

Sonia Dzierżyńska-Breś

Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań  
sonia.d@amu.edu.pl; ORCID: 0000-0002-7722-4753

## Mentoring as a form of support for prisoners' children

**Abstrakt:** Children of incarcerated individuals constitute an at-risk group vulnerable to exclusion, social maladjustment, and criminality. Interventions aimed at them primarily involve establishing community-based support networks and resources. Building supportive relationships within the community enables youth facing parental incarceration to overcome challenges.

One such intervention is mentoring. Unfortunately, there is still a lack of evaluative research concerning mentor-mentee relationship-based programs. However, the studies conducted so far suggest that it can yield positive outcomes, mitigating some of the risks associated with parental incarceration.

**Key words:** mentoring, children of incarcerated parents.

### Introduction

One of the most critical questions addressed by contemporary research on families of incarcerated individuals relates to the extent and scope of how parental incarceration affects the future prospects of their offspring. (Murray, Farrington, 2005; Murray et al, 2007; Wildeman, 2014, Johnson, Easterling, 2012; Wildeman, Andersen, 2017). Analyzing the life paths of children seeks to determine why some of them follow in their parents' footsteps and engage in criminal activities, while others do not get involved in legal conflicts and live in accordance with societal

norms (Giordano 2010; Rakt et al., 2011). These findings align with evidence-based practices focused on planning effective actions based on professional diagnosis (Muskala, 2016, pp. 93–97). In the case of children of incarcerated individuals, this entails identifying methods and techniques that minimize the risk of engaging in risky, antisocial, or self-destructive behaviors (Barczykowska, Dzierżyńska-Breś 2011, p. 270). Mentoring programs based on the relationship between an adult mentor and a mentee are the most promising in terms of results (Eddy, Poehlman-Tynan 2020, pp. 205–206). In this article, mentoring will be presented as one of the methods that “may” address the specific needs of children of incarcerated individuals, thereby creating an opportunity to change unfavorable life trajectories. “May” because research on the effectiveness of mentoring has several methodological limitations, as these considerations will also highlight.

## **Children of incarcerated individuals as children in a complex crisis**

In the literature, children of incarcerated individuals are often referred to as the “invisible population” (Gordon 2009), the “forgotten population” (Mathews 1983), or “orphans of the justice system” (Shaw 1992). This illustrates how this group is (not) seen by institutions that could provide them with assistance. However, before such potential support can be implemented, a comprehensive assessment of the child’s situation is necessary. This population is not homogeneous. It consists of individuals with varying needs and levels of risk for involvement in antisocial activities. The life situations of children of incarcerated individuals are diverse. Not all of them face significant risks solely due to having an incarcerated parent (Johnson et al., 2018). However, research (Kjellstrand, Eddy, 2011; Murray et al., 2012) has shown that psychosocial difficulties are more likely to occur in this group than in the general population or even among youth separated from their parents for reasons other than imprisonment.

Children experience various consequences, often associated with externalizing behaviors (rule-breaking, truancy, lack of behavioral control, physical, psychological, and verbal violence, etc.) or internalizing behaviors (feelings of alienation, low mood, self-harm). Parental incarceration primarily exposes them to social exclusion, stigma, poverty, low self-esteem, mental health issues, lack of prospects, the replication of antisocial attitudes and behaviors, educational failure, and early school dropout (Kjellstrand, Eddy, 2011). This is concerning, considering that those who externalize their behaviors are more likely to engage in criminal behavior in adulthood, and the continuous involvement of the justice system in families becomes an unfortunate “legacy” passed from generation to generation (Rakt et al., 2011).

Researchers on this issue point to the mutual relationship between parental incarceration and the occurrence of post-traumatic stress symptoms in children (Arditti, Savla, 2015), difficulties with emotional dysregulation (Myers et al., 2013), and disrupted and difficult family and peer relationships (Myers et al., 2013; Shlafer and Poehlmann, 2010). Findings regarding academic and educational failures, substance use, and problems related to internalizing behaviors such as anxiety and depression have yielded more diverse results. Some studies have indicated an increased risk of these issues in this group of children (Mcgee et al., 2017), while others have not found such a relationship compared to the general population (Murray et al., 2012). Despite these variations, research clearly indicates that children of incarcerated individuals are a population at risk. Preventive interventions are needed to increase their chances of functioning well in society and minimize the risk of transmitting criminal behaviors across generations.

The relationship between parental incarceration and a child's development is complex and does not follow a simple linear causality pattern: cause and effect. It is important to note that "parental incarceration" is a specific process with situational, present, and post-situational dimensions. It begins before the commission of the crime, and families may already be dealing with problems such as violence, discrimination, or limited access to material and social resources. Imprisonment, as research often shows, usually exacerbates these cumulative risk factors (Kjellstrand, 2017). It rarely becomes an opportunity for a peaceful life during the parental tyrant's penitentiary isolation. This process goes through stages: from committing the crime, disclosing the perpetrator, to arrest, trial, conviction, and penitentiary isolation. And it does not end there. The entire process culminates in the potential return of the parent home and their reintegration. However, this potential is often not realized, as imprisonment in many cases becomes the ultimate reason for family dissolution. Children's problems do not end with the parent's release from prison. Increasingly, the literature discusses the long-term effects of imprisonment, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, or addiction (Rakt et al., 2012).

During each of these stages, the child experiences instability in terms of family and social functioning, the fulfillment of family tasks, needs, and social roles. All of these factors directly impact the well-being and feelings of children, and the accompanying circumstances, such as media attention, social exclusion, family breakdown, job loss, single parenthood, can further intensify feelings of shame, stigma, and burden. However, it seems that their functioning is not directly dependent on the situation of parental penitentiary isolation but on the processes of coping with the complex crisis that the family is experiencing.

The crisis process can go in two directions. On one hand, the family or individual affected effectively resolves the problems that underlie their situation. On the other hand, adopting ineffective coping strategies can lead to a chronic cri-

sis that continually affects them. In summary, a crisis is both an opportunity for change and a threat (Kubacka-Jasiecka, 2010, p. 17). The first situation occurs much more often when individuals receive emotional support from family, friends, or professional help. Research, including studies by Boyden and Mann (2005) and Masten (2001, 2014), has shown that resilience processes can occur in the face of adverse circumstances, such as war, natural disasters, family violence, poverty, parents' mental illness, and their imprisonment. Three broad categories of protective factors have been identified in relation to this resilience in adverse circumstances:

- (1) individual characteristics, such as intelligence, self-confidence, or exceptional talents;
- (2) family characteristics, such as authoritative parenting and a good socio-economic situation;
- (3) community characteristics, such as the relationship with a caring adult, such as a teacher or coach (Boyden and Mann, 2005; Masten, 2001, 2014).

Although most existing research focuses on the first two groups, in recent decades, more attention has been paid to community factors, leading to research and practice related to mentoring children and youth. The community can create conditions for full social participation for youth experiencing parental imprisonment (Ambrozik 2016, pp. 158–168). Therefore, when seeking effective interventions to support children of incarcerated individuals, attention has been drawn to methods based on supportive relationships.

## **Mentoring as a method based on building a safe, nurturing relationship**

The homeland of mentoring is the United States of America. Its origins are primarily linked to the field of social work and the establishment of “settlements” for impoverished and marginalized families living in slums at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries (Barczykowska, Dzierżyńska, 2012, p. 264). Over the course of a century, mentoring has evolved from charitable activities to recognized and recommended preventive and rehabilitative actions in national documents. It is currently one of the most commonly used support strategies for those in need. Constantly evolving methods, techniques, and mentoring tools have expanded the circle of beneficiaries, making it effective for both children and youth at risk of social maladjustment and individuals requiring support in social reintegration (Barczykowska, Dzierżyńska, 2012, p. 265).

In literature, mentoring is defined as a method based on building relationships. It provides a secure foundation necessary to initiate a change in the protege's behavior. This relationship occurs between a mentor with the appropriate qualifications and experience and the mentee, who, by emulating their mentor, develops a sense of agency, motivation, and communication skills

(Sidor-Rządkowska 2009, p.4). Mentoring is also seen as a specific didactic process whose aim is to impart knowledge and experience by offering guidance and demonstrating desirable attitudes (Bakiera, 2016, pp. 5–7). Regarding children of incarcerated parents, mentoring is most closely understood as: “a relationship between an older, more experienced adult and a unrelated, younger protege – a relationship in which the adult provides guidance and instructions aimed at developing the protege’s psychosocial competence and skills” (Rhodes, 2002, p. 3). Therefore, this method aligns perfectly with preventive actions, both primary and secondary, targeting children and youth at risk of social maladjustment.

As Rhodes and others (2006) pointed out, “the personal relationship is at the heart of mentoring” (p. 697). It is the relationship, even of varying intensity, from friendship to bond creation, that makes this type of intervention effective. A positive, adult figure outside the family provides social, cultural, and intellectual challenges to children and offers opportunities for development. The mentor, as a role model, opens up new ways for the protege to view and respond to the world, allowing them to build a positive self-image. Additionally, children of incarcerated parents gain a trustworthy person to turn to for help.

Baumeister and Leary (1995) describe significant interaction as “providing stability and affectionate care, with a predictable future” (p. 500).

During the crisis associated with the incarceration of a parent along with all the accompanying events that become a chaotic challenge for a child, the mentoring relationship, one supportive adult whose behaviors are predictable, becomes a source of fulfilling important developmental needs: safety, acceptance, and belonging. Having an adult mentor ensures the fulfillment of these needs while also providing guidance, role modeling, and establishing norms. Mentoring allows children to integrate and transfer what they learn in this relationship into interactions with other adults and peers. A positive mentorship relationship can counteract negative cultural messages and prevent exclusion. The adverse socio-emotional environment in which many children of incarcerated parents live is effectively mitigated by mentoring relationships, thus reversing potentially negative life trajectories.<sup>1</sup>

Incarceration changes the functioning of families. The presence or absence of a stable adult role model, as shown in research (Arditti, Savla, 2015; Johnson et al., 2018; Kjellstrand, Eddy, 2011), contributes to the occurrence of negative consequences in children of incarcerated parents. The mentoring relationship is viewed as a strategy that provides stability and support to children during crises,

.....

<sup>1</sup> The importance of supportive adults who are not parents in children’s lives has been emphasized in the landmark Children of Kauai study, which tracked an entire birth cohort for the first thirty years of their lives (Werner, 1989). Many of the studied children were classified as high-risk due to being born into poverty and living in conflict-ridden or traumatic family environments. However, a significant portion of high-risk children have reached adulthood as competent, well-functioning individuals. A significant commonality among these high-risk children was a strong relationship with at least one supportive adult other than their parents (Werner, Johnson, 2004).

helping to maintain their well-being. It promotes the proper functioning of the individual despite traumatic experiences in their life. Therefore, it is not surprising that it has been proposed by both theorists and practitioners as an intervention that can yield positive effects for this group of young people. In short, the mentor becomes a “mentor of resilience,” and mentoring itself supports the development of psychological resilience (Bouregba, 2017, p. 7). Research on the protective influence of supportive, positive adults on youth experiencing individual and environmental risks suggests that mentoring can effectively support and improve the psychological and social functioning of children with incarcerated parents (Garringer et al., 2017).

Mentoring, as an intervention designed for at-risk youth, has gained enthusiastic support from institutions and government agencies. However, it is important to note that the rapid increase in the number of mentoring programs, especially in the United States, has outpaced our knowledge of whether and what effects they have on children of incarcerated parents. Although it has been assumed that they are comparable to the results obtained in earlier evaluations of the effectiveness of this intervention in the general population, this assumption has so far undergone very limited empirical analysis.

## **The state of (in)knowledge regarding the effectiveness of mentoring programs.**

In 2016, G. Roger Jarjoura from the American Institute of Research (Jarjoura 2016) conducted a systematic meta-analysis of the literature in search of studies on the effectiveness of mentoring for children of incarcerated parents. He focused his research on four key questions: (1) What is the effectiveness of mentoring programs for children of incarcerated parents? (2) What factors determine the success of mentoring for this population? (3) Which interventions, when combined with mentoring, yield the best results? (4) To what extent are mentoring activities implemented by organizations that provide care to children of incarcerated parents? Currently, it is not possible to obtain a definitive answer to any of these questions. There is a limited amount of research in the literature on mentoring, and the methodology of these studies often falls short of rigorous standards, making it difficult to understand the impact of this intervention on the population. The author of this meta-analysis included only nine research reports on mentoring in his search (ICF International, 2011; Morris, 2014; Shlafer et al., 2009; Herrera et al., 2013; Merenstein et al., 2011; Bruster, Foreman, 2012; Conway, Keays, 2015; Rhodes et al., 2000; Jucovy, 2003). Even greater limitations exist in terms of explaining the conditions and processes that would need to occur for mentoring to achieve the most optimal benefits for its recipients. Combining the available evidence on mentoring for children of incarcerated parents with the broader lite-

rature on the experiences of this group clearly suggests that mentorship organized as a program for the children of incarcerated parents can contribute to noticeable improvements in their behavior, relationships, and emotional well-being.

Shlafer, Poehlmann, Coffino, and Hanneman (2009) conducted one of the first evaluations of a mentoring program for children of incarcerated parents using mixed quantitative and qualitative methods. Their research sample included 57 teenagers participating in the Mentoring Connections program, funded by the Department of Health and Human Services and managed by the Big Brother Big Sister initiative (BBSA). They found that in over one-third of cases, the mentoring relationship ended within six months. The most common reasons for ending the collaboration were conflicts, personal and family problems of the youth, changing residences, scheduling conflicts, underappreciation of mentor involvement, and mentor-mentee mismatch. However, among pairs that built a successful mentoring relationship, they observed moderate improvements related to the reduction of externalizing and internalizing symptoms (Shlafer et al., 2009).

Between 2008 and 2010, researchers from ICF International conducted a randomized study of the Amachi Texas program implemented by BBBS. The aim was to assess the individual impact of mentoring on the school performance, social competencies, family relationships, and future plans of children with incarcerated parents. The research sample included 272 children aged 7 to 13, who were randomly assigned a mentor. The results from this project provided evidence suggesting the effectiveness of mentoring for this group of children. The initial observations of the mentor-mentee relationship within six months showed a significant improvement in the relationships the child had with their family. Compared to the control group, the participants exhibited a more positive outlook on the future and higher self-esteem. During long-term observations (12 to 18 months), the youth under the mentor's care reported a stronger sense of connection with their family, school, and community compared to the control group. Unfortunately, there were encountered formal difficulties in the process. Twice as many parents/guardians and their children declined to participate in the evaluation as those who agreed to participate. Additionally, over the course of 18 months, significant attrition was observed in the research sample (ICF International, 2011). Given these obstacles, the results of the effectiveness of this project should be considered suggestive at best.

In another evaluation of the Bruster and Foreman (2012) mentoring program within the Seton Youth Shelters (SYS) in Virginia Beach, Virginia, 49 guardians and 35 children completed surveys. All guardians reported that the program brought visible benefits. Among the youth, 80% agreed or strongly agreed with statements that mentors helped them succeed, provided valuable guidance for their future, encouraged greater engagement in education, helped them feel better about themselves, and made it easier for them to discuss their personal problems (Bruster, Foreman, 2012). Furthermore, guardians reported that since participating

in the program, they had noticed a positive change in their children's interest in school and education, as well as their overall attitude toward life.

Similarly, Laakso and Nygaard (2012) conducted a qualitative analysis of interviews with youth, incarcerated parents, non-incarcerated parents/guardians, and mentors who participated in the specialized mentoring program of BBBSA for children. According to the project stakeholders' observations, the youth involved in the program displayed greater self-confidence, were more willing to connect with peers, were open, and shared their home and school problems with mentors. Additionally, a significant improvement in school performance and educational achievements was observed in this group (Laakso, Nygaard, 2012). These studies were conducted on a small scale and primarily utilized qualitative methodology without the inclusion of a control group, and their results were largely informative in nature.

R.C. Morris in 2014 compared data obtained from the evaluation of the local Big Brother Big Sister (BBBS) program in Indiana (where 63% of program participants had a parent in prison) with data from the Fragile Families (FF) and Child Wellbeing Study, which had a representative research sample of over 5000 children living in urban areas (with over 50% of this sample being children of incarcerated parents who did not receive mentoring services). The results from this second group were used to construct a comparative group for the children of incarcerated parents participating in the BBBS program. Three outcomes were analyzed: delinquency, cheating and school fraud, such as forging signatures, as well as self-reported feelings of sadness. It was found that for children who participated in the mentoring program, there was a significant reduction in high scores in all three areas within 6 months of the program's start. After 12 months, the reduction in feelings of sadness and school fraud were still visible. However, levels of deviant behavior returned to baseline and were no longer significantly different from the control group, suggesting that these programs may have difficulty maintaining certain effects after completion (Morris, 2014). Like previous studies, the methodology applied here requires caution in interpreting the results. The youth in the FF data (comparative group) were mostly aged 8–9 years (younger than when most youth begin engaging in delinquent behaviors) and reported lower levels of delinquency, making their use as a comparative group problematic. The results of this study suggest only that mentoring can contribute to changing the behavior of children with incarcerated parents, improving their emotional well-being and relationships with others. However, both the scope of the research and the methodological solutions used are insufficient to draw strong and significant conclusions from the available evidence.

During the evaluation of the BBBS program in Connecticut, specializing in supporting children of incarcerated parents, J.M. Conway and A. Keays (2015) used the Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale (BERS) to assess the behavior of youth. This tool was used twice: in the initial weeks after the program started



and 13 months after its completion. The study did not find evidence of positive changes that could be attributed to mentoring. However, it was noted that those children who continued the mentor-mentee relationship for at least 12 months achieved the best results in terms of social skills. Additionally, children whose relationship with their mentor was described as close, trusting, and respectful achieved higher scores on the BERS Scale after 7 and 13 months after the project ended, compared to those who did not establish such a relationship. However, this study has significant methodological limitations. Among the research sample of 166 individuals aged 5 to 18 years, recruited at the time of program admission, 111 remained engaged in the program after 7 months, and 65 of them participated in the study after 13 months (representing 39% of the initial research group) (Conway, Keays, 2015). Furthermore, children and youth who participated in the study demonstrated significantly lower levels of behavioral problems compared to the other participants.

Kupersmidt, Stump, Stelter, and Rhodes (2017) conducted a thorough analysis of a large archive of BBBSA data, which revealed that children of incarcerated parents experienced significantly shorter mentoring relationships and lower ratings. They also dropped out more often from school and displayed lower levels of trust in parents after one year of mentoring, compared to youth who also participated in the project but did not have a parent in prison. Considering that premature termination of mentoring relationships in this group can be harmful, the shorter duration of interventions suggests that they are not sufficiently tailored (Grossman et al., 2012; Grossman and Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes, 2002). Even if mentoring relationships work, they are not effective for children of incarcerated parents. It appears that mentoring programs do not fully adapt to the specific needs of this population. In 2018, the same team repeated their research and again used BBBSA archival data to identify the characteristics of mentoring programs that had the expected results for children of incarcerated parents. Programs in which mentor training and goals were designed in accordance with scientific evidence indicating the needs and problems of incarcerated children were more effective. Given the popularity of mentoring programs, these research results bring some hope that well-designed programs can have positive effects and serve this neglected group well.

The presented studies suggest that mentoring programs for children with incarcerated parents may be effective in achieving positive outcomes. The most promising findings appear to be related to the improvement of mental well-being in this group, associated with the presence of an adult mentor. There is also evidence that mentoring reduces youth engagement in delinquent behaviors, although this finding is inconsistent at different methodological points. The limitations of the studies include a small research sample and the lack of a control group. Furthermore, longitudinal studies were not always conducted in accordance with rigorous principles, which affects the ability to generalize the results.

Future research focusing on the effectiveness of mentoring for children of incarcerated parents should use control groups and random assignment to groups, ensuring that all experiment participants have equal chances of being in any of the experimental groups. Additionally, the priority in such studies should be the use of longitudinal methods to observe effects over a longer period of time. It also appears beneficial to use multimodal outcome measurement, including parent reports, mentor reports, participant self-assessment, behavior measurement, teacher reports, etc., including outcomes that have clear social significance, such as high school graduation, juvenile crime reports, etc. Another important aspect is to answer the question: What characteristics of the mentor, child, family, or program enhance or hinder the effectiveness of mentoring? This is especially important because, as emphasized in the first part of the article, these children and their families are not a homogeneous group with the same life circumstances. The use of generalizations regarding this population is unjustified.

## **“Tailored” characteristics that mentoring programs for children of incarcerated parents should exhibit**

According to Rhodes (2005), mentors have the potential to enhance the socio-emotional development of youth by establishing a close, trust-based relationship. This was confirmed by the mentioned studies. The bond formed between the mentor and their mentee positively affects the mental well-being and interpersonal skills of the latter. It becomes a matrix for replicating social behaviors that allow a child affected by parental incarceration to successfully navigate the crisis and develop psychological resilience.

Another important task in which mentors play a significant role is initiating the cognitive development of the mentee through direct instructions and guidance, reinforcing the child’s engagement in education, and building critical thinking skills (Rhodes, 2005). Parents or guardians of children of incarcerated parents often have a low level of education, and the imprisonment of a close family member leads to numerous tensions related to both the family’s economic situation and caregiving responsibilities (Shlafer et al., 2009). Thus, with the support of mentors, children of incarcerated parents benefit from academic assistance, enrich their cultural experiences (visits to cinemas, museums, etc.), and parents in a situation that creates a sense of overwhelming responsibilities gain support. However, evidence of the impact of mentoring on the school functioning of children with incarcerated parents has not yet been confirmed by research.

Finally, mentors can support the development of the identity of young individuals through positive role modeling (Rhodes, 2005). This can be especially important for children who identify with their parent’s criminal lifestyle and see them as a negative role model (Johnson and Easterling, 2015; Luther, 2016).

A parent's imprisonment is a stigmatizing event. The social audience often attributes deviant characteristics "inherited" from the incarcerated parent to the child (Barczykowska, 2008, pp. 346–347). Children may start to wonder what this situation means for them and their future (Luther, 2016). Contact with a positive role model who facilitates the verification and exploration of one's own "self" in different situations and relationships can be a powerful intervention. It should be emphasized that for the mentor, the role they take on involves significant interpersonal challenges. Relationships with adults who are not parents are an important source of social capital (Hagler, 2018). Families and children of incarcerated parents are often excluded and marginalized due to stigmatization. This social alienation has serious consequences for the choices of children of incarcerated parents and becomes a barrier to their social mobility (Kjellstrand, 2017). The injection of social capital in the form of a mentoring relationship aims to help youth establish new relationships, gain knowledge, and develop skills that they can use to break the cycle of poverty and social marginalization.

The available research clearly shows that not all mentoring relationships are "tailored" and conducive to change and achieving positive results for youth. Theoretical perspectives point to mutual trust, the feeling of being liked, understood, and respected as the foundations of a mentoring relationship (Liang, Noam, 2006). The experience of emotional attachment with the mentor is a key factor affecting better academic performance and the avoidance of problem behaviors (Bayer et al., 2013). Similarly, relationships built on cooperation and focus on the young person's affairs, as opposed to those based solely on the mentor's expectations and interests, are more effective (Lian et al., 2014). This first type of relationship is characterized by durability. A sense of emotional security and cooperation is a necessary condition for a mentoring relationship to be stable and produce the expected effects.

**Characteristics of Effective Mentorship Relationships:**

**Active guidance** — The mentor shares information. Creates situations that allow the mentee to build skills, support the development of their character, and personal values. Broaden their perspective of the world. The mentor focuses the mentee on work based on personal goals.

**Support** — The mentor identifies the needs of their mentees. Assists in meeting those needs correctly. Creates a support network and resources to facilitate this, especially in the areas related to education or employment.

**Closeness/Emotional bond** — The mentor and mentee take care of each other and are "connected," potentially similar to the bond between close individuals.

**Orientation towards cooperation/development** — The mentor recognizes both the interests of their mentee and responds to their concerns. Identifies resources, nurtures, and develops their strengths.

**Consistency** — The mentor values the expectations of the mentee, such as how they spend time together. Additionally, the mentor is a credible person who consistently fulfills their promises and tasks established in the mentoring contract.

**Persistence** — The mentor and mentee maintain active contact over an extended period.

**Parental involvement** — The mentor makes active efforts to collaborate with the parents or guardians of the mentee. Respects the opinions of parents and maintains appropriate boundaries not to disrupt the parent-child relationship but rather to support it.

Positive role modeling — The mentor sets an example of how to behave honestly, take care of mental and physical health, show concern for oneself and others, etc. (Jarjoura et al. 2013).

Mentoring relationships, built on consistent and frequent interactions, have a positive impact on the behavior of mentees. Available evidence suggests that more intensive and long-term interactions provide a significantly greater opportunity for the internalization of positive attitudes in children (Rhodes, DuBois, 2006). The collaboration between the mentor and the mentee on goals is grounded in trust, which takes time to develop. It is worth noting that mentoring programs typically rely on short-term mentoring relationships (up to 6 months). This has been observed in several studies (Shlafer et al., 2009; Bruster, Foreman, 2012; Laakso, Nygaard, 2012), which have shown positive effects of mentoring within 6 months of the program. Unfortunately, these effects tend to diminish within a year after its conclusion. There are many potential reasons for this phenomenon. As previously mentioned, mentoring programs often lose a significant number of participants compared to their initial enrollment, making outcome comparisons less meaningful. Furthermore, the youth in the “control group” receives and experiences mentoring services from sources other than the target group. Mentors can be effective in quickly mitigating the impact of a parent’s incarceration and providing stability to the child during these difficult times. However, over time, family crises may accumulate, surpassing the knowledge, capabilities, and skills of a single mentor (Eddy, Poehlmann-Tynann, 2020, pp. 212–213).

There is a clear need for more research before making any generalizations about the ideal duration of a mentoring relationship. It is worth considering that, for this population, short-term mentoring programs are likely the most effectively utilized form of support. Nevertheless, the question arises as to how mentoring programs could have a long-term impact on children of incarcerated parents. When designing future programs, it would be beneficial not only to focus on individual mentorship but also to offer a team-based approach. A network of caring adults, including professionally trained individuals and those naturally becoming mentors of resilience (e.g., a favorite teacher or coach), may lead to long-term effects.

Theory and available research also emphasize the importance of how the mentoring relationship connects with other significant relationships in the youth's life. Mentors can establish contacts with parents or other significant individuals whose primary goal is the child's well-being and collaboration for their benefit. Furthermore, creating a social network by mentors, including teachers, peers, and the local community, appears to be of great importance for building resilience in children of incarcerated individuals (Dzierżyńska-Breś, 2021). Unfortunately, there is currently no research confirming this. However, despite these research limitations, practitioners should remember that a network approach that deeply involves parents and caregivers is a good starting point.

Parents or caregivers of children of incarcerated parents should be significantly engaged in participating in the mentoring program (Barczykowska, 2021, pp. 56–59). This applies to both the parent or caregiver raising the child during the partner's or loved one's incarceration and the incarcerated parent. There are many arguments in favor of engaging in early and frequent communication with parents and caregivers. They play a crucial role from the very beginning. They decide whether to enroll the child in the program and motivate them to participate in mentoring sessions. Many of the studies mentioned earlier had difficulty recruiting participants. Parents or caregivers during this crisis time in the family's life may be reluctant to involve their child in additional activities. Another issue arises when the program is directed exclusively at children of incarcerated parents. The stigma of "incarceration" associated with joining such a project can lead to mistrust and a sense of exclusion, both among caregivers and children. Therefore, clear communication with parents about the program's goals is essential to alleviate concerns and maximize the percentage of parents or caregivers who consent to participate in the project.

## Conclusions

In Western European countries and the United States of America, work based on mentoring relationships with children who have experienced their parent's incarceration has been one of the more prominent trends in mentoring over the last decade. Significant investments have been made in the development of interventions directed at this group. It is rightly recognized that preventive and intervention services for youth can play a crucial role in reducing future criminality and breaking the multi-generational cycle of incarceration and family dysfunction. However, despite substantial financial investments in such efforts, there is still limited evidence on how mentoring can serve this population. In many cases, this is not due to negligence. Put simply, the biggest challenge in this regard is how to measure the impact of these programs.

Mentoring cannot be seen as a cure-all for the complex network of problems that children and families of incarcerated individuals face, as well as society as a whole. Instead, it represents an opportunity to address specific challenges, including supporting children who have been traditionally treated as “invisible victims” of an overly punitive criminal justice system (Petersilia, 2003).

## References

- [1] Ambrozik W., 2016, *Pedagogika resocjalizacyjna. W stronę uspołecznienia systemu odziałowań*, Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls, Kraków.
- [2] Arditti J. A., Savla J., 2015, *Parental incarceration and child trauma symptoms in single caregiver homes*, „Journal of Child and Family Studies”, 24 (3).
- [3] Barczykowska A., 2008, *Sytuacja życiowa rodzin osób pozbawionych wolności*, [in:] *Rodzina i praca z perspektywy wyzwań i zagrożeń*, (eds.) L. Golińska, B. Dudek, Łódź.
- [4] Barczykowska A., Dzierżyńska S., 2012, *Zastosowanie mentoringu w działalności profilaktycznej i resocjalizacyjnej (na przykładzie Stanów Zjednoczonych)*, „Resocjalizacja Polska”, 3 (12).
- [5] Barczykowska A., 2021, *Od izolacji ku partnerstwu resocjalizacyjnemu – w poszukiwaniu optymalnego modelu współpracy z rodzinami w procesie resocjalizacji nieletnich*, „Resocjalizacja Polska”, 21.
- [6] Baumeister R., Leary M., 1995, *The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation*, „Psychological Bulletin”, 117 (3).
- [7] Bouregba A., 2017, *Helping children draw benefit from their life experience, whatever the circumstances*, „European Journal of Parental Imprisonment”, 6.
- [8] Boyden J., Mann G., 2005, *Children’s risk, resilience, and coping in extreme situations*, [in:] *Handbook for working with children and youth: Pathways to resilience across cultures and contexts*, (ed.) M. Ungar, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- [9] Bruster B. E., Foreman K., 2012, *Mentoring children of prisoners: Program evaluation*, „Social Work in Public Health”, 27.
- [10] Conway J. M., Keays A., 2015, *Children with incarcerated parents: A quantitative evaluation of mentoring and home-based counseling and case management services*, New Britain, CT: The Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy.
- [11] Dzierżyńska-Breś S., 2021, *Dzieci osób pozbawionych wolności w szkole – potrzeby, zagrożenia i możliwości wsparcia*, „Lubelski Rocznik Pedagogiczny”, 4 (40).
- [12] Eddy M., Poehlmann-Tynan J., 2020, *Handbook on Children with Incarcerated Parents. Research, Policy, and Practice* (wyd. 2), Springer Nature Switzerland AG.
- [13] Garringer M., McQuillin S., McDaniel H., 2017, *Examining youth mentoring services across America: Findings from the 2016 National Mentoring Program Survey*, Boston, MA: MENTOR.
- [14] Giordano P. C., 2010, *Legacies of Crime. A Follow-Up of the Children of Highly Delinquent Girls and Boys*, Cambridge University Press.
- [15] Gordon L., 2009, *Invisible Children: A Study of the Children of Prisoners*, PILLARS, Report, Christchurch.

- [16] Grossman J. B., Chan C. S., Schwartz S. E. O., Rhodes J. E., 2012, *The test of time in school-based mentoring: The role of relationship duration and re-matching on academic outcomes*, „American Journal of Community Psychology”, 49 (1–2).
- [17] Grossman J. B., Rhodes J. E., 2002, *The test of time: Predictors and effects of duration in youth mentoring relationships*, „American Journal of Community Psychology”, 30 (2).
- [18] Hagler M. A., 2018, *Processes of natural mentoring that promote underrepresented students' educational attainment: A theoretical model*, „American Journal of Community Psychology”, 62 (1–2).
- [19] Herrera C., DuBois D. L., Grossman J. B., 2013, *The role of risk: Mentoring experiences and outcomes for youth with varying risk profiles*. New York, NY: A Public/Private Ventures project distributed by MDRC.
- [20] ICF International, 2011, *Mentoring children affected by incarceration: An evaluation of the Texas Amachi Program*, Fairfax, VA.
- [21] Johnson E. I., Easterling B., 2012, *Understanding unique effects of parental incarceration on children: Challenges, progress, and recommendations*, „Journal of Marriage and Family”, 74 (2).
- [22] Johnson E. I., Arditti J. A., McGregor C. M., 2018, *Risk, protection, and adjustment among youth with incarcerated and non-resident parents: A mixed-methods study*, „Journal of Child and Family Studies”, 27 (6).
- [24] Jucovy L., 2003, *Amachi: Mentoring children of prisoners in Philadelphia*, Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures and Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society.
- [25] Kantowicz E., 2014, *Praca socjalna z rodziną ryzyka*, [in:] *Praca socjalna z dziećmi, młodzieżą i rodziną*, (eds.) M. Ruszkowska, M. Winiarski, Centrum Rozwoju Zasobów Ludzkich, WYG International.
- [26] Kjellstrand J., 2017, *Building a Tailored, Multilevel Prevention Strategy to Support Children and Families Affected by Parental Incarceration*, „Smith College Studies in Social Work”, 87, 1, 112–129.
- [27] Kjellstrand J. M., Eddy J. M., 2011, *Parental incarceration during childhood, family context, and youth problem behavior across adolescence*, „Journal of Offender Rehabilitation”, 50 (1).
- [28] Kubacka-Jasiecka D., 2010, *Interwencja kryzysowa. Pomoc w kryzysach psychologicznych*, Wydawnictwo Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warszawa.
- [29] Kupersmidt J. B., Stump K. N., Stelter R. L., Rhodes J. E., 2017, *Predictors of Premature Match Closure in Youth Mentoring Relationships*, „American Journal of Community Psychology”, 59 (1–2), 25–35.
- [30] Laakso J., Nygaard J., 2012, *Children of incarcerated parents: How a mentoring program can make a difference*, „Social Work in Public Health”, 27 (1–2).
- [31] Liu S., Huang J. L., Wang M., 2014, *Effectiveness of job search interventions: A meta-analytic review*, „Psychological Bulletin”, 140 (4), 1009–1041.
- [32] Luther K., 2016, *Stigma management among children of incarcerated parents*, „Deviant Behavior”, 37 (11).
- [33] Masten A. S., 2001, *Ordinary magic: Resilience processes in development*, „American Psychologist”, 56/01.
- [34] Masten A. S., 2014, *Ordinary magic: Resilience in development*, New York: Guilford Publications.
- [35] Matthews J., 1983, *Forgotten Victims: How Prison Affects the Family*, Londyn.

- [36] Mcgee Z., Davis B. L., Saunders-Goldson S., Fletcher M., Fisher L., 2017, *The impact of maternal incarceration on emotional and behavioral outcomes: Research findings from a National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health*, „SOJ Nursing & Health Care”, 3 (1).
- [37] Merenstein B., Tyson B., Tilles B., Keays A., Ruffolo L., 2011, *Issues affecting the efficacy of programs for children with incarcerated parents*, „Journal of Correctional Education”, 62.
- [38] Morris R. C., 2014, *Mitigating the effects of parental incarceration through social intervention: A social psychological perspective*, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana.
- [39] Murray J., Farrington D. P., 2005, *Parental imprisonment: Effects on boys' antisocial behaviour and delinquency through the life-course*, „Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry”, 46 (12).
- [40] Murray J., Farrington D. P., 2008, *The effects of parental imprisonment on children*. Crime and Justice: A Review of Research, 37(1).
- [41] Murray J., Janson C.G., Farrington D. P., 2007, *Crime in adult offspring of prisoners*, „Criminal Justice and Behavior”, 34 (1).
- [42] Murray J., Farrington D. P., Sekol I., 2012, *Children's antisocial behaviour, mental health, drug use, and educational performance after parental incarceration: A systematic review and meta-analysis*, „Psychological Bulletin”, 138 (2).
- [43] Muskała M., 2016, *Odstąpienie od przestępczości w teorii i praktyce resocjalizacyjnej*, Wydawnictwo UAM, Poznań.
- [44] Myers B. J., Mackintosh V. H., Kuznetsova M. I., Lotze G. M., Best A. M., Ravindran N., 2013, *Teasing, bullying, and emotion regulation in children of incarcerated mothers*, „Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development”, 78 (3).
- [45] Petersilia J., 2003, *When Prisoners Come Home: Parole and Prisoner Reentry*, Oxford University Press.
- [46] Rakt M., Murray J., Nieuwbeerta P., 2012, *The Long-Term Effects of Paternal Imprisonment on Criminal Trajectories of Children*, „Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency”, 49 (1).
- [47] Sidor-Rządkowska M., 2009, *Coaching – teoria, praktyka, studia przypadków*, Kraków.
- [48] Rhodes J. E., 2002, *Stand by me: The risks and rewards of mentoring today's youth*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- [49] Rhodes J. E., 2005, *A model of youth mentoring*, [in:] *Handbook of youth mentoring*, (eds.) L. DuBois, M. J. Karcher, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- [50] Rhodes J. E., DuBois L., 2006, *Understanding and Facilitating the Youth Mentoring Movement*, „Social Policy Report” 20 (3).
- [51] Rhodes J. E., Spencer R., Keller T. E., Liang B., Noam G., 2006, *A model for the influence of mentoring relationships on youth development*, „Journal of Community Psychology”, 34 (6), 691–707.
- [52] Shaw R., 1992, *Imprisoned Fathers and the Orphans of Justice*, [in:] *Prisoners' Children: What Are the Issues?*, (ed.) R. Shaw, Routledge, London.
- [53] Shlafer R. J., Poehlmann J., 2010, *Attachment and caregiving relationships in families affected by parental incarceration*, „Attachment & Human Development”, 12 (4).
- [54] Shlafer R. J., Poehlmann J., Coffino B., Hanneman A., 2009, *Mentoring children with incarcerated parents: Implications for research, practice, and policy*, „Family Relations”, 58.
- [55] Werner E. E., 1989, *High-risk children in young adulthood: A longitudinal study from birth to 32 years*, „American Journal of Orthopsychiatry”, 59 (1), 72–81.



- [56] Werner E. E., Johnson J. L., 2004, *The Role of Caring Adults in the Lives of Children of Alcoholics*, „Substance Use & Misuse”, 39, 5, 699–720.
- [57] Wildeman C., 2014, *Parental incarceration, child homelessness, and the invisible consequences of mass imprisonment*, „Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science”, 651 (1).
- [58] Wildeman C., Andersen S. H., 2017, *Paternal incarceration and children's risk of being charged by early adulthood: Evidence from a Danish policy shock*, „Criminology”, 55 (1).

## Netography

- [59] Bakiera L., 2016, *Mentoring rozwojowy jako przykład komplementarności międzypokoleniowej*, E-mentor, 5(67), s. 4–13 (accessed: 11.10.2022).
- [60] Jarjoura G. R., 2016, *Mentoring for children of incarcerated parents*. *National Mentoring Resource Center Population Review*, <https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/resource/mentoring-children-of-incarcerated-parents-population-review/> (accessed: 12.09.2022).
- [61] Jarjoura R., DuBois D., Shlafer R., Haight K., 2013, *Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents: A Synthesis of Research and Input from the Listening Session Held by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the White House Domestic Policy Council and Office of Public Engagement*. *Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention*, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED553640> (accessed: 15.10.2022).

