

5-2014

The Sibling Experience: Grief and Coping with Sibling Incarceration

Katie Heaton
St. Catherine University

Recommended Citation

Heaton, Katie, "The Sibling Experience: Grief and Coping with Sibling Incarceration" (2014). *Master of Social Work Clinical Research Papers*. Paper 327.
http://sophia.stkate.edu/msw_papers/327

This Clinical research paper is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Social Work at SOPHIA. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master of Social Work Clinical Research Papers by an authorized administrator of SOPHIA. For more information, please contact ejasch@stkate.edu.

The Sibling Experience: Grief and Coping with Sibling Incarceration

by

Katie Heaton, B.S.

MSW Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the
School of Social Work
St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas
St. Paul, Minnesota
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of

Master of Social Work

Committee Members
Lisa Kiesel, Ph.D. (Chair)
Janet Isaacson, MSW, LISW
Pam Bellrichard, B.S.

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 the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

Abstract

Incarceration is an issue that affects thousands of families on a yearly basis. To date, the majority of studies examining this loss have observed the impact of incarceration on children and parents; primarily how imprisonment affects child attachment to mothers and fathers (Brown et al., 2000). Most often overlooked within these studies have been the siblings of brothers and sisters who have been adjudicated (Brown et al., 2000). Specifically of interest to this study is how professionals understand the impact of sibling incarceration on grief and coping styles of non-offending siblings. Furthermore, how does this knowledge impact working relationships between professionals and these family members?

Using a qualitative design, this study examined the impact of sibling incarceration from the professional perspective. Six professionals working through some capacity with the criminal justice were interviewed and asked to share their perceptions about the impact incarceration has on non-offending siblings. A total of four themes were identified, relating to the continual study of the impact of parent versus sibling relationships, sibling involvement related to program lengths, the various feelings and roles non-offending siblings take on, and the types of communication non-offending siblings use when incorporated into the treatment or reconciliation process.

The findings of this study indicated a continued need for future research to explore the impact of sibling imprisonment on both offending and non-offending siblings. Implications for future social work practice were also discussed.

Acknowledgments

This paper is dedicated to my husband Joshua Hamborg, who has always inspired me to continue in my learning. To my mother, father and brother- without your love and support my education would not be possible. In addition, I want to thank my committee chair Lisa Kiesel, PhD, and my two committee members Janet Isaacson, LISW, and Pam Bellrichard. Without these three women, the development of this research would not have been possible.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to all the individuals who participated in this study. Your contribution to this research has provided insight and voice to a subject rarely discussed. Thank you for all you have done.

Table of Contents

<u>Section</u>	<u>Page</u>
Abstract	i.
Acknowledgment	ii.
Table of Contents	iii.
I. Introduction	1.
II. Literature Review	2.
III. Conceptual Framework	5.
IV. Methodology	7.
V. Findings	11.
VI. Discussion	18.
VII. Implications for Social Work Practice	19.
VIII. Implications for Policy	20.
IX. Future Research	21.
X. Strengths and Limitations	22.
XI. Conclusion	24.
XII. References	25.
Appendix A.	26.
Appendix B.	27.

Introduction

Incarceration is an issue that affects thousands of families on a yearly basis. Removing a family member from the home is a breakdown in systems that impact both those inside and outside of jail or prison walls. To date, the majority of studies examining this loss have observed the impact of incarceration on children and parents; primarily how imprisonment affects child attachment to caregivers (Brown et. al., 2000). While such studies provide insight into the effects of incarceration on caregivers and their roles and responsibilities, it describes little in relation to how children grieve or cope when other immediate family members are sentenced to jail or prison time.

Most often overlooked within these studies have been the siblings of brothers and sisters who have been sentenced to jail or prison (Brown et al., 2000). Indeed, many studies have yet to examine the deficit incarceration can create on sibling relationships. Specifically of interest to this study is how professionals understand the impact of sibling incarceration on grief and coping styles of non-offending siblings. Furthermore, how does this knowledge impact working relationships between professionals and these family members? Research within the United Kingdom has suggested that siblings are at an increased risk of committing a crime if another sibling has offended (Meek, Lowe & McPhillips, 2010). Despite this knowledge, there are still various unknown factors as to why this correlation might occur. With many social service agencies now focusing their work on prevention versus intervention, it is vital that practitioners understand more about how sibling relationships are developed, sustained, and impacted by crime and our country's legal system.

The underrepresentation of non-offending siblings and their incarcerated brothers and sisters within current research inspired further examination of how professionals incorporate and understand these family members, particularly their grief and coping strategies that result from the adjudication of a sibling.

Literature Review

To understand the impact incarceration can have on a family one needs to understand the dimensions of sibling delinquency that can occur within a family structure. Several opposing viewpoints regarding the cycle of family delinquency have been explored. Research examined for this study identified that the incarceration of one sibling has been positively correlated to future delinquency amongst other siblings (Meek, Lowe & McPhillips, 2010). Previous studies also indicate that siblings of offenders are at a greater risk of becoming involved in the criminal justice system (Margo and Stevens, 2008). Farrington and Painter found this particular pattern frequently common amongst brothers (2004). Some of the most common reasons specified by the various researchers who explore juvenile and adolescent delinquency include poverty, race, and low socioeconomic status.

Incarceration is an issue that affects thousands of families on a yearly basis. Within the past 20 years, parental incarceration alone has increased by 80%, (Glaze and Maruschak, 2008). To date, the majority of studies examining this loss have observed the impact of incarceration on children and parents; primarily how imprisonment affects child attachment to parents (Brown et. al., 2000). In another article published through the Curry School of Education, it was found that nearly one in forty children in the United States have been impacted by parental imprisonment at some point within their childhood (as cited in Schlafer and Wanous, 2014; Glaze & Maruschak, 2008).

Despite the specificity of such parental incarceration statistics, an unknown number of children are impacted on a yearly basis by a sibling's imprisonment (Meek, Lowe & McPhillips, 2010). In Louise Tickle's study on family dynamics, it was identified by the Howard League of Penal Reform that an estimated 35,000 children could be affected by sibling incarceration on a yearly basis (2006). Despite this significant approximation, few studies choose to examine what the needs of these children are or how professionals take into account these needs, particularly those related to grief and loss.

Past Research and Knowledge

Rosie Meek of Sussex University describes reasons behind this lack of knowledge surrounding sibling incarceration is the result of an inability to communicate about the problem with those who are impacted by it most (2008). Meek suggests that access to families, in particular children with incarcerated family members is particularly difficult (pp.265-267; Meek, Lowe & McPhillips, 2010).

A study conducted by the researchers for the Federation of Prisoners' Families Support Groups (FPFSG) reported a standout reason for such avoidance is due to the sensitive nature of the topic (Action for Prisoners' Families, 2002). In addition to the lack of records kept by the criminal justice system, the FPFSG also identified that the continual stigmatization and stereotyping of families involved in the justice system has hindered many children, parents, and family members from speaking out about their experiences (p. 4). Problems arise in understanding the subject because the stereotypes about families that have been prescribed once a member of the household has been taken into custody and sentenced leaves many feeling embarrassed to speak about the subject (Action for Prisoners' Families, 2002; Condry, 2007).

Both a lack of accessibility and cultural comfort with the topic make it difficult for families to approach or be approached about a family member's imprisonment.

Current Services

Obtaining services to assist families following a household member's sentence is rarely found (p.1). With the primary focus of the legal system based in assisting the offender on amending his or her behavior, supporting families impacted by the experience are often placed in a position of lower priority (Tickle, 2006; Meek, 2008). This lack of services can be particularly detrimental to children, because often when a parent or loved one is incarcerated, a child is asked to take on different roles, responsibilities, and additional pressures (Action for Prisoners' Families, 2002). Furthermore, children can also be faced with a greater risk of committing crime themselves because the majority of professional attentions are placed on the offender's intervention rather than the prevention of future offenses within the family system (Meek, Lowe & McPhillips, 2010).

Needs and Risks

The detriment to having such experiences is that this has the potential to increase other childhood risk factors that could hinder successful development including risky sexual activity, cyclical poverty, poorer quality education, and more unstable living environments (Loper & Tuerk, 2006; Philbrick, 2002). Again, discussion around the subject, particularly with juveniles seems to have been avoided. Meek, Lowe, and McPhillips discovered in their research that 80 percent of the children who participated in their study had never been asked about how they felt about their sibling's imprisonment (2010).

After being interviewed by researchers, the majority of these young subjects openly disclosed the complexity of their emotional needs. Many participants disclosed that emotional

distress became more prevalent within their day-to-day lives (Action for Prisoners' Families, 2002). Reasons for this stem from bullying by other students who discovered their sibling's imprisonment, adjusting to new household roles and routines, complex feelings of ambivalence related to their sibling's safety, visiting their brother or sister, and having their sibling return home after an extended period away (Action for Prisoners' Families, 2006). To expand on the work of researchers such as Meek, Lowe, and McPhillips, it is important to continue to identify how the young grieve and cope with this form of sibling loss.

The underrepresentation of non-offending siblings and their incarcerated brothers and sisters within current research inspired further examination of the subject. Of interest specifically to this study is how professionals working with families who have an incarcerated juvenile perceive non-offending siblings. In particular, how do such professionals understand and incorporate the grief and coping needs of these non-offending siblings into their work with an adjudicated client. Through the examination of this subject, the researcher hopes to contribute to future preventative work with families and to be able to more readily identify how to strengthen families impacted by this form of loss.

Contextual Framework

The current study used ambiguous grief, disenfranchised loss and trauma theory as a framework with which to study sibling relationships from. The framework of grief and loss is a valuable category to address this study from because it incorporates the ambiguity and stigmatizing nature of incarceration on the grieving process. First identified by Pauline Boss, ambiguous grief is described as loss that can occur psychologically or physically (2006). In cases of psychological loss, the absence of the mind creates grief because of the remaining physical presence (15-19). In the case of physical absence, grief stems from confusion between having

someone psychologically still available, but physically absent from daily life (pp. 15-19). In this regard, the loss is somewhat new and unknown; it can often be misunderstood because generalizations about grief often focus on the loss of both physical and psychological functioning at the same time (pp. 1-4).

In relation to sibling incarceration, ambiguous grief can be understood as the loss of a sibling physically (through the jail or prison system), despite the continued psychological impact on younger siblings either through memory, visitation, or conversation (Condry, 2007). The ambiguity that comes with remaining in contact with someone who is lost as a consequence of personal behavior also identifies another form of grief pertinent to reflection in this study. This other form of grief is known as disenfranchised grief.

Disenfranchised grief is a particularly difficult form of loss to overcome because the majority of cases involving this form of grief are the consequence of personal decisions or behaviors made (Doka, 2002). Such loss often creates a sense of shame or guilt within the individual or that person's family, making it difficult to openly mourn, discuss, or cope with the actions that have created the loss (PowerPoint Slide 10). Families with incarcerated immediate members, such as siblings, can be identified as having suffered this form of grief. Embarrassed or nervous at what others in their social community might think, many parents and siblings have identified that they consciously do not disclose their family member's imprisonment specifically because they do not want to face further stigmatization from the social systems that surround them (Action for Prisoners' Families, 2002). This in turn, creates an additional loss based on isolation. Seclusion has the ability to disrupt the family system even more following a sibling's imprisonment. As a result, a sibling could then be faced with additional trauma.

Trauma theory is identified as a particularly form of stress that is unexpected and vast (Boss, 2006). When this type of stress occurs the individual cannot cope with the how great it is, thus leaving the person overwhelmed and unable to manage or defend themselves from it (p. 35). The memory of a traumatic experience creates a heightened sense of stress and severe fear that makes an individual frightened of being vulnerable to future painful experiences (pp. 36-37). Though non-offending siblings can be hidden from the arrest, prosecution and sentencing process that comes with sibling incarceration, it is still likely that a sibling will face traumatization either through the arrest or visitation process, or the restructuring of family dynamics (Meek, 2008). Siblings have the potential to be more vulnerable to witnessing unfamiliar situations or family roles, which can trigger unpronounced stressors that might before have been avoided.

Methodology

Research Design

The primary purpose of this study was to examine how professionals understand grief and coping capabilities in the siblings of adjudicated juveniles and how their understanding impacts their professional work with families who have experienced adjudication. The study used a qualitative design based on data gathered from semi-structured interviews with professionals who work with incarcerated youth and their families. Data obtained through this format offered the researcher an opportunity to explore both how professionals understood sibling relationships and the impact their knowledge had when working with siblings and other family members.

Population and Sample

The population this study chose to examine and draw discussion from was the professional perspective of workers who are or previously were serving adjudicated juveniles and their families in some capacity. To better understand how patterns of loss and resilience impact non-offending siblings and the ways in which they are incorporated into professional work with families, this study chose to use professionals from a variety of areas in the criminal justice and treatment systems. Six professionals were interviewed about their work and their encounters with non-offending siblings.

Questions posed to these workers asked professionals to share their perspectives on how often they work with siblings, what types of grief and resiliency patterns they see in sibling relationships, and how these experiences have impacted their daily work with the clients they serve. Recruitment of these professionals was done through email to various criminal justice and treatment departments, asking directors and coordinators if they knew of staff that would be willing to meet and shed perspective on the research topic. Areas of recruitment where emails were circulated included court offices, correctional treatment centers, local court officials, and restorative justice programs within the Twin Cities/Metro area.

A non-probability strategy for this sample was based on purpose and convenience. Professionals working within the criminal justice and treatment fields were purposefully chosen because of their vast experiential knowledge related to incarceration and their frequent contact with juveniles and families. Workers within various departments of the legal system were chosen because of convenience and the various perspectives each department might have to offer. Participants serving as professionals in the field would more readily consent to sharing their perceptions of work with siblings and families. In addition, it was also believed that contacting

professionals within the community would be less time consuming and would be more likely to meet research deadlines.

Protection of Human Subjects

The protection of human subjects is understood as a critical component to the success of this study. Individuals interested in participating within the study all signed consent forms detailing the purpose of the study, the nature in which the topic of siblings was going to be discussed, and the reasoning behind the examination of the topic. Informed consent papers also defined what the risks were related to the study and the processes in which individual information was obtained and how it would remain protected.

Confidentiality was protected throughout the study by only obtaining the information needed to identify and discuss the topic. Following the release of a signed informed consent document, the professional's title and first name was recorded. This information was used only to present the context the information was being told from. Interviews were additionally secured by taking specific precautions when establishing where to collect the data. Each participant was interviewed individually and in a quiet, public environment (such as a conference room, or personal office) where the subject felt safe and comfortable enough to providing honest responses. To secure the researcher's safety, the researcher did not conduct interviews anywhere outside of these public settings. All interviews were recorded with an audio recorder, which, when not in use, was locked away in a fire proof, combination sealed container.

To assist in the coding of the data, a third party transcriber was asked to sign a confidentiality statement which inhibited the company and the transcriber from sharing any data with anyone either than the researcher. Once the transcriber signed the confidentiality statement, they were then paid to transcribe the audio-recorded interviews to a paper-based record. No other

additional demographic information other than the name and title of the professional identified on the recording was used.

Statements regarding non-coercive action took place at the beginning of each meeting with the participant. During the informed consent procedure, the researcher and the subject verbally discussed the written informed consent information (see appendix A). Non-coercive procedures were specifically discussed by notifying the participant that at any point during the interview they had the right to terminate the discussion, and be removed from the participant list for the study. There was considered no major risks to the participant while partaking in this study.

Data Collection

As required in a semi-structured interview format, subjects of the study were asked a series of questions for which they were asked to elaborate on. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed. The interview setting took place in areas that were public in nature, however also quiet and made private enough for the participant to feel secure in disclosing their thoughts. Each interview lasted between approximately 30 to 45 minutes (interview questions can be found in appendix B). Questions were created by the researcher and pre-tested for quality and reliability by committee members and the researcher's chair. In addition, validity was also examined by evaluating how past studies involving professionals working within the criminal justice system were asked, answered and reflected upon.

Data Analysis

Following participant interviews, a third party, local transcription company transcribed verbatim the recordings of each interview. Once transcribed, the researcher used the qualitative method of coding to identify specific patterns, correlations, and differences between subject

responses as identified in Berg and Lune (2012). These codes were then examined in conjunction with the research question to identify the different themes experienced by professionals in relation to sibling relationships and juvenile adjudication.

Findings

Description of Participants

The recruitment conducted for this study led to the participation of six different professionals. Three of the participants were licensed social workers (2 LICSW, 1 LGSW). Two of these three social workers served in a treatment facility (n=2) while the other participating social worker served as a juvenile justice personnel member (n=1). A fourth participant served as a juvenile court judge for several years (n=1) and another participant was distinguished themselves as a member of a local Restorative Justice program (n=1). The sixth and final participant for this study served as an associate professor for a local university (n=1), whose particular area of study surrounded family incarceration in relation to juvenile and adolescent health.

Overview of Findings

The role of this study was to identify how professionals working with adjudicated juveniles and their families understand the impact of sibling incarceration on non-offending siblings, their grief and coping styles surrounding their siblings' absence, and how this knowledge impacted the workers' service to adjudicated juveniles and their families. The researcher used a semi-structured qualitative interview process and identified four different themes that arose from experiences of the six different professionals interviewed.

The theme that consistently appeared throughout all the interviews during this process was that the mother-child relationships continue to be the main focus of professionals' work with adjudicated juveniles. Sibling work continues to be infrequent and expressed as less concerning than promoting healthy interactions with caregivers or mothers in particular.

Another theme that appeared throughout the interview and coding process was that the length of time a professional has to work with the offending juvenile can determine what family members are involved in the professional's work and how often.

When discussing specifically grief and loss related to sibling incarceration, another theme that appeared was the variety of feelings and roles non-offending siblings take on following a brother or sister's disposition.

The fourth theme that was discovered in the examination of this research was that siblings communicate their emotions and roles in various ways when interacting with an adjudicated brother or sister. It was found that a continuum of communication styles was common.

Themes

Theme 1: Mothers-child relations still discussed as workers' primary priority in the treatment process

Each professional at some point throughout the interview process acknowledged that the majority of their work was directed more towards how to work with a juvenile who had an incarcerated parent or how to amend parent-child relationships following a child's adjudication. In some instances, interviewees had not explored the topic of sibling incarceration because the

focus of their work examined the impact of caregiver incarceration. One participant (a professor for a local university) had just finished collaborating with a child's television program to create an interactive episode for children and caregivers to discuss parental incarceration. When asked about her involvement in the research, she explained that the primary focus of the story and TV episode was to explore children's feelings about the experience and ways adults can discuss a mother or father's incarceration in a safe and helpful environment. The interviewee identified that even in her individual research her focus surrounded the visitation process between parents and children. "We look for kids who are coming in to visit, of course, and when we find out the kids are coming to visit their sibling, we actually screen them out because we're really looking for an incarcerated parent." When asked to elaborate on what similarities or differences there could be if such curriculum focused on sibling relationships, the interviewee responded: "... going back and reading the material again, thinking about it as a person with an incarcerated sibling. I wonder how relevant it is...because I think it's very much framed as the incarceration of a parent."

Another participant working with youth in a corrections treatment program explained that while the clinicians of the program weren't opposed to the idea of incorporating siblings, there was concern within the program about how to incorporate siblings successfully.

We've talked about it. What does that bring to the dynamics of the groups? Would it be more of a distraction than anything? We do have to worry about that. We have to worry about, are we going to confront so and so's brother or sister for misbehaving? That's partly why we haven't incorporated them into the group yet.

In another participant interview, parent-child relationship building was instinctively referred back to, even when asked about the impact of restorative programming on other family members, such as siblings. “We build on the skill set and the relationship at the same time so the parents and residents can translate that into the home.” In other instances, it was described by another participant that having a child witness a siblings sentencing or adjudication was unnecessary or even harmful.

Well, I don't know that it's important to have the siblings there. In fact, I think that's questionable whether that's a good thing or not...I don't think kids should be missing school to go see their brother or sister in court...I think parents should protect their other kids from that level of concern and trauma over what's happening to their sibling.

Theme 2: Length of programs determines amount of family involvement

The amounts of time professionals were given to work with an adjudicated juvenile also impacted how much time they were allotted to work with family members. Specifically, three of the professionals interviewed identified that programs that involved family interaction or understanding family dynamics were more successful when interaction with a juvenile was part of a longer-term program. A clinician of a Twin Cities correctional treatment program analyzed the differences of long and short term work while reflecting on the changes in her own career.

I started out in a residential program...It became evident that families had a huge impact on whether or not kids were successful. Those kids were in that program for two to three years. It was a really long-term process...probably less availability to do things like reconciliation, but more to really actively involve families.

Other treatment programs cite that reasons for lack of sibling involvement include the prioritization of curriculum and the difficulties of even touching base with families. An interviewee serving as a clinician within a short-term correctional treatment program noted: “3 to 4 months just isn’t enough to do any of that stuff. You have to pick and choose what’s your priority and what’s not a priority.”

While for that participant the lack of sibling incorporation was based on treatment prioritizations, for others, the time limitation was a reflection of both the type of program the juvenile was involved in and the accessibility the professional had to the family. A participant serving within a restorative justice program stated: “We like to be done within 3 months...It can be really, really short and again, some of the problems are just being able to contact and work around connecting with the family.” Despite the area of work, whether working as a professional within corrections or a treatment department, time devoted to work with clients and their siblings is rarely seen.

Theme 3: Emotions and roles that appear for non-offending siblings

The emotions and responses non-offending siblings have with regards to their brothers and sisters were discussed in some detail over the course of each interview. A common reoccurrence within the discussion was the variety and complexity of the feelings seen in siblings.

Part of what I realized was is that when the kids don’t have contact with a sibling for a while, when you do the reconciliation, a lot of emotion that comes out seems to be the loss of contact...I also think it’s that they have not seen this person for so long, and

there's so many confusing feelings around why not. They may blame themselves, because they said something and brought it out.

In other instances, feelings of forgiveness have outweighed a sibling's sense of grief or guilt. In another interview, one participant disclosed how the power of relationship and age has the ability to influence how a sibling sees the situation. This particular interviewee described the difference between sibling and adult reactions to correctional treatment.

I would say that siblings are probably more forgiving...They're younger, so their life experience is not that they have-it's not their child. It's their brother. As scary as it is to hear about it, they seem to be more accepting and more forgiving rather than more judgmental.

While some professionals specified beliefs they had about what sibling grief looked like, other workers discussed the roles some siblings work to fit into as a way to cope. Sibling parentification was one position that was frequently returned to when discussing styles of grief, loss, and coping. "He was very much almost like, not necessarily babysitting, but the whole time trying to play with his sister and engage her, and then he was responsible for actually facilitating this visit with his one-year-old sister, it was just bizarre," said the interviewee researching parental incarceration. When asked to elaborate about the implications of such a role, the participant continued, stating: "I think there's been some pretty good evidence to show that this early care-taking role, particularly with the oldest boy in the family for single moms, that the relationship can strengthen and grow and that older siblings can be a real protective factor."

In a similar vein, a treatment worker for a correctional facility also described the complexity of sibling roles. Her experience with one family in particular reinforced that siblings

do attempt to engage in the treatment process with their adjudicated sibling, in addition to other roles they also represent.

I had a kid whose sister was his guardian, and she would come out. She was young, herself. I think he was 17 and she might have been 22, 23, with a 5 year old child herself. Her participation wasn't very consistent, although she would say I want to be there for you. It was difficult. She had to take care of her own responsibility. It was tough... They tried. She tried. I think when you're that young, it's hard to be able to say, let's do treatment and therapy together, when you didn't sign up for that...

Theme 4: Types of communication siblings' use with one another

The various emotions that were felt by siblings also gave rise to discussion on how siblings shared their feelings, both with professionals and their incarcerated brother or sister. In certain instances, two professionals recalled physical proximity as a form of communication between siblings that expressed closeness or connection. "I find that a lot of siblings very much want to meet with their brothers," stated the clinician of a treatment facility. The professor for a local university also commented that you can see the need for physical connection when siblings come to visit one another.

I have seen siblings stay close to each other as they're going through the metal detector, so in an environment where they would be aroused, upset, perhaps even moderately traumatized by some experience...it seems siblings stay close together as they go through that, and not the little one next to mom or grandma, but actually hanging on their sibling.

Other workers identified being able to converse with their sibling as an important piece of strengthening sibling resiliency. "There's a lot of discussion...they very much want to have a

conversation about what happened. They want to understand things. They want to learn some things.” Another participant also identified the use of language, in particular letters back forth to one another as particularly helpful for both the offending and non-offending sibling. “If they have enough ego strength to be in it, then I have them write letters to give to their brother. Their brother or sister writes them a letter, and then we read it in session.” The inclusion of such formats for those particularly working within various treatment settings, displays that several different structures can be beneficial when incorporating siblings into the therapeutic process.

Discussion

This research indicated that similar to other research cited above, little is still known in the professional community about how to effectively incorporate non-offending siblings into service programs for adjudicated individuals. Professionals within the criminal justice community still predominantly focus their services on juvenile-caregiver relationships as in past research (Brown et. al., 2000). Though this is a vital component in creating positive re-entry into the community for an adolescent, it offers little understanding of how sibling relationships are impacted by such an experiences. Parents, in particularly the roles mothers play during the treatment process remains a large topic of study.

Also congruent with other studies, was the discovery that current programming for juvenile offenders also has difficulty incorporating siblings based on the length and priorities of different programs (Meek, 2008). With a significant emphasis placed on the individual offender and the issue that brought them into the court system, few resources or time is designated to others in the individual’s family who were impacted by the crime. Long-term resources offer

service providers and families a more in-depth understanding of how a juvenile's crime impacts the whole of a family system.

It should also be noted that grief, loss and styles of coping vary between siblings (Action for Prisoners' Families, 2006). Such variances can be related to the age of the non-offending sibling, or the closeness of the sibling relationship. While some of the grieving and coping styles (such as open dialogue or letter writing) can be considered strongly resilient (Condry, 2007), certain roles that also served as coping tools (particularly sibling parentification) could be seen as detrimental to the individual taking on this role and their relationship with their sibling. An important point reiterated through the current study and past research is that open discussion with children about their sibling's adjudication is an important step in the therapeutic process and that many children currently do not have this opportunity (Meek, Lowe & McPhillips, 2010).

Implications for Social Work Practice

Of particular interest to the social work community should be how little grief and loss is discussed in relation to sibling development. Though there is a desire within the justice system to individualize treatment for the betterment of an individual's needs, it remains critical to also acknowledge the impact crime has on families as a system. Practice with juveniles in the justice system could potentially strengthen its effectiveness if more therapeutic settings were created for the adolescent, parents, and families to discuss family structures. In acknowledging every person's role in the family, discussions related to healthy and unhealthy grief and coping styles could be discussed and even strengthened by identifying what emotions and beliefs each person takes on.

Professionals practicing with adjudicated juveniles also have the power to assist adolescents and their siblings in creating their own voice within a family. By doing this, siblings will not only be able to better understand why and how their brother or sister's legal trouble impacts them, but will also be able to better express their specific needs following a sibling's absence.

Implications for Social Work Policy

Those focusing on macro level social service work also have the potential to be influenced by this research. With more knowledge of what our current justice systems strengths and weaknesses are, there is growing opportunity to advocate for legislation or funding that would promote the incorporation of family therapy services into criminal sentencing and treatment processes.

A need that could be examined would be the development of more detailed family therapy curriculum into offender based re-entry programs. Time and funding are both contentious subjects related to the topic of juvenile adjudication and treatment. Future research could benefit from the examination of how current policy makers advocate for juvenile justice programming. A study of current prioritizations in treatment programs and re-entry services for juveniles and their families could reveal gaps in legislation where further growth could promote more positive outcomes.

Promoting continued analysis of future programs also lends itself to the creation of more beneficial resources. Families struggling with incarceration currently have few platforms or professionals they feel they can turn to for resources. By developing new handouts, brochures, support or educational groups, families will be encouraged to become more involved in the

treatment process. If families feel more comfortable and secure discussing and becoming involved in such programs, it is also possible that social workers in other fields including school social workers, counselors, and grief therapists will become more familiar with their client's particular needs and thus also educate themselves on helpful materials.

Recommendations for future research

To assist in gaining a better understanding of sibling incarceration, it is suggested that future studies examine the lived experience both of the offending and non-offending siblings. The ability to gain first hand perspectives on this subject would not only offer professionals in the community a better understanding about the youth they work with, but also what intervention styles can best assist families as a whole. As family systems can suffer from cyclical issues including crime, poverty, and violence, engaging siblings and other family members in rehabilitative processes has the potential to strengthen family resiliency against such hardships.

The inclusion of father figureheads or those in a fatherhood role should also be considered when making recommendations for future research. Though the majority of incarcerated adults are males, none of the professionals interviewed for this study provided examples of work they had done with children and fathers. The social work community could extend their knowledge of sibling relationships by exploring the variances not only mothers have with children in incarceration settings, but also the experiences children and fathers have in incarceration settings. This could perhaps offer additional perspectives on the similarities or differences between the two roles related to grief, loss and incarceration.

In addition to this, an examination of specific programming, both long and short term in nature would also strengthen practitioner knowledge of what programs would benefit adjudicated

youth and their families. If specific patterns in curriculum could be identified, than it is possible that county systems would be willing to incorporate these programs in future juvenile dispositions. By identifying the length of time it would take to enroll and assist families in successfully completing treatment programming, time procedures could be reevaluated to promote additional programs and raise funding to create widespread local availability.

Just as important as the various time constraints on the program is also the population researchers choose to examine. This study chose to focus its questions around juveniles who have experienced adjudication and how their juvenile non-offending siblings are also treated. Future research would offer additionally useful data if it examined differences and similarities about the impact of incarceration on adult siblings. Analyzing such differences could shed insight into how social workers within the corrections system can successfully shift their work based on the client needs and ages.

Another unique platform to study this topic from would be to examine how other programs working with families are similar or different to those that work with adjudicated juveniles and their families. Chemical dependency or even suicide intervention programs that use the family systems perspective could be examined to identify benefits in curriculum or intervention styles that could carry over to the treatment of juveniles and their siblings.

Finally, future research should also consider examining various cultural perspectives regarding sibling relationships and if such differences in race or ethnicity impact how siblings are impacted by brother or sister's adjudication. Due to the disproportionate number of African American youth in the criminal justice system, it would be worth exploring family cultures that are most frequently impacted by our current legal system.

Strengths and Limitations

A particular strength of this research project is the topic it seeks to examine. The lack of current research identifies that little is known regarding sibling relationships, grief, and resiliency in relation to juvenile adjudication. Any additional research that seeks to open up and examine this issue creates strength that further research can be conducted on this subject. By continuing to examine the specific experiences siblings face, this study is also working to address the stigmatization and taboo that surrounds discussions of incarceration and its impact on family systems. The qualitative framework of the study's design also allowed for several points of discussion related to the topic to be expanded upon and explored. Themes were discovered about various subjects including roles, communication styles, emotions, and treatment incorporation that before have rarely been addressed.

A weakness of this study is its small sample size in addition to its inability to gain firsthand knowledge from siblings themselves. Though this study obtained information about sibling incarceration from the professionals that work with this population, future research would display more strength if researchers obtained insight from non-offending siblings personally. Time constraints inhibited the recruitment process making only professionals accessible for the interview and coding process.

The researcher's personal bias of having worked within the court system could also be considered a weakness limiting the research findings. Throughout the process, attempts to limit this bias were done with the help of committee and chair member input. Furthermore, it would also be considered important information for researchers to explore transition or re-entry

program development with families and the current unrecognized support systems that are currently in place within the community.

Conclusion

The impact of incarceration on American families is staggering. Whether adult or juvenile, no one is left unmarked by the criminal justice system. Despite a significant body of research examining the impact of incarceration on adult caregivers and their children, there has been little in the way of analysis of how incarceration impacts siblings within a family. The current study examined how professionals within the social work field identified juvenile grief of non-offending siblings. The findings of this study indicate that brothers and sisters are often a population filled with a deep sense of loss, guilt, and isolation, yet have little assistance in understanding how to work through the adjudication of a brother or sister.

References

- Action for Prisoners' Families. (2006). *Who's Guilty? Young people with a prisoner in the family*. Action for Prisoners' Families: London.
- Action for Prisoners' Families. (2002). *Supporting Young People with a Prisoner in the Family*. Action for Prisoners' Families: London.
- Berg and Lune (2012). *Qualitative Research Methods: Edition 8*. Pearson Education Inc. New Jersey.
- Boss, P. (2006). *Loss, Trauma, and Resilience: Therapeutic work with ambiguous loss*. Library of Congress: New York.
- Brown et al., (2000). *No-one's Ever Asked Me: Young people with a prisoner in the family*. Action for Prisoners' Families: London, UK.
- Condry, R. (2007). Families Outside: The difficulties faced by the relatives of serious offenders. *Prison Service Journal*. 174:3-10.
- Doka, K.J. (2002). *Disenfranchised Grief: Recognizing hidden sorrow* [PowerPoint Slides]. Retrieved from http://www.cruse.org.uk/sites/default/files/default_images/pdf/Events/KDDisenfranchise_dgrief.pdf.
- Farrington, Painter (2004). *Gender Differences in Risk Factors for Offending*. The Home Office: London.
- Glaze, L., & Maruschak, L. (2008). *Parents in Prison and their Minor Children*. Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report (NCJ 22984). Pp.1-25.
- Loper, A. B. & Tuerk, E. H. (2006). Parenting programs for incarcerated parents: Current research and future directions. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 17, 407-427.
- Margo J., & Stevens, A. (2008). *Make Me a Criminal: Preventing youth crime*. London: IPPR.
- Meek, R., (2008). Experiences of Younger Siblings of Young Men in Prison. *Children and Society*. 22: 265-277. DOI: 10.1111/j.1099-0860.2007.00108x.
- Meek, R., Lowe, K. & McPhillips, K. (2010). The Impact of a Custodial Sentence on the Siblings of Young Offenders: Matching services to needs. *Prison Service Journal*. 190: 26-31.
- Philbrick, K. (2002). Imprisonment: The impact on children. *Impact of Offending*. 3:72-81.
- Schlafer, R. & Wanous. (2014). *Little Children, Big Challenges: Incarceration-Statewide dissemination of resources for children with incarcerated parents*.

Tickle, L. (2006). Imprisoning Love. The Guardian. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2006/oct/19/childrenservices.prisons>.

Appendix A.

The Sibling Struggle: How brothers and sisters grieve and cope with sibling incarceration INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Introduction:

You are invited to participate in a research study investigating grief and coping responses with young adults who have experienced having a sibling become incarcerated. This study is being conducted by Katie Heaton, a graduate student at St. Catherine University under the supervision of Lisa Kiesel, a faculty member in the Department of social work. You were selected as a possible participant in this research because you identified as a professional working with clients who have been impacted by sibling incarceration.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to better understand how professionals can serve siblings who are grieving and coping with a sibling's incarceration. Approximately 6 to 8 people are expected to participate in this research.

Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to meet the researcher in a setting where a recorded interview can take place. Upon meeting, you will be asked to read, repeat back, and sign this consent form to signify your understanding of what this study entails. An audio recorder will then be turned on to capture a voice interview. You will then be asked to identify in what professional capacity you work with clients who are incarcerated. Following this, you will be asked a series of 7 questions regarding your professional opinion on how siblings are considered/involved as a factor in your work with your client and the impact client imprisonment has on siblings and your working relationship with the client. This study will take approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour to complete and will be done over the course of one session.

Risks and Benefits of being in the study:

The study has minimal risks. You will be asked to share your professional experiences surrounding the topic of sibling imprisonment and working with clients who have identified sibling imprisonment as an experience in their lives. This has the potential to create feelings of discomfort.

The researcher will check-in with the participant if they appear noticeably uncomfortable or concerned during the interview process. If you as the participant verbalize that you are uncomfortable with continuing the interview or the researcher determines that there is significant distress with the participant, the audio-recorder will be stopped and the interview will be terminated. The researcher will then ask the participant whether or not they wish the data they provided up until that point to be deleted or shared within the study.

Following the interview, the researcher will debrief with you about your overall experience participating in the study.

There are no direct benefits for participation in this study. You will be given an opportunity to share your professional experiences related to sibling incarceration in a setting that is safe, secure, and non-judgmental. An additional benefit of participating in this study is that you would be

contributing to a topic that is rarely discussed or known about. By sharing your perspective, you would be providing useful information for future practitioners who wish to work with families who have had incarcerated family members.

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained in connection with this research study that can be identified with you will be disclosed only with your permission; your results will be kept confidential. Using the audio recording from your interview, a third party transcriber will then document the interview in a word document. This third party can only transcribe the interview with your consent and is bound by confidentiality to only release the results of the transcription to myself (the researcher), Katie Heaton.

I will keep the research results in a locked file cabinet inside a locked closet in my home and only I and my advisor will have access to the records while I work on this project. I will finish analyzing the data by May 31, 2014. I will then destroy all original reports and identifying information that can be linked back to you. Only my advisor, the third party transcriber, or I will access the audio recordings that were made and following the data analysis, these audio recordings will be destroyed.

Voluntary nature of the study:

Participation in this research study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with the researcher or the university in which this study was conducted through. If you decide to participate, you are free to stop at any time without affecting these relationships.

Contacts and questions:

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Katie Heaton, at 715-307-2916. You may ask questions now, or if you have any additional questions later, the faculty advisor, (Lisa Kiesel, who can be reached by email at kies0954@stthomas.edu), will be happy to answer them. If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you may also contact Dr. John Schmitt, Chair of the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board, at (651) 690-7739. You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent:

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read this information and your questions have been answered. Even after signing this form, please know that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

I, _____ (the participant) consent to participate in the study and agree to have my interview with the researcher audio-recorded.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Participant

Date

Appendix B.

Interview Questions

1. Can you describe your job and how you became involved working with incarcerated individuals and their families? What is your primary goal or role when working with this population?
2. What kinds of grieving and coping styles do you see with your clients?
3. What types of grieving and coping styles have you noticed your clients' siblings having? Are they different/similar-if so, how?
4. How would you describe the impact of your client's imprisonment on their remaining siblings?
5. How do these grief and coping styles impact your work with your client and their family?
6. How many of your clients have other family members, particularly siblings, who have been incarcerated? What impact do you think this has on your clients?
7. How do you think other professionals in your position can help their clients and their siblings grieve and cope with loss due to incarceration?

