

Children of Incarcerated Parents: An Ecological Program Evaluation

Children with parents whom have been incarcerated are said to be at higher risk for a variety of behavioral and emotional issues. These children often contend with other factors such as financial instability, domestic violence, substance use, mental health issues of the caregiver, etc. Research has explored the psychological and behavioral impacts of incarceration on children, as well as protective factors to support their healthy development. More limited research has been done on how programs can impact the outcomes for this population. Programs that address the needs of this population improve both the lives of children and the communities in which they live. The projects objectives are to: 1) Provide an ecological analysis for Vermont children of incarcerated parents, 2) Demonstrate the value of the Ecological Perspective as a useful evaluative framework, and 3) Illuminate the work of a Vermont program for children of incarcerated parents by: a) describing it through the Ecological Perspective and b) evaluating how its work aligns with Ecological Perspective's conditions for optimal development. A benefit of using the Ecological Perspective is that it specifically addresses change and transitions. A program seeks to create change in its own ecosystem, within relationships, and in developmental trajectories for their intended participants. The Ecological Perspective clearly provides a beneficial framework to evaluate if the program is facilitating such changes. This evaluation uses a qualitative single case study methodology. Data will be collected through file reviews and interviews with participants and program staff. Analyses will be conducted and results provided that will also include suggestions for the program if it seeks to align with the Ecological Perspective.