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ABSTRACT

Issues of incarceration and its effects on parents, children, families, and communities are as much human development concerns as policy dilemmas. This report synthesizes the discussion of these concerns and their implications for policy, practice, and research as presented at the National Center on Fathers and Families' "Roundtable on Constructing and Coping with Incarceration and Family Re-Entry: Perspectives from the Field." Section 1 compiles summaries of the research papers presented at the roundtable, interspersed with discussants' commentaries. Section 2 describes the current and emerging issues in father incarceration and reentry that arose during the roundtable exchanges, including acknowledging ambivalence toward families of the incarcerated, reassessing assumptions about incarcerated parents, punishing parents and not their children, reentering communities with few resources, sharing information and building trust, surveying existing state efforts, addressing rising rates and declining care, addressing effects on child development, and viewing incarceration as a source of role and social strain. Section 3 offers new directions for research, including evaluating interventions and agencies, translating research findings for practice, and investigating assumptions of causation. Section 4 explores the implications of the issues raised for policymaking, including extending the war metaphor, reconciling social capital and welfare reform, redefining reentry and reintegration, and addressing fatherhood and parenting at the state level. The final section of the report describes lessons learned for practice related to listening to prisoners' children, listening to practitioners, considering issues of abuse and domestic violence, refining the notion of outcomes, articulating the diversity among incarcerated fathers, and understanding practitioners' varying roles in different settings and levels in the system. The roundtable agenda and a list of participants complete the report. (KB)

Roundtable on Constructing and Coping with Incarceration and Family Re-Entry: Perspectives from the Field (Philadelphia, PA, November 15-16, 2001).

National Center on Fathers and Families
University of Pennsylvania

November 2001

Roundtable on Constructing and Coping with Incarceration and Family Re-Entry: Perspectives from the Field

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Introduction

On November 15 and 16, 2001, more than 50 researchers, policymakers, practitioners, corrections officials, and other specialists in the field of fathers and families gathered in Philadelphia, PA, to convene the National Center on Fathers and Families' (NCOFF) "Roundtable on Constructing and Coping with Incarceration and Family Re-Entry: Perspectives from the Field."

Until recently, discussions regarding incarcerated parents have been driven by advocates and practitioners lobbying for reforms in prison policy and the criminal justice system. Yet issues of incarceration and its effects on parents, children, families, and communities are as much human development concerns as policy dilemmas. The roundtable's purpose was to examine both developmental and policy issues within the contexts of responsible parenting, family support, and child welfare. It was also intended to identify pathways leading to an integrated knowledge base on incarcerated parents, families, and communities that will be useful to researchers, practitioners, and policymakers.

While the roundtable addressed the effects of parental incarceration—when either a mother or father is imprisoned—it also provided a specific focus on the complexities of the presence, absence, and re-entry of incarcerated fathers into their children's and families' lives. This focus is essential, since an overwhelming percentage of incarcerated parents are fathers; a roundtable report delivered by Christopher J. Mumola, which examines statistics from the U.S. Bureau of Justice, indicates that of all incarcerated parents, 93 percent are male, and only 7 percent are female.

The Roundtable Online

This roundtable marked the first time NCOFF extended the event with Internet capabilities, both during the meeting itself and in extended discussion online afterward. The proceedings were simulcast live on NCOFF's website, and Internet viewers were invited to e-mail their questions, many of which were posed to participants. The video files are available for viewing using RealPlayer at www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu.

The online discussion of parental incarceration and family re-entry focused on the implications of the roundtable's deliberations for policy, practice, and research. This forum was intended to explore further specific issues raised during the live discussion, as well as contribute additional perspectives on the impact of incarceration on parents and their children, families, and communities. NCOFF posted brief statements to frame these online conversations, asked participants to post their initial comments on the statements, then distributed those comments on an e-mail listserv. Throughout the online discussion, the goal was to identify specific issues and problems that should be addressed and to suggest approaches appropriate to our specialized areas of work and possible collaborative efforts. Highlights from these online conversations were integrated into this summary report.

A Context for the Discussion

Responsible parenting—particularly, responsible fatherhood—is a hot-button issue in family research and practice. In an almost unprecedented rise from obscurity as recently as five years ago, it has become one of the top priorities of policymakers and elected officials. Despite the increased significance accorded to parenting at all levels of government, few studies focus on mothers and fathers in the criminal justice system, particularly on the capacity of state criminal justice efforts to facilitate parental involvement or on the extent to which current prison-reform efforts create mechanisms to help parents reconnect with their children post-incarceration. As well, in the midst of heightened public and political sensitivity to and concern about families, rigorous discussion of the issues and

policies regarding incarcerated parents, their families, and children is relatively absent.

Advancing the discussion requires the application of resources to this area of inquiry and practice. According to Tom Henry of the University of Pennsylvania, "If we don't get resources, we will still keep having the conversation." For nearly 50 years, the nation has expressed concern about parental incarceration, without thinking systematically about how to address it. He continues, "We are still asking questions such as: `Are incarcerated parents fit parents?' The answer, too often, is a simple `no,' with little investigation regarding why."

These and other concerns related to parental incarceration and its impact on families cross the boundaries that typically divide research and practice and that separate these spheres from policymaking. Addressing them requires collective, collaborative, and strategic efforts that: reduce risks to children resulting from parental incarceration; position families and communities to be protective oases for children; assist families and communities in addressing and redressing the uncertainties that arise from parental absence and re-entry after incarceration; and determine ways in which correctional institutions, family services, and labor agencies might best respond to the issues of responsible parenting both within correctional settings and within the prisoners' families and communities of origin.

The discussion at NCOFF's roundtable focused on four general topics: (1) "The Effects of Parent Incarceration on Child and Family Welfare"; (2) "Practical Dimensions of Father Incarceration and Re-Entry: Race, Legal Representation, and Family Policies"; (3) "Positioning the States: Intersections of Responsible Fathering, Family Support, and Correctional Systems"; and (4) "The Roles of Programs, Practice, and Communities in Supporting Fathers and Families Pre-, During, and Post-Imprisonment." Each session was interactive and was developed around a core set of questions, providing attendees with opportunities to discuss in depth the issues raised in the process of answering them.

As for all roundtable discussions, the meeting's primary goals were to:

1. Present a comprehensive analysis of issues and problems identified in the fathers and families literature;

2. Deepen the discourse around these issues between and among researchers, practitioners, and policymakers;

3. Engage participants in the development of a research agenda, as an initial activity in a longer-term research study;

4. Move the roundtable and the field past the idea stage toward the conduct of sound basic and practice-driven research; and

5. Involve practitioners closely in the conceptualization of research projects pursued by NCOFF and others in the field.

After authors delivered summaries of key themes and findings from their research papers, they were given a brief period in which to respond to discussants' questions. These responses broadened the scope of each paper, placing the issues it raised in a wider context or suggesting new ways of conceptualizing them. Moderators then led a discussion on these themes among all roundtable participants, who used them to explore new directions for research and practice and implications for policymaking.

Summary of Roundtable Themes

Several overarching themes, which are discussed in detail in subsequent sections of this report, emerged from the discussion.

- The ambivalence that exists among policymakers and society at large toward the impact of incarceration on families and communities has resulted in the absence of a systematic approach for collecting empirical and ethnographic information about incarcerated parents and their families, for performing basic research and intervention evaluations, and for launching coordinated policies that do not penalize the children and communities of incarcerated parents along with the offender. This lack of concern has led to the erosion of social capital in communities with high rates of incarceration, the development of social policies and services that often advance

competing values, and only sporadic success among programs addressing the needs of incarcerated parents. One important consideration that has yet to be addressed is the specific effects of parental incarceration on children.

- Issues of re-integration are as much about reinforcing communities as eliminating recidivism. High rates of parental incarceration deplete communities of the human resources that are needed to sustain family and community support systems. When a community is deprived of a member through incarceration, the capacity of the community to support its families and children fully is diminished. Researchers need to reconsider the models and assumptions they currently use when examining incarceration—its causes and impacts, as well as society's approaches to redressing crime. Policymakers need to address the fact that some policies designed to correct injustices, such as racial disparities in sentencing, in practice have had unintended consequences that instead reinforced those disparities and worsened conditions in communities. They must also reconsider how public resources are invested in communities with high incarceration rates—in prisons or in services that build social capital.

- For research on incarcerated parents and their families to serve policymaking and practice effectively, a number of steps must be taken. Researchers need to: find ways to work with practitioners when collecting data in order to build trust with a population and ask the right questions; develop a broader ecological and conceptual framework for thinking about role transitions surrounding incarceration, within the context of an institution and vis-à-vis the family and the community; develop more refined and realistic outcome measures that are tracked over a significant period of time; incorporate feedback from the community and practitioners into research methodology and design; design data-collection strategies that emerge from everyday settings such as schools, healthcare providers' offices, and public libraries; and obtain qualitative profiles detailing the experiences of individuals, families, and communities, rather than limiting study to quantitative measures describing a population's demographics and broadly defined outcomes. In particular, information about incarcerated parents and their families must be shared and transferred readily among researchers, practitioners, agencies, funders, and the populations with which they work.

- There is little integration between fatherhood efforts within communities and those within prisons. Moreover, the need for services far exceeds the capacity for prisons to provide such services to fathers. Of the in-prison fatherhood programs that do exist, most have a very narrow focus—primarily on child support and child-support enforcement—and may undervalue the need for training in education, job skills, and health issues. Program support also needs to be more long-term, and, to make the case that these services make a difference, states need access to evaluations of successful models to determine what works. Practitioners can serve critical roles as translators, conveners, and advocates to help address systemic problems. They can help to *translate* how public policies affect the lives of individuals by articulating the conflicting goals and missions of public and social service agencies and the need for greater interagency communication and coordination. They can serve as *conveners* within communities for the transmission of values and norms and for providing new social and economic resources. Lastly, they can serve as *advocates* who not only ensure that the concerns of the incarcerated are heard but also identify common ground between the punisher and the punished. However, when considering the various roles of practitioners in serving incarcerated parents and their children, it is essential to acknowledge that they do so in different settings (for example, in social service agencies, in prisons, schools, or communities) and at different levels (at the state level, in local agencies, or in community-based efforts).

Issues of incarceration and its effects on parents, children, families, and communities are as much human development concerns as policy dilemmas.

About This Report

This report synthesizes the discussion of the themes and their implications for policymaking, the directions they indicate for future research, and the lessons they impart for practice. The first section contains summaries of the research papers presented at the roundtable, interspersed with discussants' commentaries. The second section describes the current and emerging issues in father incarceration and re-entry that arose during the roundtable exchanges. The third section offers new directions for research. The fourth section explores the implications of the issues raised for policymaking. The final section describes lessons learned for practice.

Summary of Roundtable Papers

NCOFF asked roundtable participants to explore the issues discussed in three papers: (1) "Linking Father Involvement and Parental Incarceration: Conceptual Issues in Research and Practice" by Vivian L. Gadsden and R. Karl Rethemeyer; (2) "Returning Captives of the American War on Drugs: Issues of Community and Family Re-Entry" by John Hagan and Juleigh Petty Coleman; and (3) "Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report: Incarcerated Parents and Their Children" by Christopher J. Mumola. Two participants, Deborah Johnson of Michigan State University and Phillip Bowman of the University of Illinois, Chicago, served as discussants for all three papers, and Wallace McLaughlin of the Fathers and Families Resource/Research Center served as moderator. This section summarizes these papers and the related commentary from research presentations. The cross-cutting issues raised during the discussion of these papers are described in the remaining sections of this report.

"Linking Father Involvement and Parental Incarceration: Conceptual Issues in Research and Practice"

Authors: **Vivian L. Gadsden, NCOFF, University of Pennsylvania**
R. Karl Rethemeyer, NCOFF, Harvard University[1]

Gadsden's and Rethemeyer's paper positions father incarceration as an important subset of emerging knowledge in fathers and families research. Drawing upon literature in multiple fields of study and practice, the authors focus on the nature of father incarceration and its effects on children, families, and fathers themselves. Their goals are to consider the ways in which the issues informing parental incarceration and family re-entry might be examined in fathers and families research, and to offer suggestions for the development of conceptual frameworks that can serve to build the field, using the *Fathers and Families Core Learnings* as a context to reframe inquiry, practice, and policy and as a way to highlight the relevance of rigorous work on incarcerated fathers.

Why Focus on Father Incarceration?

Gadsden and Rethemeyer argue that father incarceration needs to be explored as a discrete, significant subset within research, practice, and policy on father absence, noting that father absence resulting from incarceration is likely to engender a specific set of risk factors for children, particularly those who are impoverished or living in unsafe environments.

They point out that research and father-focused programs tend to focus on studying or serving low-income and minority fathers, the very population demographically most likely to face arrest and/or incarceration. The threat or reality that incarceration will separate these men from their children—along with other forms of alienation and vulnerability—conspire against positive father involvement by these men. However, most studies of father involvement or the impact of father absence do not include an investigation of incarceration as the intervening variable, but instead focus on father absence due to divorce.

Moreover, some analysts suggest that the families and communities to which these fathers belong suffer the secondary effects of incarceration, over time and from an intergenerational perspective. Thus, to cope with community and family problems in the presence of poverty requires a focus on the dynamics of incarceration and fatherhood and an examination of their various effects on family, children, and community demographics.

The authors position father incarceration as a policy issue overlapping the corrections/justice and health and human

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services systems. As a justice issue, for example, father incarceration attempts to solve one problem (by removing the offender from society) but inadvertently creates another: loss of economic, emotional, and social paternal support for these offenders' partners and children. In the area of welfare, recent legislation has tried to help the families of incarcerated men by aggressively pursuing payment of child support, but this increased child support debt may have the effect, post-release, of *discouraging* fathers from reuniting with the family and from initiating or maintaining a relationship with their children. The conflicting policies of our criminal justice and welfare systems in relation to incarcerated fathers, say the authors, may actually be helping to create the next generation of children at risk for entry into the criminal justice system.

What We Know about Incarcerated Parents and Their Children

The authors describe the scope of the problem in addressing parental incarceration, then provide a summary of background issues in fathers and families research.

As a society, we have often stated our commitment to children and families; yet in practice it seems little more than ambivalence exists toward attending to the needs of children and families of incarcerated parents. This discomfort is best exemplified by the lack of a systematic approach in the United States for determining the number of parents who are incarcerated. This dearth of statistics and literature makes it difficult to draw conclusions about the size of this population or the course of research or practice efforts over time.

As the penal system expands, the number of absent parents grows, particularly among low-income African American and other minority families.

However, we do know that over the past thirty years the prison population has dramatically increased, and that the number of incarcerated fathers seems to have grown proportionately. That is, as the penal system expands, the number of absent parents grows, particularly among low-income African American and other minority families who, statistics show, are incarcerated at rates several times greater than white men of the same age.

There has been much controversy over the interpretation of incarceration patterns over time. These patterns indicate peaks in the number of those imprisoned for drug offenses and longer sentences for repeat offenders. Some research suggests more than half of the rise in imprisonment can be traced to the use of custodial sentences. This trend and other factors have led observers to point to the criminal justice system as a sorting ground for those with the fewest economic, educational, social, and legal resources.

It is difficult to convert these trends into an estimate of the number of children affected. Recent data from the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics suggest close to 1.4 million children had an imprisoned father in 2000. But pinning down a number is difficult because law enforcement rarely gathers such information, and until recently most correctional institutions did not ask prisoners for details about the families they leave behind. Thus, we lack information on the number, identity, and location of affected children—issues likely to affect almost every child- and family-related service agency and institution, including the welfare system, schools, and the workplace. Without such knowledge, the child welfare community is unable to analyze children's needs, the services they require, or the effects of parent incarceration upon them. The temptation to characterize such children as "just like any other kid" misrepresents and minimizes the range of unique, complex situations these children face.

When conceptualizing fatherhood during incarceration, the inclination is to extrapolate what little is known about incarcerated mothers and apply it to fathers. However, as much as they have in common, incarcerated fathers and mothers differ in many ways, such as the type of crimes they commit, social expectations in their role as parents, and the ability of their communities to reabsorb them post-release. Incarcerated fathers historically have had fewer support programs due to the assumption that the mother is a child's primary caregiver; however, neither fathers' nor mothers' support programs are sufficient to their needs.

Conceptualizing Father Incarceration as an Issue of Responsible Fathering

The authors next focus on determining the parameters of "responsible fatherhood" in light of father incarceration, noting the need for the field of father and family studies to move beyond crude distinctions between father presence versus absence to more realistic gauges of father involvement, and to examine fathering issues across diverse cultural, class, and ethnic groups. They note the field's tendency to focus mainly on poor fathers, and the recent policy emphasis on morals, marriage, and paternity establishment. In contrast, the authors believe programs that serve fathers would benefit from: (1) establishing a clearer definition of what it means to be a good father; (2) developing better means of measuring program success; (3) tailoring efforts to the nature of the individual programs and types of participants within them; and (4) placing experienced practitioners at the forefront of efforts regarding fathers and families.

Gadsden and Rethemeyer point to the many barriers to addressing father incarceration issues, such as getting research subjects to self-identify and the view of some practitioners that incarcerated fathers should be discouraged from involvement with their children. In light of such limitations, they apply the *Fathers and Families Core Learnings* as a framework to discuss father incarceration issues across research, practice, and policymaking, within the context of two questions: (1) What are the nature and complexities of fathering/parenting from prison and the consequences of father incarceration for families and children? (2) What are the critical features of family and community re-entry?

Father Presence. Not merely physical proximity or the opposite of absence, father presence encompasses a range of nurturing, educational, and financial roles fathers play in their children's mental, physical, and social well-being, and is closely associated with the idea of responsible fathering. Here "responsible fathering" encompasses taking responsibility for meeting a child's needs, being available or accessible to the child, and engaging in forms of direct interaction with him or her. Since literature suggests children with incarcerated parents are at-risk for a variety of negative consequences, father presence behaviors (or lack thereof) may be a useful angle from which to examine father incarceration.

Fathers' Care. A subset of father presence, fathers' care focuses on whether and how fathers demonstrate concern through different behaviors and practices that attend to children's basic physical and emotional needs—their commitment, investment, and connection to the child. It is not uncommon for incarcerated fathers to express the same kind of caring, hope, and expectation as other fathers and even to cherish their children more due to their limited contact. The challenge of dealing with incarcerated fathers' care is identifying the role of the correctional system in helping fathers become more engaged in their children's lives, especially inmates with troubled family histories.

Employment, Joblessness, and Father Re-Entry. Inadequate employment and joblessness affect a disproportionate number of incarcerated fathers, particularly poor and minority fathers. Such problems have been found to have causal links to incarceration (e.g., when men turn to drug dealing due to lack of job opportunities) and to serve as impediments to family formation and family involvement. Two questions must be addressed in this area: (1) the relationship between father involvement and joblessness, particularly among fathers of color and (2) the types of policies necessary to respond to unemployment among young fathers, especially fathers of color. In light of these issues, the authors note that the most important predictor of an absent father's involvement with his children was his employment status over the last year.

Systemic Barriers. "Systemic barriers" refers to features of public benefits, child support enforcement, and paternity establishment traditionally perceived by fathers as obstacles to their positive engagement with their children. For incarcerated fathers, say the authors, the primary barrier is not so much the incarceration itself but criminal justice, child support, and welfare policies that seem to conflict with the realities of incarceration and its impact on families. Fathers find the "system" to be more punitive than supportive of their efforts to be "good" fathers, and such a situation is likely to be exacerbated by incarceration.

In particular, three barriers act as impediments to fathering: (1) detention and judgment, which remove the father from his family abruptly and, under recent welfare legislation, often lead to the placement of children into foster care and possibly their loss of some forms of social welfare support, making it more difficult to keep the family intact; (2) incarceration, which physically isolates fathers far from home, makes it more difficult for them to establish paternity, and during which large child support arrearages may accrue, creating a huge debt that has been shown to discourage father involvement after release; and (3) release rules, such as restrictions on fathers' activities and location, that serve to limit contact with children.

It is not uncommon for incarcerated fathers to express the same kind of caring, hope, and expectation as other fathers and even to cherish their children more due to their limited contact.

Co-parenting. Co-parenting refers to the range of cooperative relationships existing between parents—whether married, cohabiting, divorced, or never married—in the process of childrearing. This task is made more complex when the parents in question have been separated by incarceration: If mother and father are not able to co-plan and co-parent, fundamental parent-child activities may be compromised, and a father's incarceration may further limit the degree to which a co-parenting plan can be created and implemented.

Role Transitions. This area focuses on how the transition to parenthood affects the life-course of parents, and how various life transitions affect parenting choices, behaviors, and practices. For better or worse, incarceration complicates and strongly influences the way a father adapts to his role as a parent, particularly for young men undergoing other normal transitions to adulthood.

Intergenerational Learning. This theme addresses the critical role the beliefs, practices, and paradigms established in families of origin play in those of subsequent generations. For example, intergenerational patterns of criminality in families are part of the public image of families with an incarcerated parent, and perhaps of society's expectations for children with an incarcerated parent—the likelihood that they will "follow in their parent's footsteps." Rather than assuming there are certain immutable characteristics that place children at risk of later incarceration, the authors suggest placing more emphasis on understanding the circumstances and family processes that are more or less likely to lead children on such a negative path.

In closing, Gadsden and Rethemeyer advocate a multidisciplinary approach to studying the nature and complexities of fathering and parenting and the consequences of father incarceration for children and families, emphasizing that parenting programs in correctional settings, however well-intentioned, will have limited effects without concurrent familial and community support systems.

"Returning Captives of the American War on Drugs: Issues of Community and Family Re-Entry"

Authors: **John Hagan, Northwestern University; American Bar Association**
Juleigh Petty Coleman, Northwestern University; American Bar Association

The recent American "war on drugs" has dramatically affected African American inner-city neighborhoods and families, and not for the better, according to Hagan and Coleman. Increased imprisonment has meant an absence of fathers that has left many families economically imperiled, and the removal of mothers has placed many children in the care of relatives or persons biologically unrelated to them. As these young men and women return to their neighborhoods and families, the settings they are re-entering are not the ones they left behind. In the aftermath of the drug war, many within these communities see more signs of revenge than of reconstruction. This paper considers the challenges posed for re-entering parents by the erosion of state capital and the buildup of negative social capital. In particular, it focuses on new federal family welfare legislation that the authors believe is emblematic of state disinvestments in these families. The final part of the paper suggests directions for research on the re-entry of released prisoners into their communities and families.

Erosion of "Social Capital"

Inner-city African American communities have experienced a loss of civic goods and services provided by public organizations. These institutions, such as police, schools, and welfare, now serve less as vehicles of social integration than as instruments of surveillance, suspicion, and exclusion. The larger consequence of such harsh legal and social policies is the formation of "negative social capital," leaving a situation in which, say the authors, "the derelict public sector of America's urban core is patently unfit to fulfill the integrative mission bestowed upon it."

Links Between Imprisonment and Families

Drawing from U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics data (including much from the report cited below) and other research, the authors present their argument that due to an aggressive "war on drugs," larger numbers of people (particularly African Americans) are being imprisoned, and for longer terms. The majority of people in prison are parents; once these parents exit the criminal justice system, the changes in criminal justice and welfare legislation that have emerged from the drug "war"—however well-intentioned—are having the effect of breaking up and/or preventing re-integration of already weakened families. Thus, as some researchers have suggested, "by getting tough on crime, the United States has also gotten tough on children."

A Focus on Incarcerated Fathers

Most of the current research has focused on incarcerated mothers, and from this baseline the authors attempt to extrapolate to fathers as well. Studies have shown that most male inmates are, in fact, fathers, and that anywhere from nearly one-half to three-quarters of incarcerated fathers were living with their children prior to going to prison. Moreover, a significant number of even nonresident fathers provided various types of positive attention and informal physical, emotional, or financial support to their children before being incarcerated. Research also indicates that incarcerated fathers usually wish to maintain their identities as parents. Whether they are a more positive influence when involved or reinvolved in their children's lives has yet to be determined—but, the authors state, despite employment problems or criminal history, most such fathers have something to offer their children, families, and communities.

In the aftermath of the drug war, many within affected communities see more signs of revenge than of reconstruction.

Considering Incarcerated Mothers

Although women represent less than 10 percent of the prison population, the female prison population is growing much more rapidly than the male prison population. As well, incarcerated mothers are more likely to have been living with their children prior to arrest. Whereas, when a father is incarcerated, approximately 90 percent of their children remain under the care of their mothers, when mothers are imprisoned the children's care is uncertain—less than one-third of children remain with their fathers, and at least one-half will not see or visit their mothers after they are incarcerated. Such children often come under substitute care that may not be adequate and usually is without sufficient financial support.

Once released, most imprisoned mothers expect to resume their parenting role at home, but this may be difficult, especially when the parent is a long-time drug user. Prisons often do not provide the drug treatment or parenting classes required before parents can rejoin their families. Further, women often have trouble finding housing, jobs, and/or childcare that would facilitate their caring for their children. Ironically, though returning mothers may need more state support than before incarceration, due to their criminal record it may now be more difficult to obtain.

The 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act and Incarcerated Women

The authors argue that new federal family welfare legislation resulting from the war on drugs is reducing the rights of incarcerated parents. They cite the 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) as an example of legislation that makes the return and re-entry of men and women to their families more problematic, and discounts the contribution

previously incarcerated parents might make to their children's lives. In so doing, ASFA creates "negative social capital" in communities where positive social resources are required to meet the needs of families.

As certain researchers have suggested, "by getting tough on crime, the United States has also gotten tough on children."

Hagan and Coleman note that ASFA was designed to assure stability in children's lives by streamlining placement with a permanent, reliable caretaker. However, ASFA has served to make terminating parental rights much easier and to reduce the amount of time allowed for parents to reunite with their children. For example, incarcerated women serve an average of 18 months in prison, but the legislation terminates parental rights when a child has been in foster care for only 15 months.

The criminal justice system and child welfare services are linked through the populations they serve. For both agencies, these communities tend to be poor and non-white—often, they are the same individuals, moving through related institutions. These systems are becoming more punitive, containing many bureaucratic hurdles and delays before mothers/parents can be reunited with their children, such as repeated meetings with case workers or parole officers, and long waiting lists for required substance-abuse programs.

Researching "Postwar" Re-Entry

To the authors, the difficulties posed by ASFA for incarcerated mothers represent a continuation of harsh treatment post-prison, in which they are more likely to be greeted by drug tests than services that would assist them in reintegrating. For example, today's service- and high-tech oriented economy offers few job opportunities for former convicts, and employment assistance is seldom provided. Such trends ultimately serve to fragment rather than rebuild family relationships.

Thus, researchers must develop an understanding of the social context into which prisoners who are parents return, and its consequences for the former inmates, their families, and communities. At a minimum, Hagan and Coleman recommend the following:

- Longitudinal studies of individuals of varying age and gender for periods long enough to establish trajectories of post-prison adjustment;
- Investigating the variety of family and community contexts to which incarcerated parents return;
- Tracking employment histories of returning inmates—both legal and illegal, and how these monies are distributed among family and non-family members;
- Including parents with children of varying ages in studies, in order to consider the impact of parental absence/return at different stages of development, and monitoring the role of programs like ASFA in what happens to the family during and after incarceration;
- Paying attention to how a range of state interventions are influenced by, and influence, post-prison adjustment;
- Incorporating ethnic and racial diversity concerns beyond the African American community, focusing especially on Spanish-speaking persons and the possible complication of immigration issues upon post-prison adjustment;
- Studying how these individuals and their families are embedded in communities that themselves vary across space and time; and
- Incorporating methods of measuring the backgrounds of persons returning from prison, in order to analyze ways in which these individuals vary from one another prior to rejoining their communities.

"Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report: Incarcerated Parents and Their Children"

Presenter: **Christopher J. Mumola, Bureau of Justice Statistics**

Christopher J. Mumola's report, compiled from U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, is part of a series of studies based on the 1997 "Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities." It presents statistics from various data sets regarding characteristics of mothers and fathers, and of nonparents, in both state and federal penal systems.

Current Rates of Incarceration

Mumola's presentation to the group enumerated highlights from the latest (2000) estimated figures, as discussed below. Together, the 1999-2000 statistics, and the trends they suggest, may be useful in understanding and studying various father incarceration issues.

Parents Under Community Corrections. Nearly 3.6 million parents were under some form of correctional supervision, in turn affecting some 7.1 million minor children. Approximately 1.1 million parents of 2.3 million children were incarcerated in prisons or local jails (representing less than one-third of those in the corrections system; most—about 2 million—are under state probation). Fathers accounted for 79 percent of all parents under supervision and 90 percent of those incarcerated.

Decade Trends, 1991 to 2000. There has been a substantial increase in the number of parents in state and federal prisons during the past decade: from 452,500 to 737,400; the number of affected children has risen from 936,500 to 1,531,500. This increase in incarcerated parents is similar to the growth in numbers of prisoners in general, 63 percent and 69 percent respectively. The percentage of prisoners in state or federal facilities with minor children (56 percent) has changed little over the course of the decade. But the number of mothers in prison grew 85 percent, while fathers increased by 61 percent.

Profiles of Parents in Prison. Of incarcerated parents, 93 percent are male, and only 7 percent are female. About half (49 percent) are African American, 29 percent are white, 19 percent are Hispanic, and 3 percent are of other races. Their average age is 32. Half of these parent inmates (48 percent) have never been married, followed by 28 percent who are divorced or separated, 23 percent who are married, and 1 percent who are widowed. The percentages and ratios are quite similar to those of nonparents, except that more nonparents are white (39 percent compared with 29 percent), more have never married (69 percent), and fewer are married (only 9 percent).

Offenses. More fathers than mothers have committed violent offenses (45 percent compared to 26 percent); the greatest percentage of these crimes are robberies. A greater percentage of mothers than fathers have committed homicide, although mothers' overall number of violent convictions is small. Mothers are also proportionately more likely than fathers to have committed property offenses or drug offenses: 28 percent of mothers compared to 21 percent of fathers have been incarcerated for property crimes, and 35 percent of mothers compared to 23 percent of fathers for drug offenses.

Incarcerated fathers usually wish to maintain their identities as parents; whether they are a more positive influence when involved or re-involved in their children's lives has yet to be determined.

Criminal History. At the time of their arrest, 49 percent of parents were already on probation or parole; first-time offenders accounted for 23 percent of parents, recidivists with only drug convictions accounted for another 4 percent; 60 percent of parents had multiple prior convictions, and nearly half (44 percent) had three or more prior convictions.

Children of Incarcerated Parents. The mean age of children with incarcerated parents was eight years old; 58 percent of such children were younger than ten. Some 2.1 percent of the nation's minor children had a parent in prison in 1999, but there is a racial disparity: African American children are nearly nine times more likely to have an incarcerated parent as white children (7 percent compared with 0.8 percent). About 2.6 percent of Hispanic children had a parent in prison, a figure more than triple that of white children.

Impact of Incarceration on Children

Effect on Households. Approximately 36 percent of fathers and 58 percent of mothers in state prisons had been living with their children prior to arrest; in 2000 an estimated 344,100 U.S. households with children were missing a resident parent held in state or federal prison.

Caregiving. Almost all—90 percent—of children with a father in state prison were in the care of their mother, while the rest were in care of their grandparents (13 percent). For children with a mother in state prison, a majority, 53 percent, live with grandparents and 28 percent with their father; a similar figure (26 percent) resided with other relatives. About 2 percent of children with a father in prison and 10 percent with a mother in prison were in foster care or other nonfamily care.

In 2000 an estimated 344,100 U.S. households with children were missing a resident parent held in state or federal prison.

Contact with Parents. Most parents, both fathers and mothers (79 percent and 88 percent respectively) reported some form of contact with their children since admission to prison, with a solid majority (62 percent and 78 percent) reporting monthly contact. However, a majority of both fathers and mothers (57 percent and 54 percent respectively) also said they never received visits from their children.

Treatment Needs of Parents in State Prison

Substance Abuse. A majority of fathers and mothers (58 percent and 65 percent) had engaged in drug use in the month before the offense for which they were incarcerated. Nearly one-half of mothers had used cocaine/crack (45 percent), as had about one-quarter of fathers (26 percent). Some 43 percent of mothers and 33 percent of fathers were under the influence of drugs when they committed the crime for which they were incarcerated; 37 percent of fathers and 29 percent of mothers were under the influence of alcohol.

Mental Illness and Homelessness. Mental illness symptoms were reported by 13 percent of incarcerated fathers and nearly a quarter (23 percent) of mothers. Mothers also reported higher levels of homelessness pre-incarceration, 18 percent, compared with 8 percent for fathers.

Current and Emerging Issues
in Parent Incarceration and Family Re-Entry

Based on the research presented in the first session of the roundtable, participants identified a number of key topics that cut across research, policy, and practice regarding father/parent incarceration and family re-entry. Summarized here, they include the following: (1) the public ambivalence towards families of the incarcerated; (2) reassessing assumptions about incarcerated parents; (3) the need for the criminal justice system to avoid harming children when punishing their parents; (4) the challenges of former inmates who re-enter communities with few resources; (5) the importance of sharing information and building trust between incarcerated parents and those who work with them, and between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners; (6) the need to survey existing efforts at the state level; (7) how rising rates of incarceration negatively affect parents' ability to care for children; (8) parental/social perspectives on children's development when parents are incarcerated; and (9) incarceration as a source of role and social strain.

Acknowledging Ambivalence Towards Families of the Incarcerated

As Vivian Gadsden of NCOFF commented, there is an often-stated commitment to children and families in the United States by public, political, and civic leaders. However, that concern does not extend to the children and families of incarcerated parents. Indeed, in both public discourse and scholarly debates, the attention, at best, reflects an ambivalence. A case in point is the absence of a systematic approach for determining the number of parents who are incarcerated.

In many countries (Canada, for example), such data are routinely collected at intake and monitored over time in order to chart the number of men who learn of their paternity while incarcerated and the number of mothers who give birth during incarceration (Stewart, 2001; Motiuk, 2001). Yet, it is possible to estimate the number of children of incarcerated parents in the United States. The lack of both empirical statistics and ethnographic literature makes it difficult to draw any conclusions about the size of this population, their experiences, and intervention participation over time.

Reassessing Assumptions about Incarcerated Parents

Velma LaPoint of CRESPAR and Howard University explained that barriers to research, policymaking, practice, and advocacy regarding parental incarceration have a great deal to do with prevailing views about incarcerated adults. Viewed strictly in pathological terms, incarcerated parents are considered to be social failures, and this pejorative characterization is exacerbated by underlying assumptions about race and socioeconomic status. "We see a wall of silence, even in families of the working poor, in admitting someone is incarcerated and in discussing the impact it has had," she said. "They share stigma and guilt, which permeate the work accomplished at all levels and in all domains." Moreover, these views become part and parcel of priority-setting in research, policy, and practice, affecting funding and resource allocation.

Punishing Parents, Not Their Children

Related to a generally derogatory view of incarcerated parents, one of the most frequently forgotten outcomes of parental incarceration is its impact on children. Public discourse—in the areas of criminal justice, law enforcement, political platforms, and even the mass media—focuses on punishing offenders without always considering the effects that removing someone from his or her family and community may have.

Imani Davis, a child of an incarcerated father, emphasized this point at the roundtable, commenting: "I want to remind everyone that these discussions should always come back to what's in the best interest of the children of incarcerated dads," she said. "We

need to make sure that we make a distinction, at least for children, that there is an important difference between a father walking out on his children and being arrested and taken away from them. Not to say that I don't hold my father responsible for his actions, but it was not his choice to leave."

The question that follows from Davis' comment is: As a matter of principle, what does the correctional system owe to children of inmates, given that children are inadvertently punished when their parents are incarcerated?

Re-Entering Communities with Few Resources

Practitioners note that many of the men in fathering programs have been incarcerated, have had "brushes" with the law, or are at-risk for incarceration due to their age, race, social class, lack of education, and limited employability, among other characteristics. Researchers such as Clear and Rose (1999), Hagan (1996), and Hairston (1998, 2001) note that many arrests of low-income, African American, and other minority men are for nonviolent crimes (typically related to the possession of illegal drugs). The sheer number of minority men who are arrested in low-income African American and Latino communities is greater than the number of men arrested in higher-income communities, even when the infraction or offense is of comparable gravity. In terms of the numbers of arrests and incidents of incarceration alone, the "damage" to a low-income, minority community is more severe and potentially intractable.

Lorin Harris of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation discussed the general increase in support for the study of incarceration from his foundation, particularly for investigating its impact on children and low-income families. However, he reminded participants that incarcerated parents, upon release, are often returning to communities with few resources. He quoted statistics from the Urban Institute showing that 1,600 individuals return to such communities daily. One of the most important questions then becomes: How can society help mothers and fathers to reintegrate into already-troubled communities after incarceration, and in ways that positively contribute to home life and to the strength of communities themselves? The answer to this question is relevant not only for foundations, who need to determine how this issue fits into their existing funding priorities, but also to the fathering field. The subject must be integrated into inquiry around the impact of father absence, and expertise, knowledge, and context brought to the study of how re-entry affects family formation and affects child well-being.

"We see a wall of silence, even in families of the working poor, in admitting someone is incarcerated and in discussing the impact it has had."

Participants agreed that, in many respects, the trend of re-entry without resources represents a "vicious circle": vulnerable communities producing a greater number of incarcerated parents and released inmates who then return to these communities, where they find few means by which to turn their own lives around and, more often than not, may instead contribute to further destabilization.

Gadsden, in her research presentation, described how this issue becomes relevant for practice both within and outside of prisons. As mentioned earlier, most men in fatherhood programs have had a brush with incarceration—particularly young fathers who are also members of ethnic or racial minorities. The number of such arrests and the lengths of sentences render the families of these men, and their neighborhoods, more vulnerable to breakdown. They also generate a greater and more sustained impact on minority communities and low-income neighborhoods than on non-minority and higher-income areas. An additional concern is that a local folklore tends to develop which undermines incentives for education and responsible fathering. Such myths are embodied in institutional practices that inure a community to the absence of fathers.

Peter Breen of Centerforce explained that high rates of parental incarceration deplete communities of the human resources that are needed to sustain family and community support systems. Communities are composed of individuals who are parents, who are mentors, who work for a living, who play baseball, who sing in church, who vote for better schools, who drive buses. Each

individual assumes a unique and vital role in the life of a community. Some roles might be more visible, but none is insignificant.

Thus when a community is deprived of a member—through incarceration, death, or other reasons—everyone loses, and in many cases a substitute does not come forward. As the losses increase, the capacity of the community to fully support its families and children is diminished. As family and individual stresses increase on those remaining, the burden becomes greater, and the focus changes to one of "survival" as opposed to improvement and enrichment. Should we then assume that the higher the parental incarceration rate, the safer and better off the community will be? Or should we, rather, assume that a higher incarceration rate leads to a reduction in individual community resources that can no longer sustain families and result in better outcomes?

Sharing Information and Building Trust

Many participants—in particular, practitioners—noted that the information which does exist about incarcerated parents and their families is not shared and transferred readily among researchers, practitioners, agencies, funders, and the populations with which they work. This dilemma represents, as one participant explained, the divide between the "bench and trench," where practitioners have a host of information that can help others overcome barriers and obstacles to study participation, while researchers and policymakers can contribute broader knowledge and models to help practitioners more successfully work with incarcerated parents and their children.

Carol Burton of Project S.E.E.K. indicated that information-sharing is especially important for incarcerated parents and their families in order to build trust. "Establishing a dialogue and relationship-building lead to ongoing trust," said Burton. "We have to determine ways to improve this communication." For example, researchers need to find ways to work with practitioners when collecting data in order to build trust with a population and ask the right questions; conversely, practitioners need to draw on researchers' experience when collecting their own practice-specific data. These groups should share information and perspectives among themselves and with the families they study or with whom they work. "All of this information could be coordinated to determine what works and what conditions are necessary to replicate successful models and methodologies elsewhere," Burton explained.

Surveying Existing Efforts at the State Level

R. Karl Rethemeyer, Jennifer Wofford, and Malik Morrison of NCOFF delivered a presentation based on the 2001 NCOFF study, "State Fathering in Correctional Settings," which surveyed the existence and extent of fathering initiatives in the 50 states. The report reveals that criminal justice departments have begun to focus on incarcerated fathers, and includes the range of interest that has been generated. The implications of this survey are particularly important at a time when many states are also undergoing reform within their correctional institutions.

How can we do a better job in helping mothers and fathers to reintegrate into already-troubled communities after incarceration, and in ways that positively contribute to home life and to the strength of communities themselves?

NCOFF found that 24 states reported having fathering programs that addressed incarceration. When examining the scope and scale of these programs, however, the study indicates there is little integration between fatherhood efforts within communities and those within prisons. Moreover, the need for services far exceeds the capacity for prisons to provide such services to fathers. Of the programs that do exist, most have a very narrow focus—primarily on child support and child-support enforcement—and may undervalue the need for training in education, job skills, and health issues. Program support also needs to be more long-term, and, to make the case that these services make a difference, states need access to evaluations of successful models to determine what works. However, many of the fathering programs studied had not established set curricula or activities, and evaluation of such programs is useful only when a systematic approach is in place to measure outcomes.

Rising Rates, Declining Care

Statistics on incarcerated parents in federal prisons indicate a dramatic increase of over 300,000 individuals over the last nine years. On average, incarcerated fathers spend six years and ten months in prison (55 percent of their sentences), while mothers' average terms are four years and one month. In both cases, these are significant amounts of time to be away from one's children—how significant will depend on their ages. Moreover, of all parents serving more than ten years in prison, fathers constitute 21 percent; mothers, only 8 percent. For such fathers, in particular, the time spent incarcerated will include almost an entire childhood.

High rates of parental incarceration deplete communities of the human resources that are needed to sustain family and community support systems.

These statistics raise a number of questions to be examined, including who will serve as the primary caregivers for children of incarcerated mothers and how fathers can reunite with their children when they have spent almost all of their offspring's childhood in prison. How can researchers explore the impact of these extended absences, on both the children's own development and the ability of parents eventually to re-integrate into their lives? How can programs respond? How can policies be more sensitive to the needs of incarcerated parents and their children?

Child Development and Parental/Social Perspectives

Deborah Johnson mentioned a number of questions that arise when studying parent-child contact—including ethnic representation, prior parent-child relationships, and childcare, among others. Also, significant variations exist between state and federal prisons in facilitating child-parent contact, which must also be taken into consideration.

There is a need, therefore, to address the complexities of parent-child relationships when the parent is incarcerated, as well as to examine parental development. Is the fact that a father does not have a relationship with his child due to a lack of knowledge that a child has been born while a father is incarcerated? There are myriad external barriers to fathering, but also a number of individual barriers for which the father must take responsibility. Does he, for example, simply lose interest in his children because they are, literally, out of sight and therefore out of mind?

Viewing Incarceration as a Source of Role and Social Strain

As Phillip J. Bowman of the Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy at the University of Illinois, Chicago, pointed out, incarceration has a severe impact on the definition of a father's role, the father's relationship with his children and their mother, and the meaning of maternal and paternal care as it relates to the roles of extended family members. Due to these shifts in role definitions, Bowman called for the development of a broader ecological and conceptual framework for thinking about role transitions surrounding incarceration. He believes that incarcerated fathers must be viewed within contexts: the individual father incarcerated within an institution, the father vis-à-vis his family, and the father vis-à-vis the community. If incarcerated men feel powerless in their role as fathers, does that affect their relationship with their children? As parents with the mothers of their children?

In particular, issues from the proximal and distal levels need to be both framed and understood. What is the nature of contact that fathers have in different types of penal institutions? More attention, in general, is warranted regarding how both biological and non-biological families operate in this environment and context. Bowman believes the patterns have not been conceptualized in terms of understanding relationships and roles at the extended family level. Researchers also need to consider how these families operate as sources of social capital and how policies can reduce the strains on the family and familial roles both in and outside of prison.

Directions for Research

Participants discussed a number of new avenues for scholarly research on incarcerated parents and their families. These areas include: (1) conducting research in support of interventions; (2) collecting empirical data, of which there is currently precious little; (3) pursuing ethnographic data, including a focus on examining the variables of race, class, gender, and age; (4) evaluating interventions and agencies; (5) translating research findings for practice; (6) examining fatherhood as a transformative event; and (7) investigating assumptions of causation.

Conducting Research in Support of Interventions

An overarching request by practitioners in the field, as expressed by those at the roundtable as well as by community members, is that researchers conduct their work in ways that more effectively support interventions and reflect the realities and values of the communities they study. Carol Burton of Project S.E.E.K. enumerated a number of these requests, which included: more refined and realistic outcome measures; goals that are measured over time, not just once immediately following release or five years after; the ability (and willingness) to incorporate feedback from the community and practitioners into research methodology and design, even when the change requires a redesign of approaches; and help for practitioners in understanding how to perform research themselves.

Ann Adalist-Estrin of Bridges added that, because inmates report that program content is not as important as the expertise and style of the instructor leading such interventions, researchers could help encourage the development of materials in formats that could be easily adapted to suit a variety of programs and could include recommendations for training. A research agenda in support of this assistance could include:

- Establishing criteria for success for a *variety* of types of interventions;
- Identifying relevant models with histories of apparent effectiveness; and
- Assessing the influence of practitioners' attitudes, style, training, and supervision.

In pursuit of such an agenda, she believes that the following questions require answers:

- Where are the gaps in services?
- Where are the overlaps?
- How can communities bridge the gaps between the systems of education, health care, social services, and corrections at the policy creation, program development, and practice operations levels?

Velma LaPoint would redirect research agendas to examine issues of prevention in order to support intervention. She recommends that researchers examine the precursors to incarceration: lack of employment, poor health care, and the phenomenon of entire communities becoming engulfed in the criminal justice system.

Collecting Empirical Data

Very little empirical data exist about incarcerated parents and their families, Gadsen said. "We know less than we should because government agencies only recently have begun compiling data, which is complicated by the fact that some men in prisons do not know about children who are born during their incarceration, while others do not self-identify as fathers," she noted. The lack of data makes it exceedingly difficult to coordinate services to children and families of incarcerated parents.

Privacy is a critical issue in studies of both incarcerated parents and parents in communities with high rates of incarceration.

Lack of trust between researchers and families prevents important information from being divulged, and may hinder data collection efforts.

A related consideration is how to perform evaluations of the impact of incarceration upon children, cross-tabulating outcomes with the various forms of contact and support between convicts and their offspring. A great deal of groundwork must be lain in this area before researchers are able to collect sufficient data on these children. And while criminal justice policy is already being made, the field still does not possess the evidence of what the consequences of such policies for children may be.

According to Adalist-Estrin, the lack of a uniform system for data collection has been an obstacle to gathering accurate information about the number and life circumstances of children of offenders; furthermore, this absence of procedures will affect any potential study. Information about inmate parents gathered directly from those within the criminal justice system is likely to be influenced by inmates' suspicions and fears. Distrust will surely interfere with participants' comfort, and most likely lead to their submitting inaccurate or irrelevant information.

"We hear very little from the child's perspective in general, and while we think that, as researchers, we know a lot about children, it is usually from the parents' perspective."

She also believes there is a need to identify effectively the children and families of incarcerated parents in the community. This effort could be accomplished by designing data collection strategies that emerge from everyday settings such as schools, health care providers' offices, and public libraries. Collecting data in this way may ensure that not only the needs and coping abilities of children and families who come through child protective services or mental health professionals are recorded but also the characteristics of those who are faring well.

Adalist-Estrin reports that some inmates attribute re-entry failure to irrelevant interventions that gave them false hope about their readiness to parent in the community. Access to such feedback can provide guidelines for creating programs that are truly relevant to inmates and their children and families—responses that consider the pre-incarceration relationships between family members, their current (during incarceration) patterns of communication, and reunification plans.

Pursuing Ethnographic Data

Several participants believe that to support the collection of empirical data—as well as formulate information collection methods—the field requires substantial ethnographic work with the children of incarcerated fathers over longer periods of time than they are currently studied. "We hear very little from the child's perspective in general, and while we think that, as researchers, we know a lot about children, it is usually from the parents' perspective," Gadsden explained. Burton added that there is a need to obtain qualitative profiles detailing the experiences of individuals, families, and communities, rather than limiting study to quantitative measures describing a population's demographics and broadly defined outcomes.

Ethnographic (as well as empirical) data on family histories are also key to explaining intergenerational patterns of criminal behavior, incarceration, and recidivism. Alisha Griffin of Child Support Services in Trenton, NJ, believes that if practitioners routinely inquired about family histories at intake, it would go a long way toward providing the type of information researchers and policymakers need to examine these patterns—providing, of course, that practitioners possess the time, skill, and training to do so.

Velma La Point believes ethnographic studies of parents in prison can help to put a "face" on those who are incarcerated, contextualizing their situations as well as humanizing their image. Such studies could employ social science constructs and principles that help explain each parent's experiences with the criminal justice system, what the impacts of this experience are, and why recidivism might occur.

Evaluating Interventions and Agencies

Just as basic data collection must be accomplished, basic questions regarding the

purpose and approach of program evaluations need to be asked. As John Jeffries of The Vera Institute said, "We talk about the need to evaluate these programs, but we haven't discussed the specificity of what we are intending to evaluate in the first place." This point raises questions such as: How punitive are the programs? What is expected of incarcerated fathers? They are important questions, especially since participants are often skeptical, fearing that the information they provide or their participation itself will be used against them.

Roundtable participants indicated that the evaluation process needs to be more transparent. In particular, when examining whether and how a program matters, methodology must be scrutinized. Who is thinking about what the outcomes are? And for whom? What are the unquestioned assumptions of the researcher performing the evaluation?

To help researchers refine the approaches they use to formulate evaluations, a number of issues were suggested for consideration:

- **Gender**. In this context, gender is meant as a relational term that describes the relationships between men and women in a family unit and how they play their respective roles. Unless these roles are examined and their differences understood within the context of incarceration, scholars, policymakers, and practitioners will have difficulty in examining, setting policy for, and implementing interventions around parenting and incarceration.

- **Subtleties of Interaction in a Given Setting**. Prisons and communities are very different places, and the prison setting itself is hardly conducive to positive interaction. Securing visitation is one example. Inmates feel that visitation is a right, not a privilege, yet the process they must undergo to secure visitation is complicated. What family members and visitors often endure—arranging transportation and traveling long distances, for example—is also arduous. All of these factors make visitation a very tense, stressful experience. Moreover, family members or practitioners may have specific and/or unrealistic expectations about what should or should not happen during that interaction. Thus, a researcher's evaluation of behavior during, or outcomes resulting from, a visit might not be reasonable given the limitations of the setting itself.

Ethnographic studies of parents in prison can help to put a "face" on those who are incarcerated, contextualizing their situations as well as humanizing their image.

- **Awareness of Class Difference**. Practitioners and social scientists both share relatively greater privilege than inmates in society. There are also socioeconomic difference between them. Though both groups have similar commitments to "do no harm," they are engaged in the field for different reasons, and often their work can be conflicting. Practitioners and researchers need to acknowledge and understand how their perspectives differ if their collaboration is to be productive.

Translating Research Findings for Practice

Geraldo Rodriguez of the Los Angeles Department of Community and Senior Services believes that researchers must focus their attention on the collective body of information about parent incarceration that is not being placed in the hands of those who would most benefit from it. Although research has called attention to the importance of fathers remaining connected to and involved in the lives of their children, those social service professionals most involved with families frequently do not have the training to help dispel the belief that some families would be better off without a father's involvement.

Rodriguez also recommended that all of the information generated by researchers needs to be synthesized and repackaged so that it can be easily read by professionals and the general public. The availability of information in different languages is also important, in light of the fact that it is inaccessible to those whose primary language is not English. Research should help support programming that leads to long-term studies designed to improve service delivery. While research can help programs answer certain questions about the services that are already

provided, much more could be done to help develop ancillary program components that would serve to complement and enhance existing programming.

Examining Fatherhood as a Transformative Event

Many young fathers in fathering programs cite the "lure" of the streets as a pretext for incarceration and remark on the transformative nature of fathering, which they say often serves to reduce the appeal of the activities that could interfere with their family life and responsible fathering (Gadsden, Wortham, Ray, & Pinderhughes, 2001). In such cases, the possibility of incarceration is seen as both a threat to familial engagement and a reality of life in high-crime neighborhoods.

Input from young fathers and practitioners reinforces analyses suggesting that, just as family and community cultures are defined by the behaviors and social practices of individuals over time and intergenerationally, so too do families and communities suffer the secondary effects of incarceration—both in the structural indicators of family and economic life and in the individual's sense of agency and access. Researchers need to examine these effects from two perspectives: How might research on father incarceration inform theory and theory-building on the notions of father presence and absence or fathering as a continuum of behaviors, with availability and involvement at one end and unavailability and uninvolvement at the other? On the other hand, how might existing theory help in the formulation of conceptual frameworks for studying incarcerated fathers and mothers?

Beginning in 1994, sex ratios were lower for African Americans in states with mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses. These states had a greater number of female-headed families than those without mandatory minimums.

Investigating Assumptions of Causation

During a dinner presentation, Samuel L. Myers, Jr., of the University of Minnesota discussed the role of research in clarifying the unintended impact of policy measures. In certain communities, he argued, the absence of the father in the household could be due to an erroneous policy implemented in the 1990s designed to make prison sentences uniform—"equal time for equal crime." It is possible, he suggested, that policies designed to correct injustices such as racial disparities in sentencing have unintended consequences in practice that instead reinforced those disparities. (See "Implications for Policymaking" on page 22, for further discussion of this issue.)

As Myers noted, research on criminal justice has proven that there are unintended consequences to drug offense laws and sentencing policies—and that incarceration has adverse impacts not just upon the individual but also his or her community. The conventional wisdom about families and incarceration, however, states that dysfunctional families are a cause of crime and incarceration. For example, the share of inmates who say they were raised in female-headed families is much larger than the share of people from such households among the general population. Myers believes it is methodologically specious to see a causal relationship in this finding, but as a policy issue it was enough for policymakers to conclude that dysfunctional families *lead to* crime. For example, said Myers, "If you ask inmates if they were physically abused as children, a larger share answer `yes' than among the general population. But does that prove that sexual abuse causes crime? It is hard to say, because you're only asking criminals"—and therefore hearing only one side of the story.

Myers believes there is another perspective for framing this issue: that criminal justice involvement might *create* dysfunction in communities. Under the formulas of uniform sentencing mentioned above, the type of crime and level of culpability lead automatically to a certain sentence, without consideration of such factors as race, ethnicity, or gender. "We now say everybody who sells crack cocaine will get the same five-year term and everybody possessing a gram of powder cocaine will get 90 days' probation. Doesn't that sound fair? Same crime, same punishment. But...it so happens that Black people more often smoke crack cocaine, and crack cocaine is punished

by a longer prison sentence, [so] the result is that Black people spend a longer time in prison."

Myers suggested two research frameworks that could be used or extended to help examine the impact of incarceration on communities, particularly from the perspective of unintended consequences.

The Sabol and Lynch Model. William J. Sabol of Case Western Reserve University and James Lynch of American University believe that the increase in violent offenders cannot be used to explain a general increase in the prison population and its impact on communities—primarily because this population represents a set of prisoners who serve longer terms. They suggest that the *flow* of prisoners admitted in and out of the system is a more meaningful and relevant area for study, because larger and larger shares of men and women are entering prison for lesser crimes. This, in turn, is the result of instituting more severe punishments and increasing the probability of going to prison for what were once relatively minor offenses.

Another area worthy of further examination is the relationship between where prisoners are released and where those who enter prison are arrested. If many of these offenders are released in the same neighborhood or region, deleterious consequences may result. As Sabol and Lynch have argued, some of these individuals are released into neighborhoods that were *not* previously destabilized and could, in fact, be contributing to a decline in the quality of life in these areas. Such release patterns are one example of the adverse, unintended consequences of sentencing and release laws.

The Darity-Myers Model. Some 15 years ago, Myers and William Darity of the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill began examining some of the factors that might explain the fractured position of African American families. They proposed that one way to consider the rise in female-headed families—what was characterized as the dysfunction or breakup of the Black family—was to think about what was happening to Black men in communities where many families were headed only by women.

According to Myers, conventional wisdom held that limiting eligibility for public assistance to single mothers had caused the rise in female-headed families. The prevailing assumption was that welfare programs themselves had become so attractive that the best way to stabilize Black families was to eliminate welfare. Darity and Myers tested the hypothesis that welfare was having an adverse impact on family structures in African American communities, positing that smaller supplies of marriageable males would have an effect on the formation and structure of the family.

Their analysis measured the ratio of marriageable, unmarried males in the labor force to unmarried females, which was found to be much lower for African Americans than for whites. Later, they updated their data to track the rates of prison admissions versus releases due to changes in sentencing laws. They found that the effect of welfare in "causing" female-headed households was very small relative to the effect of the decline in the number of marriageable males.

Darity and Myers attributed this steady decline in available, viable partners to the "marginalization" of Black men, particularly their higher rates of imprisonment relative to men in other communities. In particular, they found that beginning in 1994, sex ratios were lower for African Americans in states with mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses. These states had a greater number of female-headed families than those without mandatory minimums.

Implications for Policymaking

As participants considered emerging trends and issues regarding the impact of parental incarceration on communities and families, they identified a series of recommendations to help policymakers develop appropriate approaches to policy creation, determine funding priorities, and devise interventions. This section provides an account of the results of their discussion.

The roundtable's recommendations for policy included the following: (1) understanding a nexus of competing values that drive policy; (2) extending the "war on drugs" metaphor to include the reconstruction of embattled communities; (3) reconciling social capital and welfare reform; (4) redefining reentry and reintegration for incarcerated parents; (5) reconsidering unintended outcomes of criminal justice measures; (6) developing a different accounting of the financial costs of incarceration to include the loss of income in communities that convicted fathers leave behind; and (7) addressing fatherhood and parenting at the state level.

Understanding a Nexus of Competing Values

Elizabeth Gaynes of Osbourne Associates commented, "The potential need for services exceeds the capacity, but it has more to do with the political will involved." Participants agreed that there is a need for policymakers to focus their efforts on addressing the multiple, and often competing, incentives or barriers that interact across agencies and other public offices providing services, many of which serve the same individual but rarely in a coordinated way. These contradictory forces include the competing values of criminal justice and rehabilitation, self-sufficiency and welfare reform, and child support enforcement and responsible fathering, as well as the prevention of intergenerational criminal behavior.

Agencies often pursue a competing value at the expense of fathers, presumably on behalf of his children, but not always producing outcomes that are in the child's best interests. To deal with this pervasive problem, Marilyn Ray Smith of the Massachusetts Department of Revenue/Child Support recommends that policymakers develop strategic alliances at the federal level to integrate and coordinate lines of funding, since most funding for programs that could help populations dealing with incarceration stream from the federal government to states. Currently, funding flows in "silos," with parallel streams that are not subsequently coordinated at the state and local level across agencies of health, justice, labor, education, and agriculture. If incentives or requirements governing the use of these funds were better coordinated at the federal level, it would change how states allocate the funds and should lead to improved integration of services and support for those programs.

Velma La Point raised another set of competing priorities: investing in a "prison industrial complex" versus investing in education and other services for vulnerable children to prevent the need for incarceration. How do the increased budgets for building, maintaining, and staffing prisons and prison services compare to education budgets at the state and federal levels? What is the state of the schools to which most inmates have had access? How do we mobilize resources to prevent parental incarceration, to invest in families and children from these communities rather than feeding the need to build more prisons?

Extending the "War Metaphor"

According to Juleigh Petty Coleman of the American Bar Association, if policy advocates for a "war" on entire communities to deal with drug use, then it needs to complete the metaphor and consider the aftermath of war: reconstruction. At the conclusion of the "war on drugs," many communities—particularly African American communities—were dramatically affected. In effect, the stance "tough on crime" became "tough on children" as well. Incarcerated men and women are

returning to families and communities that have been left in peril. Will we now reinvest in those communities to avoid recidivism, or simply continue punishing both parents and, ultimately, their children? In many cities, Coleman argues, African American communities suffer from eroded social capital, where public services and goods have shifted from productive assistance toward surveillance and policing.

Participants agreed that punitive social policies create negative social capital, and that it may be time for policy to shift toward a reconstruction of the positive public services in those neighborhoods that have been decimated by what many in these communities perceive as an unjust war. Coleman suggested that the United States might need the equivalent of a Marshall Plan for incarcerated parents, essentially allocating special resources to reconstruct communities and reunify families.

Reconciling Social Capital and Welfare Reform

One participant suggested that welfare reform accomplished two important things: It propelled child support services to look at fathering programs; and, because welfare reform shifted policy focus from dependence on assistance toward paths to gainful employment, it opened the door for a conversation regarding the consideration of an offender's re-entry into his community as soon as incarceration begins.

However, the legislation that enacted welfare reform is likely to build negative social capital in communities that are already in dire need of resources. Welfare reform reduces the amount of time parents have to reunite after they have been separated, and moves to terminate parental rights if a child is not with parents, or is in foster care, for more than 15 months. While the legislation's intention was to increase the incentive for families to reunite, it has a differential impact for incarcerated parents, who may have no control over when they are released.

Moreover, in terms of policy development, legislators and policymakers must consider the progressive loss of social capital experienced by incarcerated parents—who lose it upon entering the penal system, often leave with negative social capital, and then enter communities that already suffer from a lack of resources.

How do we mobilize resources to prevent parental incarceration, to invest in families and children from these communities rather than feeding the need to build more prisons?

Redefining Re-Entry and Reintegration

Many roundtable participants were troubled by the lack of accountability in departments of justice and corrections for the outcomes of former offenders once they are released into their communities. As Eric Brenner of the Illinois Governor's Office commented, "No one is 'on the hook' for what happens after release. No one is tracking whether or how any transition assistance made available works." He contrasted the lack of accountability for criminal justice policies with the clear lines of command and culpability in the field of education. "Unlike in Illinois' schools system, where one person is accountable, if something goes wrong in criminal justice, the chain of command isn't clear, and accountability isn't enforced," Brenner said.

During his dinner presentation, Jeremy Travis of the Urban Institute proposed two frameworks within which to discuss prison sentences in light of fathers and families policy and in order to establish and reinforce such accountability.

Framework 1: Redefining Re-entry. Travis believes we first need to redefine the term *re-entry* itself. "'Re-entry' is not a program, a legal status, or an option, but the inevitable consequence of putting someone in prison, a life-course event: with the exception of those who die in prison or are executed, eventually every prisoner sent to prison will be released," he explained. "What is the effect of that process on the individuals, their families, and the communities to which they return?"

In addressing this issue, Travis noted that it is important to view incarceration as a process rather than a one-time event. "Today, we see a larger number of people churning in and out of prison for shorter periods. One important change over the past 20 years has been the increase in the number of people returned to prison for violating the conditions of their release." In 2000, for example, about

The United States might need the equivalent of a Marshall Plan for incarcerated parents, essentially allocating special resources to reconstruct communities and reunify families.

one-third of state prison reincarcerations were for parole violations, up from about 18 percent in 1980. He suggested that perhaps recidivism is not a good measure of the effectiveness of punishment policies. In his estimation, a better measure might be *reintegration*: How successful is the returnee's adjustment and reconnection to work, family, and peers?

Re-entry raises another policy question: Who manages the re-entry process and exercises power over the returnees? Some commentators have argued for no legal supervision whatsoever; others advocate strict control. What has not been addressed is whether supervision that is designed to protect the community from harm itself causes harm to the person who is released. Nor is there good research on the positive value of supervision itself.

Travis explained that the traditional conception of parole supervision embodies the idea of governmental responsibility for assisting the prisoner in moving from the custodial system of prison to the reality of life in the community under the parole system. He believes there is an alternative: "We need to add the role of the community to the equation, making community organizations critical actors in the re-entry process, helping released prisoners meet such needs as housing, health care, and employment that will enable them to make the transition back into society and families."

Framework 2: Restoring Consensus on Reintegration. Travis stated that "In the 1970s, there was a uniform philosophy about how to sentence offenders that allowed discretion by judges and parole boards. Now, we have a patchwork of state experiments such as 'three strikes,' mandatory minimum sentences, and sex offender registration. We have also lost social consensus about reintegration." The more punitive policies of the 1990s erect numerous legal barriers between released prisoners and their successful reintegration into society. For example, certain classes of offenders can no longer access services such as housing and job training programs; they may have to undergo increased surveillance; and their right to vote may be permanently revoked. According to Travis, loss of voting rights, which has profound implications for a democratic state, has had the effect in some states of disenfranchising one-quarter of the African American male population for life.

(Travis also offered several, in his words, "heretical propositions" to the roundtable. These proposals ask the judicial system to address the issue of re-entry as part and parcel of sentencing. See the sidebar on page 26 for these suggestions.)

Reconsidering Unintended Outcomes

According to Travis, the recent trend of incarcerating increasing numbers of offenders for longer sentences constitutes the most profound, unevaluated social experiment of our generation: "Namely, it is like a test of what would happen if we set about to increase fourfold the per capita rate of imprisonment in this country over 25 years, as we have in fact done." He believes we need to explore all of the consequences—intended and unintended—of this experiment.

In discussing the ways in which research has examined the unintended consequences of uniform sentencing policies for drug offenses, Samuel Myers cited Minnesota drug laws, which differentiate the punishment of crimes involving crack cocaine versus powder cocaine, with substantially harsher sentences leveled upon crack offenders. "At the time, did anyone consciously know this move would have adverse effects on minority communities?" Myers asked. "That question may never be answered. But if it was a purely exogenous thing, then here's a good example of a policy that is *driving* adverse affects on minority communities."

Taken together, such sentencing reforms do not add up to an adverse impact, but some—e.g., mandatory minimums for relatively minor drug offenses, with few distinctions as to mitigating factors—do appear to be destabilizing the pool of marriage-eligible males, and separating them from their families for longer periods. Myers believes that policymakers must support the examination of the unintended consequences of sentencing reform, particularly through empirical study. "Ultimately, if we are

concerned about *why* Black men have left their families, then we must begin by looking at sentencing policies," he explained.

Responding to Travis and Myers, William Spriggs of the National Urban League added, "To put it rather bluntly, we need someone to determine how to piece together the lives broken by stupid policies—and for someone to tell policymakers which policies are, in fact, stupid. And while there is a need to identify existing policies that have unintended outcomes, we do not necessarily have the data in hand to address those issues empirically."

For example, one may ask: Why are there disproportionately greater rates of incarceration among African Americans at the federal level than at the state level? Christopher Mumola answered that there is a fundamental difference between the types of crimes prosecuted at the state and federal levels, with drug trafficking convictions far more prevalent at the federal level. Researchers can attempt to examine these disparities, but without the willingness and support of federal and state policymakers to collect and analyze these data, their work will have little import and impact.

Spriggs believes that such policies are ultimately the result of unquestioned racism on the part of legislators and policymakers. "In the United States, *everything* is racial. The reason that racist policies have continued to exist is that racism involves an unexamined set of assumptions," he explained. The prevailing logic holds that, if a policy results in outcomes that racist notions would expect to occur (i.e., more African Americans or Hispanics imprisoned or on death row), then it must have some common sense or valid basis to it. At the national, state, or local levels there is no critique of these policies, which ultimately constitute self-fulfilling prophecies for the communities they affect and the levels of government that affect them.

Developing a Different Accounting

Similarly, Spriggs believes that policymakers need to reassess how economic and criminal justice policies contribute to and exacerbate what he calls an Economics of Discrimination. "Even in a market economy, there is a point beyond which you cannot discriminate—you cannot continue to pollute the water from which you drink," he said. "Society breaks down when large portions of the population become excluded from access to economic stability." In other words, if public monies are used to build prisons instead of schools, low-income communities are the first to feel the impact. Only when those public dollars are drained to the point that other communities are also affected is policy reconsidered. Spriggs believes the fact that communities without economic, political, or social power could be decimated before policies are changed is simply an unacceptable option.

Instead, he suggests a need for a public and financial accounting that considers not only the monetary costs of incarcerating an offender, but also the costs of incarceration to a community. The current equation, he asserted, robs communities of resources and economic supports.

He explained the social capital argument, which holds that, to encourage economic development in those neighborhoods that have been depleted of resources, residents either have to work harder or become better workers who receive higher wages. But prisons and incarceration slow down the growth rates of entire communities. If a large segment of the population is effectively siphoned off, the growth rate can only decline. For example, one month before his incarceration, a man may have been employed, receiving an income—in either the mainstream or the underground economy—and therefore paying taxes, spending money, and taking care of his family. After he is incarcerated, that community no longer has his wages to invest in its own economy.

There is a need for a public and financial accounting that considers not only the monetary costs of incarcerating an offender, but also the costs of incarceration to a community.

In addition to removing potential wage earners, incarceration also costs the community in other ways: it provides publicly funded jobs to other communities where the prisons are located; it skews the allocation of public funds to communities other than the prisoners' home towns, since offenders are considered residents of the municipality in which they are incarcerated; and it requires family members to spend considerable sums of money to visit their incarcerated relatives.

Thus, the actual cost of incarceration often far exceeds the annual expenditures required simply to house a prisoner.

"We need to determine other ways of keeping these communities intact, and to look at a broader accounting of how incarceration impacts them," Spriggs said. "Only then can we understand how much money needs to be returned and reinvested into communities that have been eroded through incarceration. Only then can we truly know the costs of a bad policy tool, in terms of the emotional, psychic, and economic tolls it takes."

Addressing Fatherhood and Parenting at the State Level

As many participants commented, how state corrections policies address fatherhood and parenting is emerging as an important issue. While a majority of states offer fathering support programs, these efforts tend to be insufficient in scale, episodic rather than ongoing, poorly evaluated, and uncoordinated with fathering efforts in communities. The lack of systematic curricula in most cases makes evaluation difficult, which in turn makes it more difficult to prove that fathering support programs have positive impacts on recidivism, re-integration, and child well-being.

In light of this gap, participants challenged state policymakers to ask themselves a number of questions: What are some of the best practices for organizing and constructing relationships between state agencies concerned with family support, labor, and child welfare and law enforcement or the criminal justice system? Should this coordination be a policy goal? If yes, what needs should be addressed and with what indicators of change? What are the policy issues that cut across the needs of mothers and fathers around which state agencies might collaborate and operate more effectively? How can policymakers think more systematically about the range of existing services and how they could be better coordinated to serve the needs of incarcerated fathers and their families—whether that policy

"Heretical" Propositions for Improving Re-Entry

Jeremy Travis, The Urban Institute

HERETICAL PROPOSITION 1
Anticipating Re-Entry upon Entry

What if our system of justice viewed re-entry as beginning at the time of sentencing? Such a radical idea might mean extending the responsibility of jurisprudence to encompass reintegration and evaluating the consequences of punishment on the incarcerated person's family. What would happen if judges were made to be responsible for establishing a sentence that will make successful reintegration more likely? Perhaps this could involve bringing family or childcare workers into the courtroom to determine what assets are needed while a parent is in prison before he or she is actually sentenced.

HERETICAL PROPOSITION 2
Reinvesting Resources and Authority into Communities

Over the last two decades, we have witnessed a political trend toward the devolution of responsibility from the federal government to the states. What if we applied this principle to punishment policy? We could start with the management of reintegration, moving the process of "supervision" from the hands of government and law enforcers into the returnee's community.

For example, one study of released prisoners compared geocoded incarceration rates for New York City neighborhoods. Some $3 million in taxpayer dollars had been spent to house the incarcerated residents of one block in a Brooklyn neighborhood. What if that money were to be redirected into the community to address the causes of crime, or to facilitate reintegration once prisoners are released back into that block, or to respond more effectively to specific crime conditions? In addition, parole officers who deal with released prisoners are not part of the community they serve. Is there a way to place them more directly in those areas?

By taking a new look at jurisprudence and how we conceptualize incarceration itself, we could move from a social work model to a "street" model, at the same time reframing the legal structure to attend to father/family issues. How can we bring positive forces of community/family into play, while simultaneously dealing with real concerns regarding community/family risk factors?

is in welfare reform, child protective services, fatherhood programs, workforce investment, or criminal justice? What are the implications of these concepts for TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) reauthorization?

A number of participants reinforced the importance for state policymakers, who determine benchmarks for measuring the outcomes of incarceration and in-prison programs, to understand incarceration as a life-course event—as well as to consider its relationship to the ways in which we understand and define notions of parenting. For example, factors that should be taken into account when measuring outcomes include: the role and importance of gender in family relationships; the quality and character of the institutional setting; the agency or agencies providing services (an important item in determining competing mandates); the understanding parents have of their own roles; and the assumptions regarding how a public investment in parenting should be pursued.

Several participants representing state departments of corrections described their efforts to link programs for incarcerated fathers with statewide fatherhood efforts and other social services. Pennsylvania's "Strengthening PA's Families," for example, includes policies established specifically for corrections. These policies are built on the notion that families serve as the cornerstone of society but that if households are located in vulnerable settings, then children are also at risk. As James Harvey Bell of the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections explained, their prison-based efforts are geared toward helping to break the intergenerational cycle of incarceration that weakens families.

The state of Virginia took a different approach, deciding to launch the Virginia Fatherhood Campaign, but without having spoken to communities affected by incarceration or to incarcerated fathers. As the Campaign's Ron Clark mentioned, "States want to launch initiatives from the top down, but that approach threatens that we won't reach the fathers and families we are actually trying to serve." He suggested that states must do "in-reach," not just outreach, when developing an initiative around incarceration issues. In fact, the state now provides seed grants to communities in order to develop ways of dealing with father absence, incarceration prevention programs, employment programs within and outside of prisons, and school-based programs serving students whose parents are incarcerated.

The more punitive policies of the 1990s erect numerous legal barriers between released prisoners and their successful reintegration into society. For example, certain classes of offenders can no longer reach for the social safety net of services such as housing and job training programs.

Lessons for Practice

During their discussion participants identified a series of lessons for practitioners and program designers serving incarcerated fathers and their families and communities. Their recommendations include: (1) listening—and paying attention—to the experiences of children of incarcerated parents; (2) paying attention to the experiences of practitioners when designing programs; (3) working to eliminate barriers to parenting while in prison and to reintegrating into one's community upon release; (4) considering issues of abuse and domestic violence; (5) fostering community; (6) refining the notion of outcomes to clarify who is defining them and for whom; (7) helping to articulate the diversity among incarcerated fathers; and (8) understanding practitioners' roles as translators, conveners, and advocates.

Listening to the Children of Prisoners

One participant challenged the field not only to talk to children of incarcerated parents, but also to listen to what they have to say and value their perspective in all aspects of their work. Such a consideration includes making an important distinction between a father walking out on his children and being arrested and taken away from them. The suggestion is not to avoid holding fathers responsible for their criminal activity, but to understand that, from the child and parent's perspectives, it was not his choice to leave his family.

Listening to Practitioners

John Jeffries presented his assessment of the value of practitioner perspectives. In his experience, when providers who self-identify as practitioners working with inmates and their families are convened, a number of common themes emerge in their discussions. Their efforts tend to be predicated on the belief that, if they are doing their jobs properly, they will not be doing it in the future; i.e., that they hope to decrease the societal reliance on caretaking, not just as an outcome for inmates, but as an overall outcome for society. He believes the field can build on practitioners' perspectives to guide a determination not only about why incarceration happens but also how to arrive at a consensus about ways to reduce its necessity.

Working to Eliminate Barriers

As Wallace McLaughlin noted, practitioners working with young fathers often report that both the fathers and programs in which they are enrolled find it difficult to maintain relationships with families and children while they are incarcerated. Upon re-entry, these fathers must also deal with a host of barriers to establishing productive social roles. "Many families have to travel four hours to a facility in order to visit an incarcerated father," he said. How can practitioners help to facilitate family visits? By assisting fathers upon sentencing to be placed in an institution closer to home? Other possibilities include facilitating co-parenting with mothers and fostering better relationships overall between fathers and the mothers of their children; assisting with re-entry employment; helping with child support arrangements; and in general supporting fathers to find a path back to productive relationships with their families and in a new life after release.

Considering Issues of Abuse and Domestic Violence

In a large number of cases of family violence, one of the primary indicators is whether a father has been incarcerated. Yet, from the perspective of policy and research, this issue has not been addressed sufficiently. In this area, practitioners can help greatly in informing the field about abuse and domestic violence upon re-entry. When does abuse tend to occur? What types of intervention have worked—or not worked—in the past?

Designing Comprehensive Programs

What would a successful program that both maintains father involvement during incarceration and facilitates his re-entry into the family and community look like?

Daniel J. Andrews, National Practitioner's Network for Fathers and Families
Ideally, a program must be both comprehensive and collaborative, and begin no later than six months prior to the release date. The program should provide services to prepare and support father inmates to deal with key reentry issues:

- transitional housing;
- building and rebuilding family relationships;
- parenting and life skills;
- mental health, especially addictions;
- managing and minimizing child support;
- legal services, particularly regarding family issues such as custody;
- gaining meaningful employment, including education and training.

Follow-through by skilled facilitators and outside agencies will be crucial.

Geraldo Rodriguez, Los Angeles Department of Community and Senior Services
Programs must recognize incarceration as a family problem in and of itself, rather than treating the symptom for which an inmate's family may seek help. In addition to the shame, anger, and depression of having a family member in prison, such families face practical challenges and typically demonstrate behaviors specifically related to father absence.

Ray Jones, Impact Services
It is essential to build a peer-support network among program participants in which ex-offenders learn how to act as resources for one another to address the challenges of community reintegration.

Mary Leftridge Byrd, SCI Chester
Institutions need to [supply] incarcerated fathers with programs that, among other things:

- Foster the ability to create and manage collaborative relationships (with judges, district attorneys, and families alike);
- Link services across local, state, and federal levels;
- Frame participation in programs as an opportunity to become a better parent rather than as a chance to gain certificates toward parole.

Peter Breen, Centerforce
The most practical time for an intervention is at the moment of arrest. It must involve the family from the start, because even the uncertainties of the pre-incarceration legal process can set the stage for family disintegration. Social workers need to customize interventions based on each family's individual strengths, and strive to limit the number of helping agents inserted into their lives to one agreed-upon case manager who can walk them through the system.

Ann Adalist-Estrin, Bridges
In the perfect world, we would have a unified format for collecting real-world data and gathering information from inmates and families that operated in a climate of honesty and trust. The information collected would be used to develop programmatic responses that meet the needs of individual fathers.

Specifically, practitioners can help us to understand how fathering programs can work with both fathers and mothers to help mediate transitions out of prison and prevent violence from occurring before it starts or recurs. In some cases, the reality may be that, for the well-being of children and mothers, fathers and mothers or fathers and their families should not be reunited. Although it is a tough decision to make, how can practitioners help to determine when family re-entry by fathers is not a good thing for a child? Moreover, how can they help determine what, in fact, is in the best interests of a child?

One participant stressed that the complexities of domestic violence should not be minimized when programs attempt to work with violent fathers and mothers who are the victims of that violent behavior. Fathering programs must consider the perspective of practitioners working with battered women or of domestic violence advocates, who may be skeptical of working with programs run by and for men. For such an intersection to work, practitioners from both men's and women's groups will need to abandon many prevailing assumptions, spend a great deal of time and effort to work through differences and identify similar objectives, and be open and flexible to sharing activities and exchanging knowledge. While some cross-program activity around domestic violence has occurred, in his opinion the conversations have been limited by a lack of structure. Moreover, few resources currently support these efforts.

Where efforts to serve incarcerated parents—fathers and mothers—and their families have been particularly successful, practitioners both within and outside of the prison system have cooperated with community leaders.

In addition, Marilyn Ray Smith added that great strides have been made recently in uniting the missions and perspectives of programs that support women who were victims of family violence and those of programs focusing on fatherhood and men's concerns. She believes there is now room for greater collaboration between these two types of endeavors, and has made overtures in the domestic violence community, urging practitioners to become allies in efforts to support incarcerated fathers—especially since, given their experiences of violence in prison, they tend to return to the homes where they may have perpetrated violent offenses or may commit them in the future.

Fostering Community-Building by Practice and Practitioners

In this context, roundtable participants used the term "practitioners" to refer to staff in fathering programs, child and family-focused programs serving communities, and transitional residences, as well as to leaders of larger, community-wide initiatives that serve as umbrellas for programmatic efforts. Both types of practitioners are acutely aware of the types of problems faced by children and families of incarcerated parents, as well as the implications of incarceration for the stability of children and families and of the community itself.

The discussion raised a number of questions that practitioners can help to answer. Where efforts to serve incarcerated parents—fathers and mothers—and their families have been particularly successful, both types of practitioners have cooperated with community leaders. In light of this, how do high rates of incarceration among parents influence the process and ability of communities to support children, sustain support systems, and reconfigure their family processes to improve outcomes? How do different types of programs working in communities with high levels of parental incarceration address the impact it has among families? How do they approach this problem? How might researchers' work help improve the community, parenting, families, and fathers' relationships with their children and with the mothers of their children?

Refining the Notion of Outcomes

John Jeffries proffered a basic, but nevertheless fundamental, question: What, in fact, are the outcomes we expect from programs that serve fathers in prisons and communities? Jeffries believes that the answers depend on who is asked. "For every program, we need more specificity about what these outcomes are, why someone doing the work should pursue them, and what they should expect to happen," he said.

Eric Brenner recommended that states make their departments of corrections and in-prison programs accountable for recidivism, using performance outcome measures. Within corrections, outcome measures are used to gauge items such as the cost per inmate or data on violence, but few focus on the issue of recidivism. Brenner believes that tracking this information will not only help to direct funding for programming at the institutional level but also provide incentives for facilities to improve their conditions. "If they know they will be held accountable," said Brenner, "facilities and departments of corrections will

Parenting Behind Bars: Tips for Fathers in Prison

Adapted from a brochure by the Virginia Fatherhood Campaign, Virginia Department of Health

Many men in jails across the country are fathers who want good relationships with their children. Here are some ways to stay connected with your child until your release.

Be positive with your child's mother.
If you have a good relationship with your child's mother—great. But if not, you still need to respect her for the sake of your child. Tell her you want to be a part of your child's life.

Ask about the rules of staying in touch with your child.
See when your child can visit you. Find out when you can make and get phone calls. Ask about sending and receiving letters, packages and e-mails. If the jail allows it, make a cassette tape of you reading that your child can listen to when he or she misses you. Buy small items, like a stuffed animal, from the commissary to send as gifts. Ask your child to send favorite photos or school papers to help remind you of him or her.

Tell your children the truth about why you're not with them.
Be honest with your children about why you are away. Tell them in a way they can understand, using words that are right for their age. Make sure they know that even though you are in jail, they are very important to you. Start a steady and reliable contact schedule with your child. When you say you are going to call or write—make sure you do.

Remember birthdays, holidays, and special family events.
Celebrate special times. If you can, make gifts using the prison carpentry, craft or metal shop to send to your child and family. Think of a game that you and your child can play long distance. Send cards often, especially homemade ones. Keep a calendar to remind you of important dates.

Improve yourself while in jail.
While on the inside, work to make yourself a better man. Go to parenting classes or anger management groups. Work on getting your GED, or take community college courses or computer classes. If these are not available, ask that they be offered. For more help, talk with the prison psychologist, your case manager, or other men inside who are fathers. Make clear decisions about how you want to be a good parent and your future as a father.

Plan now for your release.
How well you connect with your child and family after prison depends on how well you prepare while in prison. Find ways to gain the skills needed for success after your release. Improve your parenting skills, prepare for getting a job and finding a place to live. Clear up legal problems before your release date, and set a specific, practical plan on how you will re-connect with your child.

Back on the outside.
When you get out, pledge to work hard to stay out of trouble. Avoid the old places and friends that might distract you. Get a job, and find a good role model. Be patient and take it one day at a time. Making amends with your child and family can be hard and slow, but it's essential if you are to enjoy healthy family relationships.

make sure they have something to say when called upon by their supervising agencies or constituents." In addition, he thinks that recidivism performance measures can prove particularly important in deciding funding priorities, particularly at a time when human services budgets are competing with corrections budgets for dwindling dollars.

Helping to Articulate the Diversity among Incarcerated Fathers

Over the course of only one year, Ann Adalist-Estrin of Bridges received 518 requests from practitioners and families of incarcerated fathers for referrals and support. "The lives of these fathers and their families were so

different and diverse that I couldn't even begin to categorize them by class, family system, race, criminal history, addiction history, etc. The lesson is that you can't make assumptions about who these incarcerated fathers are, nor about their families," she explained. Nor is it adequate to consider them at one point in time. Whether these fathers are viewed pre-, during, or post-imprisonment has a significant impact on their perspective, and on what they need. Adalist-Estrin believes it is important to remember that, in most cases, incarcerated parents will inhabit all of these places at some point in time.

Understanding Practitioners' Varying Roles in Different Settings and Levels in the System

The term "practitioner" is often used indiscriminately to refer to a vast range of professionals who share a common mission—that of helping to improve outcomes for incarcerated parents and their children. Yet, they are a diverse set of individuals who operate within different contexts and at different levels within the system. In discussing how practitioners can best serve incarcerated parents and their children, participants mentioned that it is important to make distinctions among the diverse set of practitioners that exists, framing the work they perform in terms of the different settings and different levels that together form the context of their work and determine how they will approach incarcerated parents and their families.

Practitioners working inside prisons are seen by the administration as advocates for inmates and by program participants as being allied with the warden.

For example, practitioners may serve in the same domain, such as in social services, in the educational system, or in penal institutions. However, they may do so at different levels: from a state corrections agency; as a counselor, educator, or tutor; or as a staff member of a community-based program. They will conduct their work in different settings: in government agencies, in prisons, and in the community.

Depending on the setting and level in which they perform their work, practitioners can be said to serve in three different types of roles: as translators, conveners, and advocates.

D. Malcolm Smith of the Center for Fathers, Families, and Workforce Development stressed that practitioners working within communities serve a critical role as *translators* of the public policies that affect the lives of individuals. "They take the information and priorities they're given and translate it to the people being served in ways that help them become tools for advocacy," he explained. "Where policy can talk about fragile families, practitioners can help reinforce the reality that incarcerated fathers are returning to fragile communities, which contain the aggregated effects of negative social capital." Practitioners can also help to articulate the conflicting goals and missions of public safety and social services agencies, as well as the need for wrap-around services, and advocate for greater interagency communication and organization.

Such a role is critical, since many of these troubled communities no longer possess the resources to transmit values or sustain norms; when this is the case, programs and practitioners can also serve as *conveners* that bring new resources into these communities. By helping to prepare fathers to return in ways that build capacity, they not only have an impact on individual fathers but also foster an aggregate economic and social gain, such as increasing the income of an entire community.

In their role as *advocates* inside of prisons, practitioners often must maintain a difficult balance. Jeffries described the problems inherent in this position, in which the administration views practitioners as advocates for inmates while program participants see them as allies of the warden. "It take a great deal of maturity on the part of these practitioners, who are usually asked to do more than advocates in other areas. Here, they have to be allied with both the punisher and the punished," he explained. This task requires great professional skill in the face of seemingly conflicting alliances—practitioners must ensure that certain concerns are heard on both sides, as well as strive constantly to identify common ground.

Roundtable Agenda

Constructing and Coping with Incarceration and Family Re-Entry: Perspectives from the Field

University of Pennsylvania, November 15-16, 2001

Thursday, November 15, 2001

2:00 - 2:30 p.m. — **Introduction and Overview**

Vivian L. Gadsden, Director of NCOFF, University of Pennsylvania
Elijah Anderson, Roundtable Co-Chair, University of Pennsylvania

2:30 - 5:00 p.m. — **The Effects of Parent Incarceration on Child and Family Welfare**

Report Presentations: Vivian L. Gadsden, University of Pennsylvania
Christopher J. Mumola, U.S. Department of Justice
John Hagan, Northwestern University

Discussants: Deborah Johnson, Michigan State University
Phillip J. Bowman, University of Illinois, Chicago

Synthesis of Issues and Open Discussion

Discussion Leader: Wallace McLaughlin, Fathers and Families Resource/Research Center

5:00 - 5:30 p.m. — **Closing Comments:** Creasie Finney Hairston, University of Illinois, Chicago
James Levine, Families and Work Institute, The Fatherhood Project

6:30 - 8:30 p.m. — **Dinner and Dinner Panel**

Practical Dimensions of Father Incarceration and Re-Entry: Race, Legal Representation, and Family Policies

Introduction: Vivian Gadsden, University of Pennsylvania
Elijah Anderson, University of Pennsylvania

Facilitator:	Carol Tracy, Women's Law Project (Philadelphia)
Panelists:	Samuel L. Myers, Jr., University of Minnesota Jeremy Travis, The Urban Institute

Friday, November 16, 2001

8:30 - 10:30 a.m.

Positioning the States: Intersections of Responsible Fathering, Family Support, and Correctional Systems

Introduction:	Lorin Harris, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
Report Presentation:	"State Fathering Efforts in Correctional Settings," R. Karl Rethemeyer, Jennifer Wofford, and Malik Morrison, NCOFF
Panel Discussion:	James Harvey Bell, Pennsylvania Department of Corrections Ron J. Clark, Virginia Fatherhood Campaign Eric Brenner, Illinois Governor's Office Alisha Griffin, New Jersey Department of Human Services

Synthesis of Issues and Open Discussion

Discussion Leader:	Elizabeth Gaynes, Osborne Associates

10:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

The Roles of Programs, Practice, and Communities in Supporting Fathers and Families Pre-, During, and Post-Imprisonment

Issues Presentation:	John Jeffries, The Vera Institute Ann Adalist-Estrin, Bridges John Fantuzzo, University of Pennsylvania
Panel Discussion:	D. Malcolm Smith, Center for Fathers, Families, and Workforce Development Mary Leftridge Byrd, SCI Chester Peter Breen, Centerforce

Synthesis of Issues and Open Discussion

Discussion Leader:	Ed Hostetter, Family and Corrections Network

12:30 - 2:30 p.m. **Lunch and Working Group Sessions**

Facilitator/Rapporteur:	Jim Mustin, Family and Corrections Network Carol Burton, Project S.E.E.K.

2:30 - 3:30 p.m. **Roundtable Synthesis**

Commenters:	Marilyn Ray Smith, Massachusetts Deptartment of Revenue, Child Support Enforcement Larry Icard, Center for Intervention and Practice Research
Closing Comments:	Vivian L. Gadsden, University of Pennsylvania

Participant List

Fathers and Families Second-Tier Roundtable Series
Constructing and Coping with Incarceration and Family Re-Entry: Perspectives from the Field

November 15-16, 2001

Name	Position
Ann Adalist-Estrin Bridges	researcher/practitioner
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Daniel J. Andrews National Practitioner's Network for Fathers and Families	practitioner
Robin Baldwin Fathers Workshop of York County	practitioner
James Harvey Bell Pennsylvania Department of Corrections	policymaker
Ian Bennett University of Pennsylvania Medical School and National Center on Fathers and Families	researcher
Phillip J. Bowman Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy University of Illinois, Chicago	researcher
Rhonda Boyd University of Pennsylvania	researcher
Peter Breen Centerforce	practitioner
Eric Brenner Illinois Governor's Office	policymaker
Carol Burton Project S.E.E.K.	practitioner
Mary Leftridge Byrd SCI Chester	practitioner
Ron J. Clark Virginia Fatherhood Campaign	practitioner

Juleigh Petty Coleman Northwestern University American Bar Association	researcher
Imani Davis	child of incarcerated father
Loyce Duke New York State Department of Correctional Services	policymaker/practitioner
Jay Fagan Temple University	researcher
John Fantuzzo University of Pennsylvania	researcher
Vivian L. Gadsden National Center on Fathers and Families University of Pennsylvania	researcher
Elizabeth Gaynes Osborne Associates	practitioner
Alisha Griffin New Jersey Department of Human Services	policymaker
John Hagan Northwestern University American Bar Association	researcher
Creasie Finney Hairston University of Illinois, Chicago	researcher
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Lorin Harris The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation	program officer
Tom Henry University of Pennsylvania	practitioner
Edwin Hostetter Family and Corrections Network	practitioner
Larry Icard Center for Intervention and Practice Research	researcher
John Jeffries The Vera Institute	researcher
Sean Joe University of Pennsylvania	researcher
Ray Jones Impact Services	practitioner

Deborah Johnson Michigan State University	researcher
Velma LaPoint Howard University and CRESPAR	researcher
John Larivee Community Resources for Justice	researcher/practitioner
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Geraldo Rodriguez Los Angeles Department of Community and Senior Services	practitioner
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Diana Slaughter-Defoe University of Pennsylvania	researcher
D. Malcolm Smith Center for Fathers, Families, and Workforce Development	practitioner

Marilyn Ray Smith Massachusetts Department of Revenue/Child Support Enforcement	policymaker
William Spriggs National Urban League	researcher
Dr. John Stanfield Morehouse College	researcher
Charles Stuart Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole	policymaker
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Carol Tracy Women's Law Project	policy analyst/ practitioner
Jeremy Travis The Urban Institute	policy analyst
Mark D. Turner Institute for Policy Studies, Johns Hopkins University	researcher
Michelle Waul The Urban Institute	policy analyst
Zuline Gray Wilkinson Trenton Program	practitioner
Bernard Wilson New York State Division of Probation and Correctional Alternatives	policymaker
Jennifer Wofford National Center on Fathers and Families	researcher

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