

Journal of Forensic Social Work, 8.1:13-33, 2024
ISSN: 1936-928X print & 1936-9298 online



“Helping Me Get Through the Day”: The Importance of Social Contact and Support For Incarcerated Young People During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Jacoba Rock, Ph.D., L.C.S.W.
Boise State University

Diana Fishbein, Ph.D.
University of North Carolina

Background: There is limited knowledge about how incarcerated young people have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. An improved understanding of the impact of pandemic circumstances could help to advance a multitude of practices and policies, including those that strengthen personal relationships.

Objectives: This study aimed to (a) describe self-reported perceptions that social contact and support for incarcerated young people are powerful protective factors with the potential to attenuate the negative impacts of incarceration, (b) explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their personal and relational well-being, (c) determine the extent to which the pandemic restricted access to social support and other resources, and (d) consider potential identity-related differences in these perceptions and impacts.

Methods: This exploratory study employed interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith et al., 2010) of semi-structured interviews with 30 incarcerated young people in an adult carceral setting, ages 16-21 years, in addition to some preliminary survey information about social contact and multidimensional social support.

Results: Significant benefits of family support were identified, such as moral guidance, hopefulness, and goal maintenance, as well as the necessity of relationships for youth well-being given the especially challenging circumstances created by the pandemic. Limitations and barriers to social support, as well as access to services, were identified that may have implications for programmatic and system-level changes.

Conclusion: Contact with and involvement in supportive relationships is important for incarcerated young people, perhaps especially during times of crisis. Specific implications for both forensic social work practice, such as family-focused advocacy and services, and further qualitative social work research, including with incarcerated youth, are further explored.

Keywords: Incarcerated Youth; Social Support; Family Support, Pandemic, Prison Social Work

INTRODUCTION

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on prison populations, particularly on the personal and relational well-being of young people in adult carceral settings, is relatively unknown. Overall, studies of ways in which pandemics affect people in these settings, historical and current, have focused on the high prevalence of infections and outbreaks in adult prisons (e.g., Turner & Levy, 2010), as well as prevention and mitigation (e.g., Coleman et al., 2022; Levintow et al., 2022; Puglisi et al., 2022). Research indicates that there may be disparate pandemic impacts in these settings due to densely overcrowded units, contact between incarcerated individuals, contact with staff members, poor air circulation, reduced access to personal protective equipment, poor hygiene and sanitation, and reduced access to adequate healthcare (Kothari et al., 2020; MacDonald, 2018). Some research on pandemics in carceral settings has also focused on efforts to de-densify populations and revise conditions of release (James et al., 2023).

In the Spring of 2020, the United States Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) announced a 70% positivity rate of COVID-19 following initial screenings of 2,700 prisoners, and the World Health Organization (WHO) warned that prisoners were likely to be especially susceptible to the outbreak given both environmental and health conditions. Following those statements and similarly concerning data, there were pressing demands for improved mitigation strategies and overall responses to the coronavirus in prisons (Hummer, 2020). There have also been calls for scholars to prioritize data collection on the short- and long-term consequences of the pandemic on prison populations (Byrne et al., 2020; Novisky et al., 2020). However, very few studies (most of which utilize data from prisons outside of the United States; e.g., Junior et al., 2021), have focused on the impact of the pandemic specifically on prisoners' mental health and well-being, especially that of young prisoners and through qualitative approaches.

The disproportionate and long-term impact of COVID-19 on prison populations (Altibi et al., 2021; Puglisi et al., 2022) likely reflects an aggravation of the already significant health problems in this population due to elevated rates of exposure to early life trauma (Fazel & Seewald, 2012). In addition, other pandemic-related circumstances may have exacerbated mental health problems, such as the deaths of friends and family, and delays in legal proceedings (Kothari et al., 2020), as well as increased social isolation both within the prison due to lockdowns and cell confinement (Byrne et al., 2020; Robinson et al., 2020) and limited contact with sources of social support (Cloud et al., 2020; Suhomlinova et al., 2022). There may have also been a reduction in services to those most in need, particularly those services that may be considered non-essential by the carceral system, such as educational, religious, and mental health services (Kothari et al., 2020). Key strategies and supports typically accessed by incarcerated individuals to cope with and buffer against mental health challenges may not have been accessible during the pandemic. The need for social supports and services, and the effects of isolation and other circumstances, may have exerted an even greater impact on incarcerated young people relative to older individuals due to developmental vulnerabilities (Silvers & Peris, 2023). Furthermore, these impacts may be disproportionately experienced by incarcerated people from disadvantaged identity groups (e.g., transgender and non-binary prisoners, per Suhomlinova et al., 2023).

Developmental and Relational Consequences of Incarceration

Research generally supports that incarceration has particularly harmful effects on the cognitive, psychological, and social-emotional development of youth, who are at exceptional risk when placed in adult carceral settings due to developmental vulnerability (Fagen & Kupchik, 2011). As examples, youth incarceration is associated with a decline in temperance and responsibility (Dmitrieva et al., 2012) and greater mental health issues (Murrie et al., 2009), including depression (Ng et al., 2011), trauma (Abram et al., 2004), and suicidality (Kiriakidis, 2008), as well as physical health issues (Griel & Loeb, 2009). Additionally, youth who experience incarceration are exposed to older and more experienced offenders (Woolard et al., 2012) as well as greater incidents of victimization (Tie & Waugh, 2001). Incarcerated youth are also at greater risk for substance use issues (Gilman et al., 2015). Further, they have limited exposure to family and the outside community, and thus limited opportunities to develop social and relational skills (Steinberg et al., 2004).

Several extant studies indicate that incarceration is a disruptive experience not only for an individual, but for the entire family unit (Carlson & Cervera, 1991), given its negative effects on family functioning, relationships with children, and marital health. Parental incarceration is one focus of this research; having an incarcerated parent increases a child’s risk for criminality, as well as the risk for the development of several psychological and educational issues (Martin, 2017), potentially with long-lasting consequences. Family absence may also be a primary source of stress for incarcerated individuals. For example, the inability of incarcerated fathers to be present in their children’s lives may cause depression (Wilbur et al., 2007).

Social Contact and Support

On the other hand, research indicates that contact with loved ones and receiving social support has the potential to profoundly benefit incarcerated individuals, especially young people. For example, visitation with family can improve mental health (Poehlmann, 2005) and behavior (Cochran, 2012; De Claire & Dixon, 2017), as well as hopefulness (Cochran & Mears, 2013). Social support theory (Meyers et al., 2017) suggests that maintaining social connections can yield successful outcomes (Berg & Huebner, 2011), allowing for opportunities to plan for release, as well as foster connections to the community.

Krause (1987) indicates that social support falls into four domains: informational (the provision of important information during times of stress), instrumental (the provision of tangible goods and services), appraisal (communication of information that supports an individual’s growth), and emotional (the communication of caring, empathy, and love). For incarcerated young people, contact may also serve as an incentive, motivating program compliance and positive outcomes. Literature supports that the frequency and consistency of family contact are important variables (Cochran, 2012). However, there is limited information about the role of social contact and support specifically for incarcerated juveniles and young adults.

Additionally, the application of social capital theory (Portes, 1998) may suggest that for incarcerated young people, social relationships act as an important source of benefits, ones that could lead to the development and accumulation of protective resources. Forrest and Kearns (2001) clarify that there are different domains of social capital, including empowerment (for example, for youth engaged in decision-making and system change processes that affect them), a sense of safety and belonging, and supportive networks. These concepts have been primarily applied to understanding capital accrued before and during reentry processes (e.g., Rose & Clear, 2004), and specific to the protective relationships youth may have with their families and others (Hawkins et al., 2011). Finally, there is some indication that youth of color and their families may engage in ‘communalistic coping’ (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2012), in that their strong ties to immediate and extended family members serve as a cultural asset, especially in stressful times.

There is limited research on the benefits of family contact and involvement for incarcerated youth, though a few studies report that perceived responsibilities to family members, including children, is an important protective factor (Shannon & Abrams, 2007), family involvement and supportive family relationships help to improve reentry outcomes (Mincey et al., 2008; Thomson et al., 2011), and family relationships fulfill an important connectedness need for this population (Tracey & Hanham, 2017).

Barriers to Social Contact and Support

Many barriers to prisoners receiving social contact and external social support pre-existed the COVID-19 pandemic. Phone calls and letters are often used for contact, though their contributions to prisoner well-being may be limited, possibly due to lack of physical closeness (Bakker et al., 1978). There are many obstacles to receiving in-person social contact for incarcerated individuals, such as the financial and other logistical barriers associated with loved ones’ travel to prisons (Mikytuck & Woolard, 2019); these barriers are likely to be experienced differently by varying identity groups, such as families experiencing poverty. Many U.S. prison facilities are in rural communities (including the one recruited from for this study), resulting in disparities between families in terms of locations from the facility and uneven access to resources

that would allow them to engage in person with their incarcerated loved ones. It is important to consider these barriers as they have implications for improving family involvement and realizing the related benefits. These barriers were also likely heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic circumstances, with potential short- and long- term consequences for incarcerated youth and their families.

METHODS

Study Design

This study utilized a mixed methodological design to analyze data collected during a needs assessment of 125 male juveniles and young adults (ages 16-21 years) housed in an adult carceral facility. As part of this study, a subsample of youth ($N = 30$), randomly stratified by race, ethnicity, and sentence length, participated in semi-structured interviews, 45-60 minutes in duration, focused on trauma experiences, institutional and programmatic experiences, future goals and plans, and coping and resilience resources. Interviews were conducted by phone (due to pandemic protocols) in a four-month time frame, approximately one year after the start of the pandemic. Interviewees participated from an enclosed confidential room (typically used for legal contact); this step was taken to protect confidentiality.

For this study, primarily qualitative data from youth interviews was augmented by data from an initial survey collected one to three months before COVID-19-related lockdown procedures (from January 2020 to March 2020). This survey included the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS, Zimet et al., 1988), a measure of perceived social support from three sources: family members, friends, and significant others. An additional line of questioning gauged the frequency of contact with children, living parents, romantic partners, and friends. These two measures were used to establish a baseline measurement of social contact and support for this sample of incarcerated youth. 123 youth completed the surveys.

Procedures

This study was approved through The Pennsylvania State University IRB (Study #00011154) as well as the Department of Corrections in the state where it was conducted. Before overall data collection, informed consent was described to all youth, and every participant was allowed to ask questions or decline to participate. The informed consent form (signed in advance) was again reviewed at the beginning of every interview, and participants were specifically allowed to decline the interview with no repercussions, or to skip any questions throughout the interview process. Participants were also informed that the interview would be recorded and any identifying information deleted. Interviewee names were not used in the recording, to further anonymize and protect the data.

Data collection in a prison environment presents unique challenges and requires careful adaptation and planning to ensure adherence to the ethics of research (Abbott et al., 2018) and the NASW Code of Ethics (2021). To mitigate this risk, several checkpoints (opportunities for additional explanations and answering questions) were incorporated into the data collection process to ensure that participants understood the purpose of the study and the limitations of contact; they also had ample opportunities to ask questions about the research process. Because building rapport is imperative to collecting data from incarcerated individuals (Newman, 1958), the primary researcher responsible for data collection (Dr. Rock) intentionally used engagement skills such as verbal cues throughout interactions with participants. A semi-structured interview approach utilizing open-ended questions allowed for rapport-building, especially necessary for the discussion of sensitive topics, and was flexible to allow participants to elaborate on topics important to them (Reid et al., 2005). All interviews were recorded then transcribed using a computer-based transcription tool, and read and manually corrected for accuracy shortly following the interviews. Written field notes aided in tracking thematic observations and encounters, included in the discussion.

Analysis

Analysis of interview recordings and transcripts primarily utilized interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), a qualitative framework relied upon in social sciences research analysis for examining the details of participants' lived experiences, based on their perceptions and what meaning they make (Smith et al., 2010). IPA is considered to be a particularly appropriate contextualist methodological approach for examining topics that are complex and emotional (Smith & Osborn, 2015), such as experiences of adversity and trauma. IPA emphasizes a relational approach between the researcher and research participants (Alase, 2017), in which the researchers work to gain a deep understanding of each unique narrative.

Thematic analysis using the IPA framework first involved careful, detailed reading and re-reading of all transcripts to understand the views and perceptions of interviewees, followed by initial coding and clustering for both manifest and emergent themes, then another reading of all transcripts to code content and identify further sub-themes. All coding was conducted collaboratively, including with an undergraduate research team with lived system experiences, to develop and apply codes, to maintain rigor in the use of IPA.

Content analysis of youth interviews was conducted to code for themes of social contact and support, stress and well-being challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact of the pandemic on social support, access to services, and coping resources, and identity differences. In the coding process, subthemes emerged related to the functions of family, the primary source of support identified by interviewees, as well as emergent needs and stressors during the pandemic, and experiences of services and resources as they affected interviewees. An additional subtheme emerged regarding interviewees' sense of obligation and efforts to support their families. Simple tallying was used to count subthemes, primarily the benefits of social support. Finally, quotations were selected for inclusion which demonstrate these themes.

Participants

The average age of the interview participants ($N = 30$) was 19 years ($SD = 1.34$). 76.7% (23) of interviewees identified as Black or African-American, 36.7% (11) as White, and 20.0% (6) as American Indian or Alaskan Native; 10 participants identified themselves in more than one racial category, i.e., as biracial. Additionally, 23.3% (7) of participants identified as Latino or Hispanic. 33.3% (10) of the interviewees reported being biological parents, and 53.3% (16) reported that they had not completed high school at the time of incarceration. The average reported sentence length was 7.74 years ($SD = 8.61$) and 86.7% of interviewees indicated they were serving time for a violent offense. In the overall project sample, more than 20% of participants reported a formal diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, attention deficit disorder, and/or bipolar disorder, and many more endorsed symptoms.

Reflexivity and Ethical Approach

This research team recognizes the value of a reflexive approach to qualitative research (Joseph et al., 2021), and particularly to research in institutional settings (Freshwater et al., 2012), where awareness of one's identity and its influence on the research process is considered essential. The primary researcher responsible for data collection (Dr. Rock) identifies as a white female social worker and academic, with over fifteen years of professional experience that provides skills and knowledge useful in this research process, especially for interviewing system-involved young people. These background characteristics also create potential ethical dilemmas in that a white social worker represents a racial group and workforce that have played a role in systemic biases resulting in disproportionate institutionalization of youth of color in both U.S. child welfare and legal systems (Jacobs et al., 2021; Simmons-Horton, 2021). System-involved youth may also be less likely to trust system professionals (McLeod, 2007), having experienced chronic 'broken promises' about how their participation in research and programs may benefit them. We are also aware of the perception and reality of

the ‘savior complex’ as white people striving to improve the lives of Black and Latino youth, and the conscious and unconscious bias that may contribute to racist processes, even if unintentional.

To address and mitigate these risks, following guidance on best practices for research with diverse groups (Burlew et al., 2019) and ethical guidance for conducting qualitative research in the social work field (Shaw, 2003) was especially important to this team. Following best practices included: a) framing the study using strengths-based (as opposed to deficits-based) and resiliency approaches that emphasize developmental capacity and opportunity, and reflect professional values (Jackson, 2009); b) considering cultural mechanisms (particularly cultural assets) which may fuel differences in experience; c) using qualitative approaches to empower youth voice and perspective, as well as recognizing the limitations of using survey instruments that were primarily tested on white youth or white adults, to collect data from a predominantly Black population; d) avoiding culturally offensive, labelling, or otherwise harmful terminology in the writing process; e) making system-oriented programmatic and policy-level recommendations based on findings; and f) following through on a commitment to disseminate the research back to the system administrators responsible for improving the program, so that the population can benefit from the work to which they contributed.

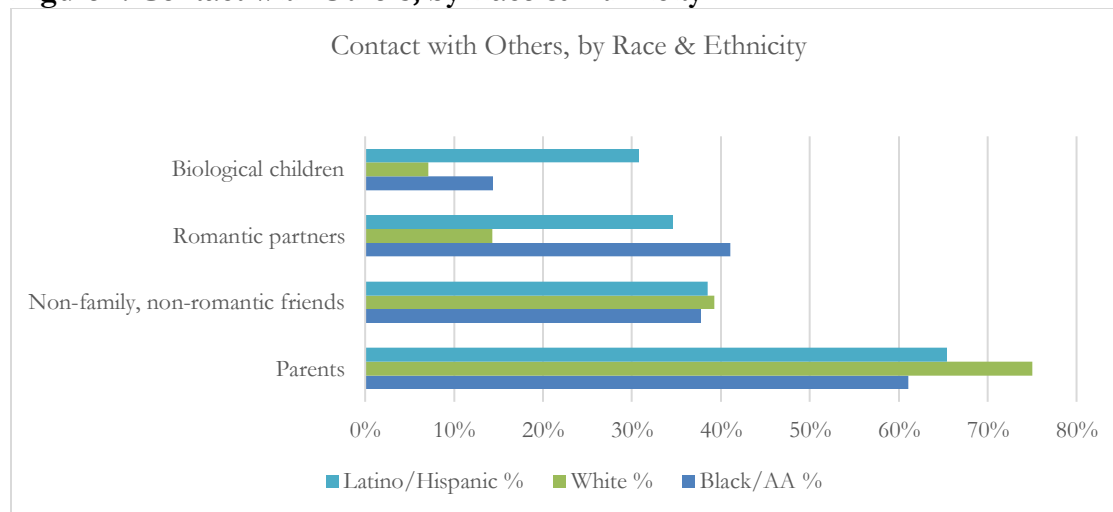
RESULTS

An initial survey of incarcerated young participants preliminarily documented frequencies of social contact by relationship type and identity, and found that contact with others and social support was deemed as important to their sense of personal and relational well-being.

Social Contact

Survey participants were asked about who has visited them and how often (Fig 1, N = 123). The most contact was reported with parents (n = 81), followed by friends (n = 51), romantic partners (n = 45), and biological children (n = 19). Though 34 survey participants reported having biological children, only 55.9% of those individuals were visited by any of their children. Similarly, though 65 survey participants reported having romantic partners, only 69.2% of those individuals have any visits with their romantic partners. The most common frequency of visits with parents, non-family / non-romantic friends, romantic partners, or biological children was monthly. In the months preceding pandemic shutdowns and lockdowns, over 60% of those who have visits with parents, non-family / non-romantic friends, romantic partners, and biological children reported that visits occur at least monthly.

Figure 1. Contact with Others, by Race & Ethnicity

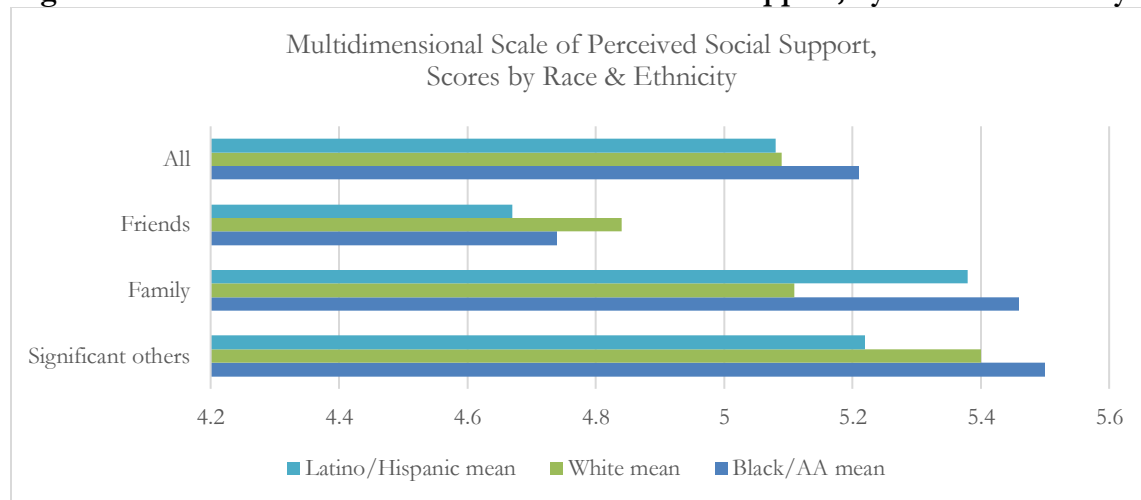


N=123

Social Support

91 survey participants responded to most or all of the questions about social support from significant others, family members, and friends (Fig 2). Participants indicated they received the most social support from non-family significant others ($M = 5.51, SD = 1.56$), followed by family members ($M = 5.44, SD = 1.53$) and friends ($M = 4.79, SD = 1.65$). This finding was not supported by interviews, during which participants provided more in-depth descriptions and examples of support they receive from family and very few mentions of non-family significant others. A one-way ANOVA test did not identify significant racial-ethnic differences in participant scores of overall average multidimensional social support, however Black and African-American non-Latino/Hispanic participants reported higher levels of social support ($M = 5.21$) than white non-Latino/Hispanic ($M = 5.09$) and Latino/Hispanic participants ($M = 5.08$) [$F(2,86) = 0.92, p = .42$].

Figure 2. Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, by Race & Ethnicity



N = 91

When asked about sources of coping and resilience generally, and specific to their pandemic experiences, many interviewees referenced in great detail how their contact with family members, including parents, grandparents, and children, and to a lesser degree, romantic partners and friends, directly and positively affects their ability to cope with their circumstances of incarceration. Examples and frequencies of types of support from family, coded as subthemes, are described in Table 1. It is noted that many of these subthemes are reflective of developmental tasks characteristic of adolescence and young adulthood, such as building a sense of identity, utilizing morals in decision-making, controlling impulses, and more deeply connecting with adults about shared experiences than earlier in childhood.

Table 1. Examples of Frequencies of Family Support Types

Hope for the future	$n = 16$	<p>“Support from my family to keep pushing me through these days is everything. Just telling me that it’s going to end soon, is gonna get harder before it gets easier.”</p> <p>“It gives me hope like that I got somewhere to go when I come home. [That] people care about me.”</p>
Moral guidance and decision-making	$n = 8$	<p>“My grandma, I think she's wise. She knows a lot of things. So if I got troubles or if I got a question, I ask her and she helps me calm down or she gives me good advice or tells me she's gonna pray for me... Or, you know, if I'm upset, she helps me make the right choices and stuff</p>

		like that...”
Goal development and maintenance	$n = 8$	“[Family contact] helps me keep my head up. It helps me stay focused on my goal of going back home, no negativity.”
Sense of identity and normalcy	$n = 7$	“[Family are] on my side... they get me. I guess that's the only way that you can be in this place is by is by talking to people that are not here.”
Impulse control and behavioral change	$n = 5$	“Just hearing their voice keeps me out of trouble. I mean, just when I feel like I'm gonna do something dumb or stupid knowing that that they're looking forward to my call just stops everything.”
Emotion regulation	$n = 4$	“My daughter - when I get negative, I always think of her... She pulls me back from my negative thoughts.”
Shared experiences	$n = 3$	“What is most important is my relationship with my mom... Because she's been in my shoes before, you know? So we kinda really connect on a level that me and others really don't connect.”

Hope for the future was the most frequently referenced purpose or benefit of family contact, even for those with many years before they may reenter the community. This subtheme was related to several other subthemes such as building or maintaining identity. For example, one interviewee, a 21-year-old Black youth with a lengthy sentence, described the long-term benefits of his family contact:

It's a fresh breath [of air], basically talking to them and hearing them laugh, and they're making me laugh. And I mean, we have fun... whenever we get time to talk and communicate and converse with each other. You know, and knowing I'm gonna go home, go home one day that that's always a light at the end of the tunnel for me.

Motivation for future outcomes was also derived from family contact, particularly from contact with children. Another 21-year-old Black youth shared:

I need to grow up, stop doing this, this dumb stuff... I got two daughters, so I definitely want to be there for them. I wanna make sure they don't experience what I experienced... [talking with them] helps me get through the day, keeps me motivated to do what I gotta do to get home and stay home.

Several interviewees identified that, though their family has a history of instability, dysfunction, and other challenges, with time there had been improvements in their family system such that their family had become an important source of strength and resilience. They shared openly about working to develop boundaries with family members, and recognizing realistic limitations and expectations.

There was also a reciprocal benefit, in that several interviewees shared a sense of obligation to their family members. For example, participants shared their role in providing emotional and material support to family members, particularly when there are losses of life, childcare stressors, and financial strains. Many interviewees ($n = 12$) described obligations to care for family as motivating, and that reentry plans (if given an upcoming opportunity) would focus on caring for family members. One 20-year-old Black youth shared, “I’m still close to my dad, but it seems like ever since my grandma passed away, he’s been going through it. So it’s like, I gotta be there for *him* now.” An 18-year-old Black youth relayed, “Just seeing what [my little sister is] going through, it just made me want to change my plans and try to do right so I can do for her.” At times, this sense of obligation seemed to be coming from a place of guilt over past experiences and being separated.

For example, a 19-year-old Black Latino youth shared, “if I let myself... do anything bad, I feel like I'm letting them down. Like me coming here. I feel like I let them down, so I feel like I owe them something.” For these interviewees, regular contact with family was perceived as a way to partially fulfill that sense of obligation, or at least plan to provide future assistance, which strengthened motivation.

When referencing friendships and romantic relationships, very few interviewees identified these relationships as supportive or beneficial. Instead, many interviewees shared about the losses of these relationships, and realizations that their pre-incarceration friendships were not authentic or helpful to their growth. An 18-year-old Black youth shared:

Honestly, like being incarcerated for this long, it's just showed me [that] when I was home, who wasn't my friends and who was my friends... honestly, it's easy to tell you, 'I miss you. Can't wait for you to come home'... it's easy to say all that, but since I've been upstate, I've probably got one letter from one person... when you're incarcerated, I don't really think people know where you're at, that you don't matter to them.

Many interviewees also stated that, in the absence of friends, their relationships with family members had become more important to them. They also shared that they have relational challenges in striking a balance between being independent and feeling like they can depend on others within their support system. For example, one 20-year-old white youth stated, “I don't like taking handouts... I just don't want my people, my family, thinking that I'm using them.”

Pandemic Impact

Interviewees consistently indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic brought about more isolation, including significantly more time in their cell, more frequent lockdowns, and reduced contact with other incarcerated young people. One interviewee stated that, at a peak in the pandemic, he was required to spend 22 hours per day in his cell. Less contact with other incarcerated youth was discussed as a loss; interviewees reported that when positive and safe, contact with other youth with whom they share a lot in common is especially helpful to their well-being. Interviewees also shared that the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in reduced contact with institutional staff members, with whom they were accustomed to regular contact.

Interviewees also consistently reported that the COVID-19 pandemic brought about increased uncertainty and stress, including about their own health risk, their legal case, and most frequently, family-related stressors. A 20-year-old Black youth stated that “it's been real stressful. You know, we don't really get out as much as we used to... we always stuck in the cell. Just thinking about everything.” A 17-year-old Black youth shared that, “they say young people really don't... get it. But I heard a lot of young people died from it, so I'm worrying about getting it too... there was an inmate that was in here and he died from it.”

Several interviewees ($n = 7$) shared that in addition to health risks, there was much uncertainty about the impact of the pandemic on their legal proceedings, parole requirements, and reentry options. One 20-year-old Black youth described the impact of the pandemic on his reentry:

[The pandemic] slows things down... if the pandemic wouldn't ever happened, I probably would have been out of the [program] right now. But like since the pandemic, it just slowed everything down... If you was enrolled in programs, your programs got stopped... and we're locked down a lot.

Some interviewees shared that they had been waiting weeks for responses from attorneys or the court system, and they had not received clarification about how the pandemic would impact their parole requirements, such as required attendance in groups that are currently unavailable, or reentry plans needing to be approved.

In general, the pandemic was described as a trigger of adverse cognitions and feelings, particularly when it involved experiences of isolation and abandonment. One 19-year-old Black Latino youth shared that the pandemic had created a prolonged experience of feeling that, “you’re in the dark room. You in your cage. You can’t go nowhere... you just sit in your cell by yourself.” Other interviewees shared that their personal history of isolation and loss had made them better prepared for the extreme isolation experienced during the pandemic. For example, one interviewee recollected that he had spent months alone in a dark attic of a foster home and that he was frequently thinking of this memory as it is closely related to what he is now experiencing. The uncertainty of the pandemic experience was described by an 18-year-old Latino youth as “constant not knowing, hopelessness, powerlessness” and by another as requiring a constant need to adapt:

Something we have to adapt to basically... sometimes you got something planned for the next day. You don't know if that's gonna go about because everything is changing every day and everything's new.

For only two youth interviewees, additional space and time to think was welcome:

You know, it just... slowed everything down. So it helped me actually, like, get my mind together and focus more. You know, I had a lot more time to myself, and I'm not out running around... I'm getting my mind off my time...

The most frequently cited source of stress and uncertainty by interviewees ($n = 12$) was experiences of grief and loss, as well as worry over health challenges, in their family unit. Several interviewees stated that they had already lost family members, while other interviewees said that they remained hopeful about being released before ill loved ones, including parents and grandparents, passed away. Regarding these experiences, one 18-year-old Black youth shared, “I feel like I go through depression, like a little bit more than I usually would... Because I be thinking about everything and all my people that I lost.” The risk and loss associated with COVID-19 seemed to compound the impact of past losses. One 17-year-old Black youth described:

[In the last year], my aunt died from an overdose and my godfather, he got shot. And my grandfather had died of old age... Being in here longer than what I gotta be here for as [I'm] losing my family to this pandemic... I don't wanna be in here while a lot of people passing. I'm missing stuff out there, my loved ones.

In addition to experiences of grief, loss, fear, and uncertainty, several interviewees ($n = 8$) shared their concerns about the financial impact of the pandemic on their families, including income loss due to economic strain, childcare challenges, loss of income from ill or deceased family members, and additional expenses related to transportation and health services. Some interviewees shared that their family members had been unavailable for contact and support because their work hours increased to cover these costs.

Access to Social Support

Interviewees indicated that in many ways, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a change in the frequency of contact with their social support systems, including less frequent phone calls, uncertainty of when contact would occur, and more strain on shared time for phone usage between incarcerated youth. There was variability in access between units and over the weeks that the interviews occurred, as the prison system worked to resolve these problems. Some interviewees stated that their phone contact had increased, which helped address and resolve stressors. Other interviewees ($n = 6$) shared that they were making an effort to contact family members more frequently and consistently, especially grandparents whose age places them at more risk. Several interviewees also reported that reduced family contact had driven their anxiety and sleep issues for many months.

The novel availability of video visits was reported to have both positive outcomes and significant limitations. Twenty-one of the 30 interviewees reported that they engaged in a video visit at least once, with some saying that they were participating in these visits once per week. For some interviewees with family members too distant to have in-person visits frequently or ever, video visits had become a new forum

through which they could have more regular contact with family members. For others, video visits presented too many technical challenges to their family members. Interviewees referred to several family members who struggled to use the special program designed for secure video visits. This issue was more often reported by participants from marginalized backgrounds who said that their families had given up on accessing or utilizing this technology and, thus, were simply not visiting. One 17-year-old Black youth shared:

My family don't know how to do the Internet thing... I gotta explain to them every time they do it. When my mom said she did it, they switched. They switched the website, so she ain't know how to do it, so I told her just forget about it.

Several interviewees recognized the limited benefits of the video visits, and that they greatly missed in-person visits, with one youth simply stating, “It’s nothing like hugging your family.” Despite these limitations, four interviewees who reported relatively low social support (and low support specifically from family members) in the original survey process commented on the increased frequency and benefits from contact with their family members at the time of the interview, approximately one year later.

Contact with family members was noted as especially important in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, for the opportunity to have more certainty and reduce stress. A 20-year-old Black youth shared that contact:

... Gives me, sort of like my sanity, well it helps me keep it... COVID and everything, it gets a little stressful not knowing, what's going on with your family. So for me, talking to them a lot, it helps me... I mainly just don't want them to come in contact with the virus at all, and I just pray every day that they stay as far away from it as they can... when they worry about me, I feel like I should be the one worried about them.

Others stated that the pandemic had allowed them to connect with their family and to feel like there was something they could offer to provide emotional support.

Finally, several interviewees reported that contact with family members had become an important source of information, given relatively limited access to vital knowledge while in prison. A 17-year-old Black youth described the communication he received from siblings:

My big sister, she'd never tell a lie to me like, no matter what... And with my brother, they just keeping me up to date on everything that's going on out there. I feel like when I talk to them... I feel like I'm out there with him. That's my favorite part about it.

For another white Latino youth, there were mixed feelings about receiving information from family:

It definitely helps cause you not knowing what's going on out there. That really brings stress. It could bring stress both ways, like you know what's going on and not being able to do nothing about it, and you not knowing what's going on and then stressing about what's going on. It brings stress both ways, but it just depends how you take it like I've tried not worry about it and just make sure my family's right.

Access to Coping Resources and Services

Access to resources and services that could be used to cope with the exacerbated challenges and stressors of the COVID-19 pandemic appeared to be especially important to interviewees in light of inconsistencies and losses of contact with social support. Interviewees reported that in non-pandemic times, their most common coping strategies included exercise, reading, and listening to music. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, reduced exercise time and time spent outdoors was reported, as well as increased use of television to pass time. Additionally, reduced and occasionally discontinued access to a kiosk used to update tablet music and email was reported (for those who had access to a tablet). Some interviewees shared that they believed the privilege of using these resources was taken away by staff unnecessarily, or even out of spite, and that the pandemic had been used as an excuse to limit their freedoms and resources.

Reduced access to educational, religious, and therapeutic services was also discussed by interviewees. Several participants described the strain of needing to complete certain group programs for parole expectations, but not having access to those programs since they cannot be held in person, which may lengthen their incarceration. Other interviewees commented that group services are held through remote work (“handbooks” and “worksheets”) to be completed individually in their cell, and that they no longer saw the benefits of these services as they had in the past. One youth said he missed the support of group services: “I would like for us to go back to being in person so that I can get one or more perspectives on what I wrote down.” Interviewees also shared that time in school and the library had been reduced, and that all schoolwork was also being completed independently through remote work. Others commented on reduced religious services, as harming their daily functioning.

Researcher Observations

Youth interviewees were positively engaged in the totality of the interviews, including in citing examples of how their relationships are important to them generally, and specific to their ability to cope with pandemic circumstances. Many youth expressed appreciation for being listened to and heard, indicating that they did not have many opportunities to share their stories or experiences, including through services or professional contact. Further, many of the youth seemed desirous of more contact through this research, and Dr. Rock found herself frequently offering clarity about her role and the lack of continuous nature. The youth also seemed invested in providing information about their experiences in hopes that there would be institutional and systemic change for themselves and others; the desire to engage in empowerment practices, as another form of social capital (Forrest & Kearns, 2001) was indicated, though not the focus of this study. In these conversations, Dr. Rock was especially conscious of the assumed and real power that she has over the youth, and their awareness of it, that she would be able to affect their circumstances. Dr. Rock repeatedly clarified what she would and would not share back regarding their information, through program improvement processes, with the intentional goal of ‘giving back’ by evoking positive change (Fleming, 2011).

DISCUSSION

Findings from this study indicated that contact with family, friends, and romantic partners is perceived by incarcerated young people to be important to their sense of well-being. The vast majority of qualitative responses and examples indicated the many ways that contact with family is most important compared to other relationships, including in times of crisis. The frequency of visitation in pre-pandemic times, with over 65% of the population reporting at least monthly visits, is more than double that reported by the general population of adult state prisoners (per Prison Policy Initiative, 2015). In this study, multidimensional perceptions of social support were especially high for relationships with family members.

Subthemes capturing the purposes and benefits of family support, many of which involve the family’s role in supporting participants’ development, underscored the multitude of ways that family relationships remain important at this life stage, including and perhaps especially for institutionalized young people. Examples cited of social support covered the scope of the four domains suggested by social support theory (Kort-Butler, 2010; Krause, 1987), most especially the significant roles of emotional and appraisal support. One explanation for the role of family involvement is that attachment security in adolescence is important to a balance of autonomy and connection. Benefits of attachment for all young people include lower levels of externalizing behavior and depression (Allen & Manning, 2007), support that could be especially salient for incarcerated youth given their heightened risk. These benefits could be realized both in the prison environment, as well as in future reentry experiences. The findings of this study are also in line with social bond theory (Hirschi, 1972) in that youth may be: (a) concerned with their family members’ perceptions of them, (b) reconnected to the value of those relationships when contacts are made, and (c) supported by family to develop prosocial beliefs in the present and future. Per social capital theory (Portes, 1998), these social experiences may also enhance feelings of emotional safety, belongingness, and support, countering further involvement in criminality, both within prison and in future reentry opportunities.

Our finding that these incarcerated youth believe family contact supports their well-being and behavioral improvement is well-aligned with the literature (Cochran, 2012; Poehlmann, 2005). There is limited research, however, that focuses on developmental vulnerabilities to better understand how family contact over time may affect outcomes for incarcerated youth. Interviews further supported the important role of the family in instilling hopefulness (Cochran & Mears, 2013), especially in a time of strain. While recognizing that incarcerated youth may have particularly traumatic, unstable, and otherwise high-risk family histories, it is important to view the family system through a developmental lens. Through this approach, a familial context that provided adverse early childhood experiences may no longer be a harmful connection for an adolescent or young adult years later, or at least could provide both positive and negative influences. Positive change may occur in the family unit such that there is an opportunity for additional support and benefits, particularly during times of stress and adversity, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as future reentry into the community. Supporting incarcerated youth development and practice of relational skills in the family context before the strain of reentry experiences could be an especially useful exercise.

There were also many opportunities and strengths identified by these youth in their relationships with loved ones, such as a sense of obligation and commitment to family members which may motivate youth, including care for their children. While recognizing the associated limitations and barriers in carceral systems, there may be ways for personnel, including social workers, to assist system-involved populations in nurturing these relational strengths and, in effect, support their growth and change. Given both the challenging dialogue with family members cited by interviewees, and the expressed desire to connect with family, these incarcerated youth may be receptive to family-based services that focus on building their relationship skills, for example, to become better equipped and involved parents.

This investigation further revealed that incarcerated youth felt that the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated mental health and well-being challenges, primarily related to stress, anxiety, and uncertainty. Although this experience is similar to COVID-19-related mental health issues in the greater community (Sheridan Rains et al., 2020), many unique conditions of the prison environment likely exacerbated these challenges. Also, the population of incarcerated young people may be especially at risk given their history of trauma, institutionalization, and other preexisting mental health needs. Many sources of uncertainty prevailed for incarcerated youth during this time, including those related to procedures and rules in prison routine, and contact with loved ones. For our interviewees, heightened levels of uncertainty were associated with stress.

The psychological construct of external locus of control (LOC) (Reitzel & Harju, 2000) is applicable in that there are many perceived and real factors affecting the lives of incarcerated youth that are outside of their control. That interviewees identified feeling so uncertain and not in control of their circumstances, alongside descriptions of stress and anxiety, aligns with longitudinal research examining the relationship between external locus of control and heightened anxiety (Hovenkamp-Hermelink et al., 2019). For these young people, repeatedly losing any control they had over their circumstances could be especially triggering. A common recommendation for practice with traumatized and institutionalized young people is to empower them to take ownership of their behaviors and offer them age-appropriate choices; trauma-informed principles support the role of agency and choice (Huang et al., 2014). As such, there may also be implications for treatment which would help youth feel some sense of control in a safe, productive, and realistic manner.

Increased frequency and duration of periods of isolation may also be particularly problematic and triggering for incarcerated young people; limited research indicates that the mental health effects of solitary confinement for incarcerated youth, like those for adults, may include depression, anxiety, paranoia, psychosis, and suicide (Simkins et al., 2012). There may also be some adaptive strengths that incarcerated youth bring to this pandemic experience; e.g., their ability to adapt to varying and dynamic environmental circumstances as a result of undergoing constant changes and instability in their upbringing, and being accustomed to isolation and loss which also commonly characterizes their childhood experiences.

At a time when stressors and challenges for incarcerated youth were amplified, there was a corresponding decrease in access to sources of social support, coping resources, and services. From an attachment perspective (Bretherton, 1992), when uncertainty and stress are greatest, the need for relational support is also heightened, presenting demands for healing and closeness. Many interviewees recognized the importance of family contact for their well-being during this time.

While there may be many short- and long- term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the well-being and relationships of incarcerated youth, the consequences may vary depending on the identity of the youth, beyond the preexisting needs described above. Mentions of disproportionate challenges included technological barriers to video visit access for some families (potentially related to socioeconomic status). Being restricted to individual level clinical and educational services, as opposed to group work, may have disproportionately impacted youth with mental health problems and learning differences. These data suggest that there may be many sources of variability in responses to the pandemic. Further, some youth may be disproportionately exposed to stressors from their families; e.g., for youth raised by grandparents who served in primary protective roles, those losses may be more detrimental. Research on COVID-19-related illnesses and deaths also implicates disparate negative outcomes for Black individuals and families (Rubin-Miller et al., 2020), placing incarcerated youth (who are disproportionately youth of color) at greater risk of these strains and losses in their family system. Notably, many barriers to family contact and support existed before the pandemic, including disproportionate challenges for families to visit when they are coming from longer distances (such as city areas) and/or have transportation challenges (Christian et al., 2006).

Although we were unable to detect significant identity-related differences in perceived social support through quantitative data, and there was a lack of explicit mention of the role of cultural identity in social contact during the qualitative interviews, the potential for ‘communalistic coping’ (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2012) is supported by the content of the youth interviews. In times of significant adversity, both pandemic-related and otherwise, a sample of mostly Black/African-American and Latino/Hispanic incarcerated youth are clearly relying on relationships with those they trust and care for to process stressors, access information, make decisions and plans, and maintain identity and hope. These cognitive and relational processes are likely tied to culture-specific values and best supported through connections with those with whom they share identity, especially considering that the demographic makeup of staff is not aligned with that of the youth.

CONCLUSION

Overall, study findings indicate that, from the perspectives of incarcerated young people, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in increased isolation (in frequency and duration), uncertainty and stress, experiences of grief and loss, and triggering of prior traumatic experiences (including isolation and abandonment). Pandemic-related experiences of isolation may mimic solitary confinement and prior isolation experiences, magnifying the issues and challenges of incarceration, and creating a further dehumanizing experience for incarcerated young people. Additionally, access to social support and resources was limited due to a lack of physical visitation as well as technological challenges, restricted and uncertain access to necessary information, coping resources, and services (educational, therapeutic, and religious). Participants described how essential social connections are to them, particularly family involvement, in providing necessary emotional support that keeps them connected to the outside world. Though not confirmed by this study, these issues and barriers may be disproportionately experienced by incarcerated youth who are Black and/or Latino, and from a low socioeconomic status family background.

This investigation contributes to the literature given the scarcity of quantitative and qualitative research focused on incarcerated young people, who are regarded as a ‘hard to reach’ population (Abrams, 2010), particularly during a pandemic. Translation of our findings to different juvenile and criminal legal system-involved populations should take into consideration environmental and developmental similarities and differences, as well as the role of timing. For example, in juvenile carceral settings, family contacts may receive greater support from facility administrators and isolation may be used less frequently due to

heightened legal protections for youth and a more rehabilitative culture. In adult populations, family involvement and other social supports may not be influential in the same way considering differences in life stage as well as other demographic and facility differences. Importantly, the disconnectedness of our sample was exacerbated by pandemic-related restrictions; thus, the self-reports of our interviewees pertain to these unusually harsh circumstances and may not fully apply to other points in time. On the other hand, these findings during particularly difficult circumstances call attention to incarcerated youths’ need for social and relational support, most especially through contact with family members.

Practice Implications

There are significant implications of this study for the practice of forensic social work, particularly for social workers’ treatment efforts within carceral settings and advocacy for legal system change. Implications include developing practices and policies that meaningfully involve family members in incarcerated youth treatment and preparedness for reentry.

First, this study supports the idea that the strengths and assets of incarcerated young people should be emphasized. There may be relatively underutilized assets, such as those related to family and culture, which need to be prioritized. Relatedly, incarcerated young people should be viewed by social workers as having qualities and abilities that can help others, including their family members. Improvements should be made to involve important social support figures, particularly family, in stressful and uncertain times, to help youth cope and mitigate potential long-term consequences. Practice opportunities may include increasing the use of family services and telehealth services (e.g., Tadros et al., 2021), providing individualized support services to youth that may help them to improve the quality and health of their relationships, and addressing barriers to accessing other coping strategies and basic services vital to the youth’s wellbeing. If social support through familial relationships is beneficial for incarcerated young people, social workers should play a key role in advocating for family involvement in treatment and visitation.

Second, young people and their families should be viewed through a developmental lens in that there is always a capacity for change and positive growth in the family. Though many system-involved families have a trauma history, that does not preclude family members’ abilities to support each other in any number of ways.

Third, social workers should advocate for programmatic and policy change to overcome the many barriers to making contact and reinforcing involvement with family. For example, increasing the availability of video technology will increase visitation with loved ones. Existing barriers may be experienced differently by marginalized groups, creating equity issues that social workers can work to address.

Fourth, forensic social workers should continue to advocate for trauma-informed and culturally sensitive approaches to working with incarcerated and other institutionalized young people, acknowledging that the pandemic itself was traumatic for many and compounded other systemic traumatic experiences of this population. Validation of the importance of social contact adds to the literature that supports reducing or eliminating the use of solitary confinement and other isolation practices due to severe adverse effects on mental health (Haney, 2018).

Finally, social workers advocating for system change should consider the argument that these practice and policy measures present cost-savings through the provision of services that support social contact and involvement which have the potential to reduce re-entry and recidivism (Welsh, 2004). Moreover, previous studies show that family contact reduces the number of costly behavioral issues during incarceration (i.e., Cochran, 2012; De Claire & Dixon, 2017).

Research Implications

These findings also provide a foundation for future qualitative research on incarcerated youth and their families, including longitudinal research that extends beyond their incarceration to consider how social support affects reentry. Qualitative research with incarcerated people during crises, such as the pandemic, may also have important potential for nuanced insights (Maycock, 2020), including those uncaptured by quantitative research, as well as the value of prison-based research that centers lived experiences (Pratt & Crook, 2023) and cultural identity. These advantages were realized here, as the MSPSS instrument did not capture the importance and depth of family support as did our qualitative data. There are likely unexplored intersectional needs, for example, the roles of geography and language. There may also be unexplored cultural assets, such as the value that youth of color may place on their family systems and the perceptions of support they derive from family contact, even when limited.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been particularly disruptive for incarcerated young people and their families, an especially important source of support and connection for youth already at risk. There is a particular concern about the potential consequences of long-term alterations to the prison environment, such as reduced family contact, because replacement visitation methods and processes have become commonplace. Overall, given the risks and disparities created by the pandemic in this environment, it behooves the criminal and juvenile legal systems to provide access to coping resources and services for incarcerated youth, including those related to family contact and involvement, thereby mitigating future needs. While recognizing that improving access to mental health and other social services during crises may be particularly challenging (Robinson et al., 2020), identifying options to mitigate long-term and disproportionate consequences is essential.

The COVID-19 pandemic may have further exposed the need for criminal legal reform in key areas (Nowotny et al., 2020), such as in seeking the elimination of social isolation, and improvement of lacking and outdated treatment services, for which forensic social workers should advocate. While recognizing the harmful effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on society, and disproportionately so on marginalized and institutionalized populations, reframing the pandemic as an opportunity to better understand preexisting systemic issues will best serve vulnerable populations, including incarcerated young people.

NOTES

1. **Acknowledgments.** A special thanks to former undergraduate students Henry Deteskey, now a J.D. graduate from Fordham University School of Law, and Hannah Gagne, now the Program Director for the YWCA North Shore Rape Crisis Center, for their assistance in collecting and processing the data used in this study, as well as to former undergraduate students Yaire Nuñez and Karen Sanchez, now both M.S.W. graduates from New York University School of Social Work, for their assistance in interpreting and disseminating the study findings at the Society for Social Work and Research Conference (oral presentation, 2023).
2. **Acknowledgments.** Additionally, the prison superintendent and the unit manager of the facility where this study was conducted are acknowledged for their tremendous support of this project, and for their ongoing investment in the improvement of services at the facility.

REFERENCES

- Abbott, P., DiGiacomo, M., Magin, P., & Hu, W. (2018). A scoping review of qualitative research methods used with people in prison. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 17, 1-15. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918803824>
- Abram, K. M., Teplin, L. A., Charles, D. R., Longworth, S. L., McClelland, G. M., & Dulcan, M. K. (2004). Posttraumatic stress disorder and trauma in youth in juvenile detention. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 61, 403-410. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1001/archpsyc.61.4.403>
- Abrams, L. S. (2010). Sampling ‘hard to reach’ populations in qualitative research: The case of incarcerated youth. *Qualitative Social Work*, 9(4). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325010367821>
- Alase, A. (2017). Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA): A guide to a good qualitative research approach. *International Journal of Education & Literacy Studies*, 5(2), 9-19. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.5n.2p.9>
- Allen, J. P., & Manning, N. (2007). From safety to affect regulation: Attachment from the vantage point of adolescence. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 117, 23-39. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/cd.192>
- Altibi, A. M., Pallavi, B., Liaqat, H., Slota, A. A., Sheth, R., Al Jebbawi, L., George, M. E., LeDuc, A., Abdallah, E., Russell, L. R., Jain, S., Shirvanian, N., Masri, A., & Kak, V. (2021). Characteristics and comparative clinical outcomes of prisoner versus non-prisoner populations hospitalized with Covid-19. *Scientific reports*, 11(1), 1-9. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-85916-w>
- Bakker, L. J., Morris, B. A., & Janus, L. M. (1978). Hidden victims of crime. *Social Work*, 23, 143-178. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/23.2.143>
- Berg, M. T., & Huebner, B. M. (2011). Reentry and the ties that bind: An examination of social ties, employment, and recidivism. *Justice Quarterly*, 28(2), 382-410. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2010.498383>
- Bretherton, I. (1992). The origins of attachment theory: John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth. *Developmental Psychology*, 28(5), 759-775. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.28.5.759>
- Burlew, A. K., Peteet, B. J., McCuistian, C., & Miller-Roenigk, B. D. (2019). Best practices for researching diverse groups. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 89(3), 354-368. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/ort0000350>
- Byrne, J., Rapisarda, S. S., Hummer, D., & Kras, K. R. (2020). An imperfect storm: Identifying the root causes of Covid-19 outbreaks in the world’s largest correctional systems. *Victims & Offenders*, 15, 862-909. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1080/15564886.2020.1838373>
- Carlson, B. E., & Cervera, N. (1991). Inmates and their families: Conjugal visits, family contact, and family functioning. *Criminal Justice & Behavior*, 18(3), 318-331. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854891018003005>
- Christian, J., Mellow, J., & Thomas, S. (2006). Social and economic implications of family connections to prisoners. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 34(4), 443-452. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2006.05.010>
- Cloud, D. H., Ahalt, C., Augustine, D., Sears, D., & Williams, B. (2020). Medical isolation and solitary confinement: Balancing health and humanity in US jails and prisons during COVID-19. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 35(9), 2738-2742. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-020-05968-y>

- Cochran, J. C. (2012). The ties that bind or the ties that break: Examining the relationship between visitation and prisoner misconduct. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 40(5), 433-440. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2012.06.001>
- Cochran, J. C., & Mears, D. P. (2013). Social isolation and inmate behavior: A conceptual framework for theorizing prison visitation and guiding and assessing research. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 41, 252-261. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2013.05.001>
- Coleman, P. C., Pailing, A., Roy, A., O'Moore, E., Chandan, J. S., Lumby, V., Newton, P., Taylor, A., Robinson, E., Swindells, J., Dowle, S., & Gajraj, R. (2022). Implementation of novel and conventional outbreak control measures in managing Covid-19 outbreaks in a large UK prison. *BMC Public Health*, 22(1), 1-10. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-12991-7>
- De Claire, K. & Dixon, L. (2017). The effects of prison visits from family members on prisoners' well-being, prison rule breaking, and recidivism: A review of research since 1991. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 18(2), 185-199. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838015603209>
- Dmitrieva, J., Monaham, K. C., Cauffman, E., & Steinberg, L. (2012). Arrested development: The effects of incarceration on the development of psychosocial maturity. *Development and Psychopathology*, 24(3), 1073-1090. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579412000545>
- Fagen, J., & Kupchik, A., (2011). Juvenile incarceration and the pains of imprisonment. *Duke Forum for Law and Social Change*, 3, 29-61.
- Fazel, S., & Seewald, K. (2012). Severe mental illness in 33,588 prisoners worldwide: Systematic review and meta-regression analysis. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 200, 364-373. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1192/bjp.bp.111.096370>
- Fleming, J. (2010). Young people's involvement in research: Still a long way to go? *Qualitative Social Work*, 10(2), 207-223. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325010364276>
- Forrest, R., & Kearns, A. (2001). Social cohesion, social capital, and neighborhood. *Urban Studies*, 38(12), 2125-2143. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00420980120087081>
- Freshwater, D., Cahill, J., Walsh, E., Muncey, T., & Esterhuizen, P. (2012). Art and science in health care research: Pushing at open doors or locked in institutions? *Qualitative Health Research*, 22, 1176-1183. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732312449206>
- Gaylord-Harden, N. K., Burrow, A. L., & Cunningham, J. A. (2012). A cultural-asset framework for investigating successful adaptation to stress in African American youth. *Child Development Perspectives*, 6(3), 264-271. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1750-8606.2012.00236.x>
- Gilman, A. B., Hill, K. G., & Hawkins, J. D. (2015). When is a youth's debt to society paid? Examining the long-term consequences of juvenile incarceration for adult functioning. *Journal of developmental and life-course criminology*, 1, 33-47. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40865-015-0002-5>
- Griel, L. C., & Loeb, S. J. (2009). Health issues faced by adolescents incarcerated in the juvenile justice system. *Journal of Forensic Nursing*, 5(3), 162-179. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1939-3938.2009.01049.x>
- Haney, C. (2018). The psychological effects of solitary confinement: A systematic critique. *Crime and Justice*, 47. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/696041>
- Hawkins, R. L., Vashchenko, M., & Davis, C. (2011). Making a place for youth. In F. T. Sherman & F. H. Jacobs (Eds.), *Juvenile justice: Advancing research, policy, and practice*. (pp. 245-266). Wiley & Sons. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118093375.ch12>
- Hirschi, T. (1972). *Causes of delinquency*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hovenkamp-Hermelink, J. H. M., Jeronimus, B. F., van der Veen, D. C., Spinhoven, P., Penninx, B. W. J., Schoevers, R. A., & Riese, H. (2019). Differential associations of locus of control with anxiety, depression and life-events: A five-wave, nine-year study to test stability and change. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 253, 26-34. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2019.04.005>
- Huang, L. N., Flatow, R., Biggs, T., Afayee, S., Smith, K., Clark, T., & Blake, M. (2014). SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for Trauma-Informed Approach. A report for SAMHSA's Trauma and Justice Strategic Initiative, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma14-4884.pdf>
- Hummer, D. (2020). United States Bureau of Prisons' response to the Covid-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Evidence-based Research, Policy, and Practice*, 15(7-8). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15564886.2020.1829765>
- Jackson, K. F. (2009). Beyond race: Examining the facets of multiracial identity through a life-span developmental lens. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 18(4). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15313200903310759>

- Jacobs, L. A., Kim, M. E., Whitfield, D. L., Gartner, R. E., Panichelli, M., Kattari, S. K., Downey, M. M., McQueen, S. S., & Mountz, S. E. (2020). Defund the police: Moving towards an anti-carceral social work. *Journal of Progressive Human Services, 32*(1), 37-62. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10428232.2020.1852865>
- James, J. E., Foe, M., Desai, R., Rangan, A., & Price, M. (2023). Covid-19 and the reimaging of compassionate release. *International Journal of Prisoner Health, 19*(1), 20-34. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPH-08-2021-0072>
- Joseph, F. I., Earland, J., & Maryam, A. (2021). Experience of conducting sensitive qualitative research as a cultural outsider: Formulation of a guide for reflexivity. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 1*-12. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211105861>
- Junior et al. (2021). Analysis of the prison population’s mental health in Sars-Cov-2 pandemic: Qualitative analysis. *Psychiatry Research, 296*.
- Kiriakidis, S. P. (2008). Bullying and suicide attempts among adolescents kept in custody. *Crisis, 29*(4), 216-218. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1027/0227-5910.29.4.216>
- Kort-Butler, L. A. (2010). Experienced and vicarious victimization: Do social support and self-esteem prevent delinquent responses? *Journal of Criminal Justice, 38*(4), 496-505. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2010.04.019>
- Kothari, R., Forrester, A., Greenberg, N., Sarkissian, N., & Tracy, D. K. (2020). COVID-19 and prisons: Providing mental health care for people in prison, minimizing moral injury and psychological distress in mental health staff. *Medicine, Science, & the Law, 60*(3), 165-168. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1177/0025802420929799>
- Krause, N. (1987). Understanding the stress process: Linking social support with locus of control beliefs. *Journal of Gerontology, 42*, 589-593. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/geronj/42.6.589>
- Levintow, S. N., DiRosa, E., Carda-Auten, J., Brown, M. E., Bradley-Bull, S., Blue, C., Powers, K. A., & Rosen, D. L. (2022). SARS-CoV-2 mitigation strategies, testing, and cases at 254 jails in the US Southwest, October 2020 to May 2021. *American Journal of Public Health, 112*(11), 1589-1598. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2022.307012>
- MacDonald, M. (2018). Overcrowding and its impact on prison conditions and health. *International Journal of Prisoner Health, 14*, 65-68. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1108/ijph-04-2018-0014>
- Martin, E. (2017). Hidden consequences: The impact of incarceration on dependent children. *National Institute of Justice Journal, 278*, March 2017, <https://nij.gov/journals/278/Pages/impact-of-incarceration-on-dependent-children.aspx>
- Maycock, M. (2021). ‘I do not appear to have had previous letters.’ The potential and pitfalls of using a qualitative correspondence method to facilitate insights into life in prison during the Covid-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 1*-11. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211047129>
- McLeod, A. (2007). Whose agenda? Issues of power and relationship when listening to looked-after young people. *Child & Family Social Work, 12*(3), 278-286. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2007.00493.x>
- Meyers, T. J., Wright, K. A., Young, J., & Tascia, M. (2017). Social support from outside the walls: Examining the role of relationship dynamics among inmates and visitors. *Journal of Criminal Justice, 52*, 57-67. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2017.07.012>
- Mikytuck, A. M., & Woolard, J. L. (2019). Family contact in juvenile confinement facilities: Analysis of the likelihood of and barriers to contact. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation, 58*(5), 371-397. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2017.07.012>
- Mincey, B., Maldonado, N., Lacey, C. H., & Thompson, S. D. (2008). Perception of successful graduates of juvenile residential programs: Reflections and suggestions for success. *The Journal of Correctional Education, 59*(1), 8-31. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23282643>, DOI: <http://doi.org/10.36510/learnland.v5i2.561>
- Murrie, D. C., Henderson, C. E., Vincent, G. M., Rockett, J. L., & Mundt, C. (2009). Psychiatric symptoms among juveniles incarcerated in adult prisons. *Psychiatric Services, 60*(8), 1092-1097. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1176/ps.2009.60.8.1092>
- National Association of Social Workers (2021). NASW Code of Ethics. <https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English>. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.013.829>
- Newman, D. J. (1958). Research interviewing in prison. *Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology, 49*, 127. <http://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/jclc/vol49/iss2/4>. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.2307/1140922>

- Ng, I., Shen, X., Sim, H., Sarri, R., Stoffregen, E., & Shook, J. J. (2011). Incarcerating juveniles in adult prisons as a factor in depression. *Criminal Behavior and Mental Health*, 21(1), 21-34. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/cbm.783>
- Novisky, M. A., Narvey, C. S., & Semenza, D. C. (2020). Institutional responses to the Covid-19 pandemic in American prisons. *Victims & Offenders*, 15(7-8), 1244-1261. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15564886.2020.1825582>
- Nowotny, K., Bailey, Z., Omori, M., & Brinkley-Rubinstein, L. (2020). Covid-19 exposes need for progressive criminal justice reform. *American Journal of Public Health*, 110(7), 967-968. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2020.305707>
- Poehlmann, J. (2005). Incarcerated mothers' contact with children, perceived family relationships, and depressive symptoms. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 19(3), 350-357. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.19.3.350>
- Portes, A. (1998). Social capital: Its origins and applications in modern sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24, 1-24. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.24.1.1>
- Pratt, D., & Crook, R. (2023). Conducting prison-based research during the Covid-19 pandemic and the value of involving people with lived experience. *Criminal Behaviour & Mental Health*, 33(4), 223-228. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1002/cbm.2305>
- Puglisi, L. B., Rosenberg, A., Credle, M., Negron, T., Martin, R. A., Maner, M., Brinkley-Rubinstein, L., & Wang, E. A. (2022). Paths to improving pandemic preparedness in jails and prisons: Perspectives of incarcerated people and correctional staff. *American Journal of Public Health*, 9(112), 869-873. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2022.306956>
- Reid, K., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2005). Exploring lived experience. *Psychologist*, 18, 20-23.
- Reitzel, L. R., & Harju, B. L. (2000). Influence of locus of control and custody level on intake and prison-adjustment depression. *Criminal Justice Behavior*, 27(5), 625-644. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854800027005005>
- Robinson, L. K., Heyman-Kantor, R., & Angelotta, C. (2020). Strategies mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on incarcerated populations. *American Journal of Public Health*, 110(8), 1135-1136. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2020.305754>
- Rose, D. R., & Clear, T. C. (2004). Incarceration, reentry, and social capital: Social networks in the balance. In J. Travis & M. Waul (Eds.), *Prisoners once removed: The impact of incarceration and reentry on children, families, and communities*. (pp. 313-341). Urban Institute Press. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5860/choice.42-1257>
- Rubin-Miller, L., Alban, C., Artiga, S., & Sullivan, S. (2020). COVID-19 racial disparities in testing, infection, hospitalization, and death: Analysis of epic patient data. Kaiser Family Foundation. Accessed at: <https://www.kff.org/report-section/covid-19-racial-disparities-in-testing-infection-hospitalization-and-death-analysis-of-epic-patient-data-issue-brief/>. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1126/science.abd7715>
- Shannon, S. K. S., & Abrams, L. S. (2007). Juvenile offenders as fathers: Perceptions of fatherhood, crime, and becoming an adult. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Sciences*, 88(2), 183-191. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1606/1044-3894.3616>
- Shaw, I. F. (2003). Ethics in qualitative research and evaluation. *Journal of Social Work*, 3(1). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/146801730300300100>
- Sheridan Rains, L., Johnson, S., Barnett, P., Stear, T., Needle, J. J., Carr, S., Lever Taylor, B., Bentivegna, F., Edbrooke-Childs, J., Scott, H. R., Rees, J., Shah, P., Lomani, J., Chipp, B., Barber, N., Dedat, Z., Oram, S., Morant, N., & Simpson, A. (2021). Early impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health care and on people with mental health conditions: Framework synthesis of international experiences and responses. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 56, 13-24. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1101/2020.06.15.20129411>
- Silvers, J.A., & Peris, T.S. (2023). Research review: The neuroscience of emerging adulthood: Reward, ambiguity, and social support as building blocks of mental health. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*. 64(7), 989-997. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.13776>
- Simkins, S., Beyer, M., & Geis, L. M. (2012). The harmful use of isolation in juvenile facilities: The need for post-disposition representation. *Journal of Law & Policy*, 38.
- Simmons-Horton, S. Y. (2020). “A bad combination”: Lived experiences of youth involved in the foster care and juvenile justice system. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 38, 583-597. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-020-00693-1>
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2010). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. London, England: Sage. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000252-008>

- Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2015). Interpretative phenomenological analysis as a useful methodology for research on the lived experience of pain. *British Journal of Pain*, 9(1), 41-42. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1177/2049463714541642>
- Steinberg, L., Chung, H., & Little, M. (2004). Reentry of young offenders from the justice system: A developmental perspective. *Youth Violence and Justice*, 2(1), 21-38. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541204003260045>
- Suhomlinova, O., Ayres, T. C., Tonkin, M. H., O'Reilly, M., Wertans, E., & O'Shea, S. C. (2022). Locked up while locked down: Prisoners' experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic. *The British Journal of Criminology*, 62, 279-298. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azab060>
- Suhomlinova, O., O'Reilly, M., Ayres, T. C., Wertans, E., Tonkin, M. J., & O'Shea, S. C. (2023). “Gripping onto the last threads of sanity”: Transgender and non-binary prisoners' mental health challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Mental Health*, 52(3), 218-238. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207411.2022.2068319>
- Tadros, E., Aguirre, N., Jensen, S., & Poehlmann-Tynan, J. (2021). COVID-19 inspired relational telemental health services for incarcerated individuals and their families. *Contemporary Family Therapy: An International Journal*, 43(3), 214-225. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1007/s10591-021-09578-6>
- Thomson, S., Hirshberg, D., & Qiao, J. (2011). Outcomes for adolescent girls after long-term residential treatment. *Residential Treatment for Children & Youth*, 28, 251-267. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0886571X.2011.605051>
- Tie, D., & Waugh, E. (2001). Prison youth vulnerability scale: Administration and technical manual. Department of Corrections Psychological Service, New Zealand. https://www.corrections.govt.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0015/10671/pyvmanual.pdf
- Tracey, D., & Hanham, J. (2017). Applying positive psychology to illuminate the needs of adolescent males transitioning out of juvenile detention. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 61(1), 64-79. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X15591242>
- Turner, K. B., & Levy, M. H. (2010). Prison outbreak: Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 in an Australian prison. *Public Health*, 124(2), 119-121. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2009.12.005>
- Welsh, B. C. (2004). Monetary costs and benefits of correctional treatment programs: Implications for offender reentry. *Federal Probation Journal*, 68(2), 9.
- Wilbur, M. B., Marani, J. E., Appugliese, D., Woods, R., Siegl, J. A., Cabral, H. J., & Frank, D. A. (2007). Socioemotional effects of fathers' incarceration on low-income, urban, school-aged children. *Pediatrics*, 120(3), e678-685. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2006-2166>
- Woolard, J. L., Odgers, C., Lanza-Kaduce, L., & Daglis, H. (2012). Juveniles within adult correctional settings: Legal pathways and developmental considerations. *International Journal of Forensic Mental Health*, 4(1), 1-18. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14999013.2005.10471209>
- Zimet, G. D., Dahlem, N. W., Zimet, S. G., & Farley, G. K. (1988). The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 52, 30-41. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327752jpa5201_2