helpful, and to make things easier for the parents. Both women described a resource that is heavily used throughout the county, called the Anonymous county resource listing. This list contains a wide variety of different resources that clients may need, including domestic abuse hotlines, food and clothing resources, homeless shelters, case facilitators, areas social workers, and many other resources for families. Often a client struggles to seek support, because they do not have the skills or tools necessary to do so. In a situation like this, Marie tries to ease the client's anxiety by providing resources that will meet a variety of different needs.

Sometimes there's like... That anxiety of approaching a different agency because they've already come to me and they've never met me so I always try to accompany them. I always try to be as helpful as possible to get a close network together for that person.

The interviews both gathered a great deal of information about the importance of providing parents with the resources that are necessary for basic survival, before parenting skills can be successfully taught. Both women shared about different ways they have provided their clients with tools for their toolbox. Often times this involves figuring out which areas the clients would like to improve on. Liz shared that during a session she begins by finding out where the client's skills and abilities lie, so she has a better understanding of what the client needs.

One of the most popular curriculums is the love and logic curriculum. Now, for people who are in a lot of chaos, love and logic is probably not a good fit. So a lot of times we have to find out where they're at, and meet them where they're at, and kind of go from there. One of the things we do is called a road map. We have them plot... we tell them they need to be very honest and up front so that we can truly have an understanding of where they're at.

Throughout both interviews the participants emphasized the importance of remembering parents often struggle with parenting duties because of a skills deficit. They reiterated

that in their experience, individuals often need to be taught these skills, and provided with resources to help them further develop their parenting skills.

Getting to Know Clients

Gathering information about the past. The second theme that arose from both interviews was the importance of getting to know your clients. Both women that were interviewed indicated that clients are less likely to engage in the program if they do not feel that they are being heard. If the group facilitator does not take the time to find out information about the parents there will be a higher chance of group members becoming easily disengaged.

The first subtheme within the theme of getting to know clients is that of gathering past information. Both Liz and Marie shared that the majority of parent clients have endured some extremely traumatic events in their past, which can often be reflected in their parenting styles. Liz shared that she does an activity in which she encourages parents to share honestly about experiences from their past:

One of the things we do is have them identify who it was that really raised them... So we have them fill out a diagram that looks a lot like a flower. They put the person who raised them in the center petal. The petals on the outside are the different characteristics. If they are incarcerated they've obviously made life choices that have led them in a way that they don't want to be.

Throughout these types of activities the respondents both emphasized the importance of being honest in these activities. Marie and Liz shared that even though many of the clients they work with have done things in the past that they are not proud of, it is imperative that they are open and honest. Both respondents reiterated that honesty it is very difficult, if not impossible, to help these clients. Marie talked about exercises she

conducted with her clients that require them to map out their past, and indicate areas in which they made poor choices:

What I do when I first see them is a project called a road, where they come and... it's just a white piece of paper and a Sharpie and I say, "Where do you think the problem started?" We do a timeline of events to where they are currently at, and we focus from there on goal setting for what they want to learn.

Both interview subjects emphasized the importance of gathering information about the client's past. Both respondents said that gaining a clear picture of the type of upbringing the parents experienced, as well as an awareness of any past trauma, can often be the most effective way of determining why the client has deficits in his or her parenting abilities.

Goal setting for the parent. In order to assist clients in strengthening their parenting abilities, it is imperative that the program facilitators have an idea of the areas in which parents wish to improve. Both Liz and Marie indicated that they always ask clients to share the goals they have in terms of parenting. This often determines the type of approach that will be taken within the program sessions. Liz shared that she first has clients create a road map to plot past events in their lives. After the client has shared about his or her past, she will encourage them to formulate the goals they want to achieve, "... *Many of times being the reunification with their children.*" Liz went on to discuss the importance of first focusing on parents' strengths, and then trying to figure out where their weaknesses lie. Liz emphasized the importance of being strengths based when it comes to helping parents improve their parenting skills.

Through setting those goals we are able to find the things they do really, really well. We are also able to find out where the weaknesses are, and then we can bring in new topics kind of depending on where the weaknesses are.

Marie reported doing similar interventions with her clients. She shared that before she can focus on goals it is important to have the client map out events from his or her past, that have led to the situation they are in now. After the clients are able to reflect on these events, they are able to move forward and work on goal setting.

Addressing parent challenges. The final subtheme that arose during interviews was addressing parent challenges. Both women shared a great deal about the stresses and trauma many of their clients live with. When a parent is in survival mode it is very difficult for them to maintain themselves, much less their children. Liz and Marie both discussed the importance of gathering information about the challenges that are currently being experienced by the parents they are working with. After they have gathered information about the challenges parents are facing it is much easier for them to determine the type of assistance they need to provide.

Marie also brought up a very valuable perspective to take when working with parents who are struggling with effective parenting. She was asked a question regarding the amount of clients who were referred to parenting classes, compared to those who elected to seek out help. She reported that 95% of her clients were court ordered to participate in parenting classes. When Marie was asked what type of demeanor clients usually had, she said,

Mad... but, you know... We don't work FOR the system, we work WITH the system. I also tell them, "You know, I know you're made. I know you don't want to be here. If I was in your shoes I wouldn't want to be here either. But you have to get it done. It's no longer about you. Put your pride aside and think of your kids." After they know I'm not there to judge them they start feeling better.

Marie was able to validate the parents' feelings and address the challenges they are facing simply by reminding them that although they are in a situation that seems uncomfortable

and unappealing, it would be beneficial for them in the long run. Marie went on to stress the importance of validating your clients' concerns and feelings, so that they do not feel like outsiders, or someone who is being strongly judge. Through the use of validation and empathy Marie is able to show clients that she is aware of the challenges they are facing. This helps clients feel more relaxed and optimistic about the process of parenting interventions.

In addition to the skills of empathy and validation, it is also important to have a high level of involvement in assisting parents with the challenges present in their lives. Liz discussed parent challenges in her interview to a great extent, and focused on the idea that it is important to work closely with the parent to deal with the challenges that are present in their lives. This can focus on anything from lack of food or job, to needing assistance communicating with their children. Liz said that she works diligently to be available for her clients in many different ways, including assisting them to find employment:

There was one parent who had to get a job and was really fearful of going into the resource center so I was like, "Hey, let's just go together." Sometimes having that encouragement is enough to have them take that next step. I think a lot of times when parents are so over worked, you know they're trying to maintain a job, they're trying to parent, and trying to do all the different things... It's so overwhelming that to take that first step is really, really, scary. They don't even know where to start, so that's something we work with.

Throughout the interviews both respondents brought up the fact that many of their clients are faced with several stressors in their lives, on top of trying to be a more effective parent. Both women discussed the challenges faced by parents that are brought on by poverty, lack of stable job, their own mental illness, or their own skill deficits. Marie and Liz both provided examples of ways they assist their clients with a variety of

needs. Both women provide clients with a county resource list. This list provides contact information for resources dealing with many of the common struggles at-risk parents endure (lack of food or shelter, struggles with mental health, domestic abuse, parenting resources, etc.) Often a client will look at the list and it will help them verbalize some of the challenges they are experiencing, which assists the parenting resource staff in helping these individuals.

Liz has worked with parenting programs for the past twenty years, and shared how both the programming and needs of the parents have changed a great deal. Liz shared that *“Parents are faced with so many more challenges now, that we have to be aware of that, and we can’t have that expectation that they’re going to sit down, read a book and understand it. It’s really looking at every unique situation and kind of curtail it.”*

Discussion

This research focused on community providers' experiences with working parenting programs, and whether or not these programs could be implemented within a jail or prison setting. The participants in this study provided information that both confirmed and contradicted the literature about parenting programs and attachment. The themes and subthemes from the interviews will be compared to information within the literature review, and the similarities and differences will be addressed.

It is important to consider the level of experience participants have working with parenting programs. Liz, who has worked with the parenting program for twenty years has been able to see the gradual changes that have taken place in parenting programs over the past few decades. She has insight into the struggles that parents endure, and how these have shifted over the last twenty years. Marie has worked in program for three years. Although she has not been in the program as long, she can provide a newer perspective on the effectiveness of the parenting programs she facilitates. It is important to remember that the level of experience these women have can influence their attitudes towards the effectiveness of the programs.

The Importance of Being Aware of the Parents' Needs

Self-care of parents. Both interview participants discussed self-care as being an imperative component for parents. Both women discussed the methods they use to implement self-care into their work with clients. The literature focused mainly on the different types of programs available for parents, and how they can be tailored to be the most beneficial for the children. There was literature that supported the need for parents to address their mental health issues, before being able to care for their children. In an

article by Haight, Kagle, & Black (2003), research states that parent-child attachment often fails to develop during times of stress, and unresolved mental health issues in caregivers can often hinder the parent and child relationship. Research suggests the need for intensive services for parents with mental health issues (Haight, Kagle, & Black, 2003).

Adjusting to your audience. Both interview participants indicated that adjusting to your audience is very important if you plan on keeping clients engaged in the parenting program. There is not a great deal of research that supports these findings. It is often difficult for the individuals that facilitate these programs to even know what they need to do in order to adjust these programs. This is mainly because there is such a significant deficit in the amount of research on parenting programs, especially those within the jail and prison settings. According to Schlafer, Gerrity, Ruhland, & Wheeler (2013), one of the major challenges with research focusing on this topic is that none of the relevant academic disciplines (psychology, social work, criminology, etc.) has identified children of incarcerated parents as a population of particular interest. Parenting programs that are implemented within jails also do not have a great deal of follow-up or evaluation in regards to their success. These programs “vary in their approach and are rarely rigorously evaluated (Miller, Weston, Perryman, Horwitz, Franzen, & Cochran, 2014, p. 164).”

Many of the studies discussed in the literature review discussed limitations to their study regarding the adaptability of their programs. Barr, Brito, Zocca, Reina, Rodriguez & Shauffer (2011) discussed the fact that while multiple studies have focused on the positive impact of emotionally responsive fathers, the studies have not been

extended to the teen parenting population. This study also suggests a relationship-centered intervention would be more beneficial in strengthening dyadic interactions between parents and children. The information gathered from the literature review indicates that although many programs have produced some positive results for participants, they are not being adapted as significantly as they should.

Only one study from the literature review reported making adjustments to a curriculum to adjust the individual needs of the clients. The Parenting While Incarcerated program focused on a variety of different parenting skills. Certain lessons on clear communication and understanding how to set and maintain appropriate expectations for children seemed to be something of high interest for the parents attending sessions. Notes from the study indicated that the sessions were able to stay on topic for the most part, but topics were inserted into the curriculum to address the needs and concerns of mothers in the program (Miller, et al, 2014).

Providing clients with a valuable parenting toolbox. In both interviews the participants brought up the importance of providing parents with tools for their “parenting toolbox.” These needs will vary immensely from client to client, but are extremely important for all clients. A great deal of literature was found to support the idea that providing parents with new skills is extremely important in strengthening the parent-child relationship. “Research on the process and outcome of parent education or training programs over the past 20 years suggests that compared to other kinds of psychotherapeutic interventions, the former produces more consistently positive outcomes and is more economical of professional time and consumer cost (Wolfe & Hirsch, 2003, p.61).” Parenting programs can provide an increase in parent confidence,

simply because parents are provided with new skills that they may have been lacking before. Parenting programs can provide new skills for parents that can help change parents' behaviors, increase their range of skills, and reduce the proportion of negative parenting (Bell, 2007).

Research highlights the success of parenting education programs, both within the community and in the jail or prison setting. Many parent programs within the prison setting have had a great deal of success at increasing parental efficacy and parenting knowledge. These programs teach skills such as discipline, child development, and the mechanics of parenting in the absence of parent-child contact (Barr, et al, 2011).

Getting to Know Clients

Gathering information about the past. The importance of gathering information about the past was present in both interviews, and each participant emphasized the fact that past experiences can often have a great impact on the way an individual parents his or her children. The literature yielded significant data regarding the importance of acknowledging the type of past parents endured. 40% of state prisoners reported growing up in a house that received public assistance; 14% reported living in a foster home, agency or institution at one point; and 16% of incarcerated fathers and 60% of incarcerated mothers reported a history of physical or sexual abuse (Shlafer, Gerrity, Ruhland, & Wheeler, 2013). It can often be difficult for parents to be effective mothers or fathers if they are dealing with trauma from their past. As parents resolve their own childhood distresses, it is easier for them to differentiate between their children's feelings and their own. They are also better able to adapt their parenting to meet the needs and demands of their children (Wolfe & Hirsch, 2003).

Goal setting for the parent. Goal setting was brought up in both interviews, and its importance was highlighted in regards to gaining a better understanding of the areas a client wishes to improve on. Although the literature did not directly address goal setting for parents, it did place a great deal of emphasis on the importance of parent motivation within the programs. The research spoke a great deal about the fact that if parents lack internal motivation to improve, they will not be fully engaged in the parenting program. Some programs provide a pre-entry assessment to develop a baseline for parents, and to gather information regarding the types of things they hope to gain from parenting programs. Bell (2007) reported that parents involved in several various parent education programs found things most useful when they correlated with the experiences they hoped to gain while attending—A feeling of respect and acceptance as a parent. The Strengthening Families Program gathered information regarding parent goals during a pre-assessment period before individuals began the program (Miller, et al, 2014). Sanders (2008) also discussed a program called the Triple-P Positive Parenting program that made it a priority to allow participants to select goals to work on. This program believes that if parents are given a role in choosing what they focus on during the program, they will be more likely to stay motivated during the session.

Addressing parent challenges. Both interview participants brought up the fact that many parents are facing substantial challenges in their lives, and if these challenges are not addressed it will be impossible for them to take care of themselves, much less their children. Although the literature did not directly address parent challenges, there was a significant amount of information regarding the importance of being aware of the difficulties and struggles a parent may be experiencing. Both women agreed that being

aware of the difficulties parents might endure while trying to maintain a healthy relationship with their children is extremely important. Both women also addressed the issue that many parents endured their own trauma when they were younger, and that it is important to address these things before you can help them become effective parents. Challenges can also arise when a parent-child relationship has problematic aspects, such as the failure to develop an organized strategy for relating in times of stress (Haight, Kagle, & Black, 2003). The literature mentioned the importance of being aware of the challenges faced by parents, and focused both on incarcerated and non-incarcerated parents. Parents who are incarcerated face many challenges because they are separated from their children, making it difficult to maintain an active parenting role. Parents in the correctional system have also endured poor parenting role models and experience multiple associated challenges, such as abuse or dysfunctional family relationships (Miller, et al, 2014).

It is also important to remember that among the challenges that arise with parenting; there are many other situations that can cause additional stresses and challenges for parents. In many cases, there are a host of family problems, such as poverty, family discord, substance abuse, or criminal behavior. In addition to this, both incarcerated and non-incarcerated parents often have long histories of trauma and limited coping skills, making it difficult to maintain relationships (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008).

Strengths and Limitations

This qualitative study was geared towards examining community providers' perspectives regarding parenting programs, and determining whether or not these

programs could be adjusted to serve parents who are incarcerated. This study resulted in many strengths, as well as some limitations.

Strengths. In terms of strengths, two strengths are noteworthy. First, the qualitative nature of this study provided the researcher with very content specific, detailed responses regarding parenting programs. Both participants were very open and honest, and willing to provide a great deal of information to help the researcher gain a better understanding of parenting programs. Although the population sample was very small, both women came from very diverse backgrounds in regards to experience working with parents, which gave the researcher a great deal of insight into the importance of accommodating various types of audiences.

Second, although the difficulties in obtaining an adequate population sample will be addressed later as a limitation, these difficulties reinforce the fact that there are not enough resources for individuals who work in parenting programs. The lack of willingness to participate validates the fact that although parenting programs are extremely important, there is definitely a gap that needs to be filled in order to ensure parents are provided with all the resources they need.

Limitations. In terms of limitations, two limitations are noteworthy. First, this study yielded only two participants, which made it challenging to find themes throughout the interviews. In addition to this, the small sample size meant that only a limited number of agencies could be studied, resulting in very little information on the different types of community-based parenting programs.

Second, the limited literature regarding this topic provided a substantial limitation as the researcher attempted to gather data on this topic. Since there was such limited

literature it made it difficult to find a variety of different perspectives on the effectiveness of parenting programs. The limited literature also made it difficult to find information that supported the themes from the interviews.

Recommendations for Future Research

Research on parenting programs has been significantly understudied in the field of social work thus far. “Only ninety-five papers referring to the effects of parental incarcerations and/or prison-based parenting education programs were identified which were either research findings, descriptions of practice or opinion pieces dating between 1976 and 2009 (Newman, Fowler, & Cashin, 2011).” Since this is such an understudied area of social work, it makes it difficult to have a solid understanding of the types of questions to ask, or the appropriate places to seek out valuable research.

Future research would benefit a great deal from a more diverse group of participants. A study that only has participants from one type of job lacks a diverse set of perspectives, which is necessary when gathering data.

Implications for Future Social Work Practice

Social work practice would benefit a great deal from a stronger understanding of the effectiveness of parenting programs, and how they can be improved for individuals who are incarcerated. In addition to this it is very important to increase awareness for individuals that have a career within parenting programs. Since there is such little research on parenting programs, there is not a strong knowledge base of what makes them effective or ineffective. Without this knowledge it is very difficult to determine which aspects of these programs are successful, and which areas need to be improved.

Social workers also need to remember that it is very important to tailor these programs to the audience they are working with. We cannot treat these programs in an objective way, because information that is benefit for one individual might be completely irrelevant for someone else. It is important for social workers to be aware of what the clients hope to learn so that we can design these programs to benefit participants to the greatest extent possible. Clients will also feel better about themselves and their abilities as parents. Newman, Fowler, and Casher (2011) reported that studies show an increase in parenting skills and self-confidence as outcomes of parenting programs. These interventions are beneficial because they are proactive in the fact that they work to assist parents in developing skills that will hopefully decrease negative behaviors from children in the future.

Conclusion

The research in this study added new information to the literature on community-based parenting programs and parenting programs in implementation for parents who are incarcerated. The research correlated positively with past research in many areas, and also provided new perspectives that did not correlate with past research. Participants in this qualitative study emphasized the importance of catering a program to fit the individual needs of participants. The research also reiterated the fact that it is very important to encourage participants to be aware of the things in their past that have led them to where they are now. After participants are able to do this it will help them develop the goals they wish to achieve. Both participants in this study had a great deal of knowledge about the best interventions to use with parents, and both emphasized the important of being honest with clients, and encouraging clients to be honest with

themselves. Research on the effectiveness of parenting programs continues to be a very important area of study. It is imperative that continued research is done in an effort to determine the most effective ways to assist clients in developing parenting skills. Only with further research, will we be able to assist parents in the most beneficial way possible.

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Appendix A



January 28, 2015

Dear *****,

My name is Hilary Fasbender, and I am a masters student in the masters of social work program at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, MN. As you may remember from when we spoke previously, I am in the process of writing my clinical research paper, which is a requirement that I need to fulfill in order to graduate with my Masters of Social Work in May 2016. My research project studies community-based parenting and visitation programs, and whether or not they can be adapted to serve parents who are currently incarcerated. I hope that my research can be utilized find ways to improve parenting programs for individuals in jail or prison, as well as their families.

Thank you so much for expressing a willingness to participate in my study. Your assistance in this study would be greatly appreciated. Your participation would allow me to have insight into your experiences regarding parenting education and visitation programs.

Please ask any questions that you have about participating in this project at any time. I want you to have the information you need to make a decision that is best for you. If you are willing to participate in my study, I am flexible in scheduling time to set up an interview. Once the interview has been scheduled, I will send you a consent form that you can sign and have for your records. If you have questions, please feel free to contact me by email at fasb7418@stthomas.edu or by telephone at ***-****.

Sincerely,

A photograph of a handwritten signature in cursive that reads "Hilary A. Fasbender".

Hilary A. Fasbender

Masters of Social Work Student
University of St. Thomas
Email: fasb7418@stthomas.edu

Appendix B

Consent Form University of St. Thomas

Can parenting programs be adapted for families impacted by incarceration?: Community providers' perspectives

I am conducting a study about the effectiveness of parenting programs and visitation programs, with an emphasis on programs implemented for parents who are incarcerated. I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because you are currently employed in a program that provides resources for parents, including visitations and parenting classes. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: *Hilary Fasbender and Kari Fletcher, University of St. Thomas School of Social Work.*

Background Information:

The purpose of this study: This study is being conducted to examine the types of parenting programs that are currently in implementation within the community, and to compare them to the types of programs that are already implemented within the jail or prison setting. This study will also focus on whether or not community-based interventions can be adapted to serve the population of parents who are currently incarcerated, and struggling to maintain a relationship with their children. The research gathered will be used to determine whether or not these programs have a direct benefit for the children whose parents are participants in these programs. The research hypothesis states that children will directly benefit from their parents participating in parenting or visitation programs.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things: You will be asked to participate in an interview to gather data about your experiences with parenting programs and visitation programs. The interview will take approximately thirty minutes, and can be done face-to-face or via phone, whichever is more convenient for the participant. If you would like to view the questions prior to the interview, a copy of interview questions will be provided for you to review before the interview. In addition to the interview questions you will also be asked to provide basic information regarding your current job position. No identifying information will be used in the research findings.

Risks or benefits of being in the study:

This study has no direct risks or benefits.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way. The paper consent forms will be

signed by each participant. Once these are obtained they will be kept in a file cabinet with a lock on it. Interview questions and written notes will be obtained electronically. The electronic copies of these documents will be kept in a computer file that is password protected. The audio recordings will be uploaded onto a computer. The computer in which this file is kept is also password protected. All data will be kept for a period of three years. Records will be destroyed in January 2018, with the exception of the consent forms. These forms will be kept until May 2018, which is three years after the completion of the research paper.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of St. Thomas, or with the agency in which you work. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time up to and until March 1, 2015. Should you decide to withdraw data collected about you will be used in the study. You are also free to skip any questions. If you decide to withdraw from the study you will be asked to provide a written letter announcing your withdrawal from the study.

Contacts and Questions:

My name is Hilary Fasbender. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact the Institutional Review Board at the University of St. Thomas at 651-962-6038. You may also contact me at ***-****. My advisor's name is Kari Fletcher. You may reach her by email at kari.fletcher@stthomas.edu, or by phone at 651-962-5807 with any questions or concerns.

You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study. I am at least 18 years of age. I also consent to allowing the researcher to take an audio recording of my interview session.

Signature of Study Participant

Date

Print Name of Study Participant

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix C

Supportive Resources for Interview Participants

Thank you for your time and consideration in participating in this interview. Please feel free to use and share these resources.

Parenting Resource List:

http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/pubs/adv_in_parenting/Pages/index.aspx

*National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)
Describes an effective approach to parenting and provides examples of how to use it with children.*

<http://onetoughjob.org>

This website for parents includes information on stress, parent-child communication, discipline, child safety, parenting tips sorted by age, and more.

http://www.circleofparents.org/parent_resources/index.html

*Circle of Parents
Effective parenting information for dealing with discipline, rules, schoolwork, and other family situations. Also available in Spanish.*

<http://www.fatherhood.org/?pid=410>

*Resources for Dads: National Fatherhood Initiative
Programs, brochures, articles, and other resources to become a better father.*

<http://www.parenting-resources.com>

This website contains various resources for parents, including parenting tips and information regarding community-based resources.

Appendix D

Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me about your current role and job responsibilities?
2. Can you tell me about your work with youth? And your work with at-risk youth specifically?
3. What type of prevention or early intervention strategies do you implement in your work with at-risk youth?
4. In your work with at-risk youth, what degree of your work includes connecting with these children's parents, teachers, and/or community resources? Can you give some examples of what this looks like in your work?
5. Have you ever worked with families who are mandated, on probation, in prison/jail? What new challenges does work when these circumstances are present?
6. What types of services do you provide in terms of parenting programs or classes?
7. Please comment on any benefits or drawbacks these programs present for the children involved.
8. What types of services do you provide in terms of visitation programs for parents?
9. Please comment on any benefits or drawbacks these programs present for the children involved.
10. How do you think your work with at-risk children might be adapted to meet the needs of those who are experiencing the incarceration of a parent? What considerations may be relevant for parenting programs in this setting? For visitation programs?
11. Who else do you feel would be important to for me talk to? How can I get in contact with them?
12. Is there anything else you think would be important or unique in your experience with regard to your work with at-risk children whose parents may be involved with the legal system that you would like to mention at this time?

