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EXPERIENCES OF MOTHERS IN JAIL

BOTHWELL PIASON

85 Pages

Women make relatively small proportions of incarcerated population worldwide, but the rate at which they have been incarcerated over the past four decades in the U.S. has outpaced that of their male counterparts. Although carceral trends show declining patterns in prison population numbers, the jailed population continues on an upward trend (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2022), studies have focused more on prison than jail. The disproportional incarceration of women is evident in jails where the majority of women incarcerated are mothers of young children (Sawyer & Bertram, 2022). The current paper explores mothering experiences of women in two Midwestern jails, including those detained before trial and not yet convicted of crime, as well as convicted individuals incarcerated for one year or less. The study utilizes a qualitative research design and data were analyzed from in-depth interviews with incarcerated mothers. The findings discuss the women's mothering experiences prior to their incarceration, as well as their parenting experiences while in jail. Most of the mothers in the study were not part of their children's lives before their incarceration meaning that there were intersectional issues in the system that make the mothering experiences hard for the women. The study presents policy implications relating to parental experiences of mothers' involved in the criminal justice system.

KEYWORDS: mothering; jail; motherwork; children; women

EXPERIENCES OF MOTHERS IN JAIL

BOTHWELL PIASON

A Thesis Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Department of Criminal Justice Sciences

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2023

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EXPERIENCES OF MOTHERS IN JAIL

BOTHWELL PIASON

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Dawn Beichner-Thomas, Chair

Mijin Kim

Ralph Weisheit

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My appreciation by writing here is never enough. I have been supported unreservedly by everyone during the course of this work, yet this experience could have never been possible without my academic mother, Dr. Dawn BEICHNER-THOMAS. This is the work we knew we would do 13 years ago, when we first met in Johannesburg. You saw a ray of light in me, and you pocked it out to shine. Here we are! I could never write enough to appreciate you. I am forever grateful for the chance I had to work with you and learn from you. I remember you saying, “Finish strong”. This work is evidence of your advice. You believed in me. I could never ask for more than wish you a great prosperous future. Once a mother, you shall always be.

Drs. Mijin KIM and Ralph WEISHEIT, thank you for being on my thesis committee where your guidance made this work possible. Dr. KIM, thank you for taking extra time with me. I never knew that a student could be friends with a professor! Dr. Jessie KRIENERT, you inspired me to think of research as a way of life.

Dr. David LANE, I appreciate you for being a brother throughout my experience. You understood what I needed and challenged me to grow my imagination by every way possible. Your guidance remains the greatest support I needed for future. You provided space for my academic growth as my Graduate Assistantship Supervisor.

The entire Criminal Justice Department faculty, staff, and students, you stood by me every step on this journey. I remember everyone coming down to the 3-MT competition for this work! You are such an amazing family. Jenny ALTIERI, you are an incredible being! What could I do without you? My fellow students, you were a blessing to have. Yoo AKAKPO, we were twins from the onset to finish. Juanita SEFA, you are my hero. It is you who saw and saved

me from challenges that an international student may face while away from home. You observed, you approached, you listened and held my hand on. May God bless you.

I was deeply loved by the International Friends community. Special mention to Brenda JUHNKE-STEELE for all the care, and great outings we had. To my host parents, Fred and Laurie MARTIN, you shared your love with me unconditionally and made me one of your own. May God continue to bless you abundantly.

The Kenyan and Zimbabwean communities in Bloomington-Normal helped me a lot on this journey. I found friends, relatives, and parents amongst you. I want to specially mention Dr. Stephen MUJEYE and Precious MUJEYE for taking me in during my desperate times and provided care and love whilst I was working on the current project. For that gesture, I believe God will remember you indeed. I also want to thank the Zimbabwean Roman Catholic community in the United States and Canada, for their online services that kept on uplifting my spirit during my time working on the thesis.

I want to thank my entire family and close friends for their encouragement and support. Family is all we have. I know you prayed for me. My wife, Rumbi, you were right there as my pillar during the entire time. I could never ask for more.

B.P

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The United States of America (U.S.) is a carceral state. Its prisons and jails currently hold 2 million people (The Sentencing Project, 2022), surpassing the populations of some countries such as Eswatini, Mauritius, or Latvia (The World Bank, 2022). Most of these incarcerations happen in the jail system (Milavetz, Pritzl, Muentner, & Poehlmann-Tynan, 2021), where most incarcerated women are mothers of young children (Glaze & Maruschack, 2010; Collica-Cox & Furst, 2019; Milavetz et al., 2021). Following changes in U.S. policies that aimed at reducing drug-related crimes about 40 years ago, gendered consequences were evidenced through increased incarceration of women, most of whom were mothers (Barberet, 2014). As the number of women confined in carceral facilities rose, so did the number of children with incarcerated parents. Although the U.S. has 4% of the world's female population, it holds 30% of women who are incarcerated worldwide. The trends of incarceration rates for women behind bars in the U.S. have raised concerns over human rights as an issue related to violence against women (Beichner & Hagemann, 2022).

Globally, the incarcerated population of women has risen 60% against men's 22% over the past 20 years (World Prison Brief, 2021). The proportion of inmates who are women and girls has risen from 5.4 % to almost 7% within the same period (Beichner & Hagemann, 2022). Although women make up a small number of incarcerated populations across the world, they are disproportionately being incarcerated at a higher rate than their male counterparts (Barberet, 2014). According to World Prison Brief (2021), 740,000 women were incarcerated or detained across the world, with the U.S. recording 211,870.

Incarcerated women remain invisible, oppressed, misunderstood, and marginalized, yet they experience various forms of victimization without getting justice against their perpetrators

(Beichner & Hagemann, 2022, Belknap, 2021; Garcia-Hallett, 2022). More so, the majority of women in prison and jails have committed non-violent crimes, yet they are incarcerated and separated from their families and support systems as they go through dehumanizing experiences (Beichner & Hagemann, 2022).

Policy Implications of the War on Drugs

Worldwide, women are likely to commit less severe crimes than men (Barberet, 2014). Moreover, their offending patterns are not the same as those of men, and so are their pathways to crime (Barberet, 2014; Garcia-Hallett, 2022; Gurusami, 2019). Women often get arrested for drug-related offenses and less serious crimes compared to men, who are often involved in fraud and theft (Barberet, 2014). In cases where women rarely commit serious crimes than men usually do, they are more likely to be caught and covered more widely in the media because their acts would have been considered abnormal for women to commit (Barberet, 2014).

The increased rate of women's incarceration has been primarily attributed to policies that predominantly affect women. For instance, drug policies that were premised on criminalization and incarceration resulted in abuse of women involved in drugs by law enforcement agents (Birgin, Fernandez, Nougier & Youngers, 2022). Compared to their male counterparts, women have been largely deterred from accessing scarce lifesaving health services, thereby worsening the stigma and discrimination against them (UNODC, 2018). Accordingly, women were over-criminalized for illegal drug supply involvement as more than a third of incarcerated women globally are being incarcerated for drug-related offenses compared to one in five incarcerated men (UNODC, 2020).

Since women are usually on the lower echelons of the drug peddling hierarchy (Barberet, 2014), where they are mostly mules or have some dependency on drugs (Frost, Greene & Pranis,

2006), they are susceptible to law enforcement agents, who would in turn arrest them at a higher pace than their male counterparts. The design of a drug peddling hierarchical structure makes women vulnerable to arrest and contributes to the high rates of women's incarceration (Barberet, 2014). The increasingly punitive nature of drug enforcement is associated with high rates of women detained and imprisoned in the U.S. (Barberet, 2014). Due to the gendered consequences of crimes committed by women and their vulnerability to patriarchal systems that lead them to incarceration, global attention has been drawn to call for ending violence against women.

International human rights law stipulates that the prevention of violence against women is the mandate of the State (Beichner & Hagemann, 2022). Meanwhile, the United Nations (UN) adopted the Kyoto Declaration on Advancing Crime Prevention, Criminal Justice, and the Rule of Law: Towards the Achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the Kyoto Declaration) in 2021. The Kyoto Declaration enshrines ideas of preventing crime by identifying the root causes of crimes as well as addressing risk factors that make certain groups more vulnerable to committing a crime (UN, 2021). This includes women in the U.S., who are at the intersectionality of being mothers, of color and low socio-economic status. Amongst the elements highlighted in the Kyoto Declaration is an improvement of prison conditions in tandem with the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (The Nelson Mandela Rules) and the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (The Bangkok Rules). The Kyoto Declaration calls for contemporary restorative justice in order to reduce reoffending through rehabilitation and reintegration as well as adopting rehabilitation in corrections (Beichner & Hagemann, 2022). It lastly declares gender-specific mainstreaming for both offenders and victims, intending to protect girls and women from revictimization during the course of justice (Beichner & Hagemann, 2022).

In the U.S., racialized mass incarceration are deliberate macro-victimization practices which are equal to other international human rights violations (Beichner, Craig, & Bell, 2021). The systematic and institutionalized racism have a bearing on carceral patterns where women of color are mostly affected (Beichner & Hagemann, 2022). For women who are at the intersection of motherhood, low socioeconomic status, gender, and race, the jail beckons. From 2010 onwards, statistics showed a general decline in the number of incarcerated populations, yet the incarceration of women continued on an upward trend, with black women being twice more likely to be incarcerated than white women (Carson, 2018). Multiple issues get women involved with the criminal justice system, thereby explaining the gendered and racial differences in incarceration rates.

Studies have shown that prior to their incarceration, women would have encountered trauma and abuse - in some cases going as far back as their childhood experiences (Beichner & Hagemann, 2022, Beichner & Rabe-Hemp, 2014, Belknap & Grant, 2021). Women in jail, particularly those incarcerated for substance abuse, sex work for money or drugs, are at high risk for severe addiction, mental and physical comorbidities, and numerous psychosocial challenges which inhibit recovery (Cigrang et al.,2020). These women tend to have co-occurring mental health challenges such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression. Women who tend to be repeatedly arrested, may be involved in sex work to get money to finance their drug addiction (Cigrang et al., 2020). In addition, substance use disorder in women usually goes hand in hand with financial and employment crises, such as not having graduated in high school, having no job, being homeless as well as experiencing family instability (Beichner& Rabe-Hemp, 2014). More than 60% of incarcerated women have a history of physical or sexual abuse (Kajstura, 2018). In most cases, the risk factors that land women in jail tend to increase their

chances of recidivism since carceral facilities lack the necessary support and rehabilitative interventions necessary to address women's issues.

Risk factors that predict recidivism include criminal history, antisocial values and family or parenting circumstances (Peterson et al., 2019). For instance, having a child taken into foster care or losing parental rights tend to increase a mother's risk for recidivism (Newman et al., 2022). Studies have long shown that the stability of family is directly correlated with future involvement with the criminal justice system (Maruschack et al., 2010). The relationship between a mother and the child affects one's criminal behavior, as strong family relationships preclude future crimes. Gurusami (2019) argues that even in post-incarceration, the mother role is inhibited due to the temporary loss of parental custody. Resumption of parenting following release from jail often becomes hard as mothers suffer erosion of social support (Gurusami, 2019). As a result, strengthening the mother-child relationship is critical in the reduction of the risk of possible involvement with the criminal justice system (Purvis, 2013).

Be that as it may, 2.7 million children in the U.S. have a parent incarcerated in prison or jail, and more than 5 million children have had a parent incarcerated at some point in their lives (Peterson et al., 2019). Parental incarceration disrupts multiple socio-economic factors for children such as changing school, moving in with another parent and losing financial or emotional support (Milavetz et al., 2021). Children with incarcerated parents are exposed to violence in their homes or community and are even likely to be poor (Peterson et al., 2019).

The consequences of separating a mother from her children through the criminal justice system can be upsetting (Garcia-Hallett, 2019). Incarcerated mothers suffer from depression, anxiety, stress, and other mental illnesses more severely than men. Confined mothers are three times more likely than fathers to have been living in a single parent-headed household a month

before their arrest (Glaze & Maruschack, 2010). This would mean that children lose a custodian, primary caregiver, and support once the mother is temporarily taken into custody. Children whose mothers are incarcerated experience multiple challenges such as social exclusion, depression, anxiety, social instability, poor performance in school, early criminality, and unhealthy relationships among other mental health problems (Cigrang et al., 2020).

Although women in jail tend to be separated more briefly from their children than their imprisoned counterparts, they are included in fewer programs than fellow jailed men (Collica-Cox & Furst, 2019). Incarceration limits a parent's ability to carry out their family obligations. Whereas confined parents want to be responsible for their children, to be part of their lives and helping with parental guidance, incarcerations inhibit such (Milavetz et al., 2021). Incarceration weakens family bonds, frustrating parental efforts to keep or mend relationships with their children (Gurusami, 2019). Carceral facilities have protocols and measures that restrict parents' ability to interact and communicate with their children and those individuals taking care of them (Beichner & Rabe-Hemp, 2014). Such individuals can be caregivers, counselors, and other family members. Amongst the most paramount concerns raised by women for leaving jail were gaining custody of their children, and this required a safe home, legal employment, and accomplished education (Cigrang et al., 2020). The jail environment makes it hard for children to be in contact with their mothers (Beichner & Rabe-Hemp, 2014). The section below gives a glimpse into the U.S. jail system as it is separate from prisons.

The United States Jail System

Unlike elsewhere where the terms jail and prison may be used interchangeably, a jail and a prison are different in the U.S. correctional system. Jails are old facilities, most of them constructed before the 1970s, and they fall under elected authorities such as a Sheriff (Lurigio, 2016). According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2021), a jail is a carceral facility usually run locally by a sheriff, chief of police or city administrator. Whilst a few jails are privately run, most are run at city or country level, with regional jails under control of two more jurisdictions in agreement (BJS, 2021). The jail system includes jails, detention facilities, localized correctional facilities, specializes jail facilities (such as those for treatment or prerelease), temporary cells or holding facilities relating to the jail functions (BJS, 2021). Although they are designed for adults, jails sometimes hold juveniles prior to their case adjudication or after, or in transit for onward transfer to juvenile facilities (BJS, 2021).

The administration of these facilities by elected officials who have term limits could lead to potential disruption of systematic management as well as the implementation of long-term programs in jails (Champion, 2008). The differences between jail and prison range from infrastructure, administration, resources, operations, and equipment (Lurigio, 2016). In addition, jails are meant to accommodate fewer inmates in their localities than prisons; - which are mostly run by the state or federal government. Those admitted in jail do not have sentences that last beyond 12 months, although some studies reveal that some inmates end up staying longer for various reasons such as court delays in conclusion of their cases, or the case of Covid-19, refusal of admission by prison upon their transfer (Kang-Brown, Montagnet & Heiss, 2021). Release from jail requires completion of time, other out-of-custody arrangements, and in some cases one's ability to pay a fine and earn their freedom.

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2021), jails house people that serve sentences 12 months or less, those whose cases are ongoing, detained awaiting trial, convictions or sentencing; those on readmission, absconders, bail violators; detained juveniles in transit to their designated facilities, people with mental illness for onward transfer to mental health care facilities, persons of military involvement, secure custody, court witnesses, those in contempt of court; convicts on release to community following completion of sentence; those in transit to other facilities such as state and federal institutions, convicted inmates housed on behalf of overcrowded institutions such as federal or state prisons and; such individuals involved in community-based programs as alternatives to incarceration.

Jails are home to those who are detained, awaiting trial and sentencing, and those sentenced for less severe crimes usually warranting less than a year in confinement. U.S. jails usually detain people for certain periods of time while awaiting trial and sentencing. In 2022, 75% of inmates at Harris County Jail in Texas were not convicted as they were awaiting trial (Center for Justice Research, 2022). According to Kajstura (2018), 60% of women in jail are being detained before conviction or trial, partly due to their inability to pay bail.

Jails disproportionately hold people of color, as well as those with mental health issues. Such depiction reflects inequalities in the administration of justice in the U.S. society. Although carceral facilities in the U.S. are not equipped to deal with mental illnesses effectively, they are the major processing institutions of most individuals with mental health challenges (Aiello, 2016; Torrey et al., 2010). Data from a survey conducted by Torrey and peers (2010) revealed a gloomy picture showing that there are more than three times more seriously mentally ill individuals in carceral facilities than hospitals. They further revealed that the number of mentally ill individuals continues to rise along with illness severity in carceral facilities. In addition, James

and Glaze (2006) revealed than more than 50% of jail inmates reported having diagnosis, treatment or showing symptoms of mental health disorder within the past 12 months as most individuals in jails were more affected compared to their prison counterparts. As such, studies reveal that it is in confinement facilities where the severity of mental illness symptoms notably increases (Fuentes, 2022).

Research Questions

In light of the highlighted challenges faced by incarcerated women, who happen to be mothers, this study explores the mothering experiences of women in jail. Few studies have examined mothering experiences in jails, as most studies have mainly focused on prisons, resulting in a dearth of literature about mothers in jails. As such, the purpose of this study is to build knowledge on mothering experiences of women in jail, to inform possible policy changes that may help reduce the surging challenges of incarcerated mothers. The significance of this study is elevated by the lack of knowledge of what mothers in jail go through. Unlike their prison counterparts, women in jails have not been adequately studied to understand their circumstances. Meanwhile, existing evidence has shown that the incarceration of mothers does more harm than good (Gurusami, 2019).

Whereas incarceration may be practiced for creation of safer communities, the intended outcomes of this practice are upside down in the U.S. jail system. In fact, the gendered consequences of such policies disproportionately affect women - especially mothers who end up trapped in a cycle of criminality and incarceration. Mothers fail to even resume parenting due to compounded factors such as history of abuse, trauma, mental problems, and even incarceration itself (Beichner & Rabe-Hemp, 2014; Belknap, 2020; Green et al., 2005; Hayes, 2009). The

collateral consequences of having mothers in jail include intergenerational incarceration and an unending string of jail candidature for both mothers and their children (Aiello, 2016; Arditti & Few, 2008; Beichner & Hagemann, 2016; Brown & Bloom, 2009; Burgess-Proctor et al., 2016).

This qualitative study utilizes interview data with incarcerated mothers that were collected from two Midwestern jails. An interview guide was used to collect respondents' data concerning various issues, including mothering experiences. The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1) What was the nature of the mother-child relationship before incarceration?

2) What are the participants' perceptions of their relationships with their child(en)?

3) What are the respondents' perceptions of the impact of incarceration on their children?

4) How do respondents intend to resume mothering following their release from jail?

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The population of incarcerated women in the U.S. correctional system surpasses that of any other country in the world (Penal Reform International, 2022). Most of these incarcerations happen in jails that process above 10 million admissions each year (Zeng, 2019). Following policies that were aimed at ending drugs about four decades ago, the rate at which female offenders have been incarcerated continues to soar and has since outpaced that of their male counterparts (Belknap, 2015; Birgin et al., 2022). Most of these women are mothers to 1.3 million minor children who are at high risk of experiencing future incarceration, trauma, and other mental health challenges (Collica-Cox & Furst, 2019). Although jails house individuals who are not meant to stay incarcerated for longer than 12 months, the impact of brief interruption of mother-child bond can have far reaching consequences for both (Rodda & Beichner, 2017; Garcia-Hallett, 2019b).

This chapter presents knowledge relating to the experiences of mothers in jail. The review will be written in a deductive format which starts with the history of women incarceration, carceral trends of women, legislation guiding women involved in criminal justice systems, followed by incarcerated women's experiences, and then narrowing down to maternal incarceration before finishing the chapter with applicable theories to the study.

The History of Women Incarceration

Correctional institutions, as they are known today, are both culturally and historically constructed (Bosworth, 2000). The continuous structural persecution and subsequent incarceration of women existed for centuries. Although the establishment of one of the oldest facilities for women's incarceration, the Spinhuis in Amsterdam, can be traced back to 1597

(Sellin, 1944), France's Salpatriere remains one of the few institutions revealing how women were treated by carceral systems from as far back as 1684 (Christie, 1994). The Salpatriere was an institution which housed the poor, sick, and unwanted female population in Paris, continuing this role into the 20th century across different political and administrative systems (Bosworth, 2000). The treatment of women did not change. The issues that put women at risk of carceral punishment did not change either. Salpatriere was meant to keep an assortment of women in depravation, in need of healthcare, the healthy, pregnant, infertile, mad, or foolish along with their offspring (Bosworth, 2000). The institution's history shows how gendered ideas were extolled in the prison system from the start (Bosworth, 2000). It was labeled a place for bad, poor, and mad women.

Instead of shifting to ideas of punishment, women's confinement in Salpatriere revealed continuous penal ideologies from the early modern world era (Sparks, 1996). In the 19th Century Salpetriere, there was evidence of a mixture of modern and early modern methods of corrections (Bosworth, 2000). For instance, women were both given temporal sentences and branded. They were sentenced to the varying length of incarceration by courts, but they could also stay there longer at the request of their parents, neighbors, or husbands (Van Waters, 1938). Instead of making it a holding place for women, waiting for punishment became a punishment itself (Bosworth, 2000). The notions of being "less eligible" and belonging to "dangerous classes" which were evident in 19th and 20th century support for punishment, formed an integral part of the prison system (Sparks, 1996).

The transformation of Salpatriere from a prison to a reform school, albeit in different eras of comparable ideologies, reflected the carceral plight of similar populations. The place housed women who were condemned for bad behavior by their families, convicted of petty

crimes, or simply for being poor (Sparks, 1996). Unwanted wives, pregnant or sexually active girls, prostitutes, thieves, and others, were punished by confinement for many centuries (Bosworth, 2000). Elsewhere, similarly, women confined in the Ospizio in Malta around the 1830s, were described as "poor" and "maniacs" (Knepper & Scicluna, 2010). They were bundled together with their children who were below five years of age in overcrowded spaces. Although women were categorized as either imprisoned or detained in the Ospizio, they worked under similar surveillance, shared the same rooms, and ate the same food (Knepper & Scicluna, 2010). Deprivation of visits from relatives was used as a form of punishment for those that resisted laborious work in the facility.

At about the same time, the state of New York established what would become the first female prison in U.S. history - the Mount Pleasant Female Prison opened in 1835 (Rafter, 1983). Consistent with other globally deplorable conditions suffered by women in Salpatriere and Ospizio, New York's Mount Pleasant Female Prison was overcrowded and degrading as women were exposed to daily routines of surveillance and control (Bosworth, 2000). Although the facility was shut down thirty years later, subsequent female carceral facilities in the U.S. had numerous reports of whipping women who fought, swore, or acted unusual (Rafter, 1983).

Since the establishment of female carceral facilities in America, women have been punished severely for non-violent crimes compared to their male counterparts (Cobbina, 2021). Crimes they were accused of committing were mostly improbity, prostitution, randy behavior, and homelessness (Pishko, 2015). Women involved in the criminal justice system were considered wayward and morally deficient. Elsewhere, in other carceral facilities such as the Reformatory Prison for Women of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, attachment between mother and child was used as a "natural incentive" to improve their behavior (Van Waters,

1938). In addition, biological factors were attributed to the behavior of female inmates, including epilepsy and other mental health manifestations which could otherwise be considered symptomatic of sexual trauma today (Pishko, 2015).

In light of the historical developments of women's incarceration across the world, it is evident that nothing much has changed. In fact, the incarceration of women has increased across the world to such an extent that it has become a human rights concern related to violence against women (Beichner & Hagemann, 2022; Birgin et al., 2022). Part of the reason for incarceration of women is due to introduction of policies that have gendered consequences, which result in the vulnerability of women to criminal justice involvement (Barberet, 2014). As such, there have been efforts at a global level to set standard on improved justice delivery, especially for women and girls.

International Legislation Guiding Incarceration

The operation of jails and prisons is guided by international legislation and guidelines that aim to improve the standards of treatment of those involved with the criminal justice system. International human rights laws stipulate that prevention of violence against women - including of those in carceral facilities - is the mandate of the State (Beichner & Hagemann, 2022). Some of the measures set in place at an international level include the UN's Kyoto Declaration of 2021. Among the elements highlighted in the Kyoto Declaration is improving prison conditions as it complements the Nelson Mandela Rules and the Bangkok Rules. The Kyoto Declaration calls for contemporary restorative justice in order to reduce reoffending through rehabilitation and reintegration as well as adopting rehabilitation in corrections (Beichner & Hagemann, 2022). It lastly declares gender-specific mainstreaming for both offenders and victims, intending to protect girls and women from victimization (Beichner & Hagemann, 2022).

The Bangkok Rules are the first of their nature to specifically address the plight of women involved with criminal justice system, those awaiting trial, those detained pending conviction, and those pending sentencing and under state custody (Fernandez & Nougier, 2021). The Bangkok Rules work and complement the 1955 Standard Minimum Rules for Non-Custodial Measures (also known as Tokyo Rules of 1991). The Bangkok Rules are a set of 70 rules that guide authorities on how to ensure humane treatment of women in the criminal justice system by emphasizing alternatives to imprisonment. The rules also address the needs of children, whose mothers are imprisoned, by highlighting that those mothers of young children ought to be kept out of carceral facilities as much as possible by advocating for alternatives to imprisonment for such individuals. They provide for the gendered needs of incarcerated women (Penal Reform International, 2021).

Although the Bangkok Rules were voted by all member states of the UN who accepted that girls and women involved with the criminal justice system had gender-specific needs that ought to be preserved and addressed (Cobbina-Dungy, 2022), many countries continue to violate their provisions (Van Hout et al., 2021). For Van Hout et al., (2021), incarcerated women continue to suffer injustices within criminal justice systems. Such injustices further exacerbate the invisibility of women, systemic violence in correctional systems, reflect contempt of international guidelines, and continue to impede the exercise of the Bangkok Rules. Failure to observe the provisions of the Bangkok Rules has led to perpetual maltreatment of prisoners worldwide as many facilities face overcrowding, violence against women, and failure to cater to the mental, physical, and medical needs of female inmates (Van Hout et al., 2021). Since most incarcerated women have a history of trauma and abuse, the deplorable conditions in carceral facilities add to their challenges, especially triggering mental health issues (Pringer & Wagner,

2020). Unfortunately, the protocols guiding carceral facilities tend to retraumatize female inmates, failing to avoid revival of mental health challenges (Cobbina-Dungy, 2022). Across the world, women continue to face serious victimization through mass incarceration policies that are premised on gender inequalities (Barberet, 2014).

Women Carceral Trends

Globally, the population of imprisoned individuals has been estimated to have soared to an all-time high of 11.5 million (Penal Reform International, 2022). This follows a significant reduction in the prisoner population between 2019 and 2020 due to the impact of Covid-19 (Minton & Zeng, 2021; Penal Reform International, 2022). In fact, the reduction of figures in carceral facilities during the pandemic era did not change the disproportionate picture of those affected by mass incarceration, such as the overrepresentation of women of color in jail. The sudden increase is, however, largely attributed to resumption of court operations and clearance of backlogs, resulting in some countries recording higher figures than those in place before the pandemic (Kang-Brown et al., 2021). One in three people who are incarcerated are being held in pre-trial detention, and this population has not changed much since 2000 (Zeng, 2020). Meanwhile, the number of women held in prison has grown, with an estimated increase of 33% since 2000, while that of men has increased by 25 % (Belknap, 2015). Moreso, almost 260,000 children are in detention each day across the world since 2020 (Fair & Walmsley, 2021). Further, people of color and those from indigenous groups continue to be overrepresented in carceral facilities across the globe (Fair & Walmsley, 2021).

The U.S. incarceration rate stands at 655 people per 100,000, with a population of more than 2 million in the correctional system, undoubtedly presenting the highest number of people in prison worldwide (Fair & Walmsley, 2021; Cobbina-Dungy, 2022). Since women form a

small portion of the imprisoned population – about 7% of the entire prisoned population worldwide (Fair & Walmsley, 2022; Belknap, 2015) - their gendered needs tend to be overlooked (Cobbina-Dungy, 2022). Although the imprisoned men population is much higher than that of women, the rate of female incarceration continues to outpace that of men. In fact, the population of women and girls who have been imprisoned since 2000 has risen by almost 60% (Fair &Walmsley, 2022), clearly revealing an unrelenting trend of female imprisonment in the 21st century.

The U.S. jail trends generally replicate those of prisons. While there was relative stability in local jail trends across the U.S. since 2010, the period between 2019 to mid-2020, saw a 25% decline in the jailed population - with Covid-19 as the main factor for this trend (Minton & Zeng, 2021). The jail population went down from more than 10 million to 8.7 million between 2019 and 2020, respectively (Kang-Brown et al., 2021). The downward trend of the jail population was, however, short-lived as recent data revealed that from June to September 2020, local jail population started rising up by 10% within 90 days (Kang-Brown et al., 2021). Nonetheless, during the peak of the Covid-19 period, the jail incarceration rate for women went down 37% compared to 23% for males (Minton & Zeng, 2021). Given that these trends are based on the Covid-19 era restrictions, they probably reveal the nature of crimes that women committed prior to their admission into jails. Women often commit nonviolent offenses, which usually relate to drug and property-related crimes (Cobbina, 2021). In most cases, jailed women would have been victims of violence before their involvement with corrections (Verona, Murphy & Javdani, 2016). Again, this presents evidence that carceral facilities in the U.S- although not equipped to deal with mental health issues- are largely responsible for processing individuals with mental health challenges.

Jails, like prisons, show a worrisome trend of overrepresentation of minority groups. In 2020, 48% of jail inmates were white, 25% were black, and 15% were Hispanic (Minton and Zeng, 2021). Given that whites make up 59%, Blacks 12% and Hispanics 18.9 % of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021), such overrepresentation of minority groups in the U.S. correctional system could strengthen the argument that punishment could be viewed as a weapon of social control for the weak and poor. From gendered lenses, punishment can equally be a method of suppression of women. For Garcia-Hallet (2019), the U.S situation reflects a punitive patriarchal system that suppresses women of color who happen to be at the intersections of race and gender. To worsen the situation, those who accounted for more than half of the jail population were aged between 18 and 34 (Minton & Zeng, 2021). Clearly, this is a child-rearing age which explains why the majority of incarcerated women are mothers. In addition, these are mothers who actively seek to provide for their children, thereby making themselves prone to the criminal justice system. Furthermore, rural jails have higher incarceration rates compared to urban ones, as three out of five people admitted to local jails are in rural communities (Kang-Brown et al., 2021).

Scope of the Problem

Jails in the U.S. house and process larger numbers of people than prisons. Each year, they admit nearly 12 million people (Minton & Golinelli, 2014), which is 20 times higher than prison admissions (Vera Institute of Justice, 2015). Regardless of the number of people who go through jails, studies on this population, especially women's experiences, remain obscured (Cobbina-Dungy, 2022). Since 2000, the average daily population in jail has increased by one percent due to the increased number of detainees awaiting trial (Minton & Zeng, 2015). The increase in jail population is directly related to changes in policy following the declaration of a war on drugs

about three decades ago (Lurigio, 2016). The current average period of stay in jail is 28 days (Minton & Zeng, 2021). However, people tend to stay longer due to the bureaucracy of the courts system in processing cases (Lurigio, 2016). According to the American Jail Association (2015), there are more than 3,000 operational jails in the U.S, with almost every big city having numerous such facilities. The detainee population continues to rise against the non-expansion of jail spaces leading to overcrowding (Lurigio, 2016).

The rate at which women are admitted to local jails continues to rise faster than that of their male counterparts, with Black women being twice as likely to be incarcerated compared to Whites (Carson, 2018). More than 70 % of incarcerated women are mothers to minor children, most of which are children of color (Maruschak, Glaze, & Mumola, 2010). For women – particularly mothers of minor children-, admission in jail removes them from society for short periods of time (Collica-Cox & Furst, 2019). However, this temporal disruption of mother to child relationship due to jail incarceration may negatively impact both. In the U.S., 1.7 million young children are exposed to behavioral problems, trauma, and future incarceration due to their mothers being incarcerated (Collica-Cox & Furst, 2019). Meanwhile, a study by Murphey and Cooper (2015) found that more than 5 million children in the U.S, ever had a parent in jail or prison. The proportion is higher for black, poor, and rural children (Carson, 2018).

Evidence shows that most incarcerated mothers are the primary caregivers to their children, making it difficult for them to maintain the relationship (Beichner& Rabe-Hemp, 2014; Murphey & Cooper, 2015). Amongst the incarcerated population, 90% of men have their children being taken care of by their biological mothers compared to women's 25% (Greenfeld & Snell, 2000). This reflects how incarceration is more burdensome to female inmates than for their male counterparts. This experience diminishes the quality of relationships that ought to

exist between children and their mothers (Beichner & Rabe-Hemp, 2014). Incarceration affects the parent, the child, and also caregivers of those children (Murphey & Cooper, 2015). Incarceration of mothers becomes a two-edged knife that effects both the inmate and those left outside. Jailed women lose income, and strain their marital relationships, as incarceration usually leads to their divorce or separation with partners (Garcia, 2016; Gurusami, 2019) - factors that may be useful in reducing their risk of recidivism. On the other hand, studies have associated parental incarceration with poor childhood experiences for minors. It affects children's wellbeing leading to depression, anxiety, and poor academic performance, thereby likely resulting in later life challenges in their adulthood such as poor health both mentally and physically (Murray, Farrington, & Sekol, 2012; Gjelsvik et al., 2014).

For Purvis (2013), restoration or mending of the mother-child relationships significantly reduces risks of future involvement with the criminal justice system. The stability of the family institution is strongly correlated to deterrence from criminal behavior (Andrews, Bonta, & Wormith, 2006). As such, maintaining communication and contact between a mother and her children establishes strong family bonds, which can prevent recidivism (Purvis, 2013).

This study reveals lessons from the mothering experiences of women in jail, particularly how they play the parental role from behind bars, their strategies in coping with their carceral situation, their perceptions on the nature of relationships with their children (both before and after jail), and how they plan to resume their mothering role post release from jail. Below is a discussion of some factors generally agreed to be part of the women's experiences before and/or during incarceration.

Traumatic Past

Women who go on to offend often have a history of victimization at some point in their lives, such as gender-based violence, trauma, and dysfunctional family relationships (Beichner & Rabe-Hemp, 2014; Garcia-Hallet, 2019; Milavetz et al., 2021). Studies have shown a significant association between a history of physical or sexual abuse and women's delinquency, dangerous behavior, and subsequent criminal involvement (Widon & White, 1997). Childhood victimization experiences often increase the risks of female offending (Garcia-Hallet, 2019). In most cases, young girls tend to run away from home, thereby exposing themselves to property crimes and drug involvement as a way to support and heal themselves (Gilfus, 1992). A large number of incarcerated individuals have proven traumatic childhood challenges (Milavetz et al., 2021). Some of them grew up in an abusive household with an incarcerated family member or engaged in substance abuse (James & Glaze, 2006).

In a nationwide study conducted on prisoners, more than half of incarcerated parents in state prisons had a family member who was incarcerated (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Moreover, research done in jail by James and Glaze (2006), revealed that 37% of mentally challenged inmates in jail, had experiences with a parent who used alcohol and drugs during their childhood. In jail, mothers revealed that they had childhood trauma and also suffered domestic violence (Poehlmann, 2005).

Further, women in carceral facilities are 6-10 times more likely to have been in an abusive relationship (Beichner & Rabe-Hemp, 2016). Beichner and Rabe-Hemp (2016) highlight that women tend to hold on to abusive relationships due to financial and psychological dependency, especially on their re-entry from prison. Knowing that an abusive relationship increases one's risk of committing crime, such romantic relationships make women vulnerable to

committing a crime (MacKenzie & De Li, 2002). Ultimately, such weakened familial bonds could explain high recidivism rates by women who suffer the trauma of abusive relationships. More so, women with parents who are physically absent and emotionally inaccessible as a result of certain addictions, accounted for a large number amongst those who are incarcerated (Beichner & Rabe-Hemp, 2016; Few-Demo & Arditti, 2013).

Substance Use

Studies further show that past physical and/or psychological traumatic experiences are related to substance use as a coping remedy for women (Cobbina-Dungy, 2022; Gilfus, 1992). This makes substance use a common culture amongst female offenders. Approximately 60% of female inmates in prison are known to have a drug problem or to have indulged in drug use at least a month prior to their incarceration (Mumola & Karberg, 2006). In addition, almost half of female inmates reportedly use alcohol, drugs, or both at the time of committing an offense (Greenfeld & Snell, 1999). For Fuentes (2022), lack of support in terms of vital resources such as education, job skills, access to health and treatment usually push women to engage in what they termed "choiceless" choices. These choices comprise dangerous behavior such as substance abuse, sex trade, putting up with abusive partners or leaving children home unattended - which may result in incarceration, separation from children and traumatic experiences that follow.

Substance abuse has been linked to poverty. Stressful life circumstances such as oppression and poverty are associated with family dynamics, abuse of substance and subsequent incarcerations (Gunn, 2020). There is an intertwined relationship between victimization and the addictive use of substances (Beichner & Rabe-Hemp, 2014), which further exposes women to the criminal justice system. The majority of women who are incarcerated are mothers to minor children and they have a history of mental health issues and traumatic experiences, they tend to

experience repetitive adult behaviors which may involve substance use (Beichner & Rabe-Hemp, 2016).

In their study that assessed the needs of women in jail, Rodda and Beichner (2017) found that, due to the past traumatic experiences encountered by women, such as sexual victimization, women turn to substance abuse as a therapeutic way to deal with their challenges. These habits make them vulnerable to criminal justice involvement. Emanating from these challenges due to a lack of safe upbringing, mothering from prison could be hard for incarcerated women as they are likely to face mental health issues (Rodda & Beichner, 2017).

Mental Health Issues

For Beichner and Hagemann (2016), most incarcerated women show mental health symptoms. Prisons and jails in the U.S have become the biggest mental health institutions as they are three times more likely to handle serious mental health cases than hospitals regardless of their lack of expertise to address mental illness (Torrey et al., 2010). Most women in correctional institutions suffer from mental health problems, with 36% having major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder, or posttraumatic stress disorder (Beichner & Rabe-Hemp, 2016; Green et al., 2005). Many of these women would have experienced mental health challenges since their childhood and continue to suffer into adulthood (Beichner & Rabe-Hemp, 2016). For some women, mental health issues are a result of a specific life event, while for some, it is a result of cumulative life experiences over time (Beichner & Rabe-Hemp, 2016).

A study conducted by Torrey and colleagues (2010), revealed that the population of those with mental health weaknesses had increased along with the increase of mental illness severity in carceral facilities. Amongst the most identifiable mental health problems is depression, anxiety, aggression, and somatic problems. More than 50% of those in jail reported

having a mental disorder within 12 months, as jail inmates are more affected than those in prison (James & Glaze, 2006). Based on such findings, mental health issues remain one of the factors likely to increase incarcerated mothers' chances of unending involvement with the criminal justice system.

Poverty, Race, and Gender

Apart from traumatic history, mental health and substance abuse, there are three other intersectional factors that put women of color at higher risk of being in contact with the criminal justice system - poverty, race, and gender (Garcia-Hallet, 2022). The intersectional overlaps of these factors increase the risk of violence against women of color in the U.S. The three variablesare intrinsically overlapping in as far as assessing risks of one's involvement with the criminal justice system. There are absolute racial and economic disparities at every level of the justice system of the U.S. (Milavetz et al., 2021). Since jails have an overrepresentation of poor people, people of color (Sawyer & Wagner, 2019) and fast-increasing numbers of women (Cobbina-Dungy, 2022; Garcia-Hallet, 2019), processing individuals in jail has serious implications for inequality (Turney & Connor, 2019).

For Cobbina-Dungy (2022), serious economic marginalization has led some individuals to commit crime. According to the hypothesis, increased inequalities in standards of living between men and women due to rising gender gap in poverty explains the criminality of women. Women earn almost half of what men make worldwide, making up the majority of those 1.5 billion people who live on less than $1 per day (UN Women, 2000). The criminal involvement of women is linked to poverty (Cobbina-Dungy, 2022). Frye (1983) in her essay, "Oppression" elaborates how women were trapped in a caged system that restricted and punished them. She brought up the concept of systemic female oppression, which sees women stuck in double-binds.

Frye (1983) defines double binds as a network of forces and barriers that exposes one to penalty, loss, or contempt, whether on welfare or not, with children or not, raises children or not, married or not, heterosexual or lesbian. It is the idea of women being stuck between systematically related pressures which are not of their own making. In double binds, one is restricted by networks of forces and barriers that makes them vulnerable to penalty, loss, or deprivation. Women are subjected to the pressure of competing expectations and judgments about women, wives, and mothers. For example, women are condemned and left in a paradoxical situation for being sexually active or not. Either way, they are given negative tags for their actions and decisions. Double binds oppress women as they are left without alternatives as they are condemned either way.

When women are involved with the criminal justice system, they lose employment opportunities, get paid low salaries (if hired), reduced welfare support, financial challenges, and vagrancy (Hunnicutt & Broidy, 2004). Exclusion from conventional economic opportunities pushes women to engage in economic crimes for survival (Daly, 1996), and for mothers to take care of their families as expected. Even within the correctional system, some women get carceral sentences due to their inability to pay a fine or afford bail (Penal Reform International, 2021). In addition, the financial challenges female offenders encounter becomes burdensome when it comes to their role as primary care providers to dependent children (Cobbina-Dungy, 2022). Globally, the increased number of children facing parental incarceration continues to grow (Cobbina-Dungy, 2022).

Patriarchal and racialized systems in the industry put women at the lowest of all employment preferences (Garcia-Hallett, 2019). Women of color, who are mothers or perceived to be so, are less likely to be hired, thereby subjecting them to a lack of income (Garcia-Hallet,

2022). These gender differences in employment are attributable to gendered socialization and casual job search methods (Drentea, 1998), as well as preconceived ideas that women are weaker than men, thus, associated with particular jobs (Bergmann, 2005). Resultantly, these gender-driven differences strengthen "feminization of poverty" (Carlen, 1988), where women are disadvantaged at the economic peripheries compared to men. Worse still, women of color are less likely to be hired than their white peers (Ortiz, 2014). As such, women of color tend to have high unemployment rates (Browne & Misra, 2003) and get paid lesser than white females (Bound & Dresser, 1999). Apart from gendered disparities in employment, white women are cushioned by white privilege whilst women of color are further disadvantaged (Crenshaw, 1989). The connection between gender and racial-ethnic disparities adds to the socio-economic exclusion of women of color as potential employees. These challenges are exacerbated when there is a criminal record which may further increase stereotypes against formerly incarcerated women (Giguere & Dundes, 2002). The lack of employment opportunities for women of color sets them to commit financially motivated crimes such as theft, fraud, and burglary (Garcia-Hallett, 2019). In most of these circumstances, women with children are even further strained when incarcerated.

Mother-Child Separation

Women are typically primary caregivers of children before their incarceration, thereby becoming heavily affected by imprisonment as it separates them from their children (Collica-Cox & Furst, 2019). As a result of their incarceration, family arrangements often disintegrate as children may be relocated and siblings may further be separated (Harm & Phillips, 2001). While it is important to maintain relationships between mother and child during incarceration as a positive way for post-release success, family connections are hard to keep in place (Christian,

2009). Incarcerated mothers encounter numerous challenges in keeping in touch with their children (Beichner & Rabe-Hemp, 2016). In some instances, people who take custody of children while the mothers are incarcerated may not commit to visiting their mothers, which subsequently severs the mother-child connection (Beichner & Rabe-Hemp, 2016). Some of the challenges for visitation are lack of transportation means, distance, costs, stress on family during visits, and non-committal of caregiver in bringing the child (Greene, 2013). The devastating long-term effects of mother-child separation can result in stress, triggering mental health issues, trauma, and self-harm (Jasperson, 2010).

The incarceration of a family member leads to emotional strain and trauma (Shaw, 2019; Sharratt, 2014). Since most incarcerated women are mothers who play the role of primary caregivers before their imprisonment, their incarceration greatly impacts their children (Beichner & Hagemann, 2022). On the other hand, children suffer from anxiety, depression, social exclusion, substance use, poor educational performance, mental health issues and limited future success amongst other unending challenges (Aaron & Dallaire, 2010; Christian, 2009; Miller & Barnes, 2015). The incarceration of mothers is an intergenerational problem since studies reveal that children, especially daughters, subsequently go down the same route of the criminal justice system (Burgess-Proctor et al., 2016). Children are secondary victims of the incarceration of their mothers since their parents risk losing their custody no matter how short the custodial sentence is (Penal Reform International, 2021). The children may experience poverty and perpetual change in households (Cobbina-Dungy, 2022).

Maternal involvement with their children prior to incarceration determines mother-child relationships for women during incarceration and post release (Siegel, 2011). Children who lacked that bond before incarceration may distance themselves and become part of caregiving

networks in their mother's absence; those with mothers who constantly battle triple threat challenges often find themselves in the care of others (Siegel, 2011). As this is often the case, society tends to sympathize more with children by giving them more attention than their mothers (Garcia-Hallet, 2019). However, consideration of the needs of mothers post-incarceration is necessary as an important step to secure them from recidivism and further enable them to effectively reintegrate into society following their release (Brown & Bloom, 2009; Hayes, 2009).

Disproportionate attention given to children may obscure society from the importance and complex of maternal experiences, thereby supporting notions of "mother-blaming" (Caplan, 1988). It breeds perceptions of women involved in the criminal justice system as unworthy and dangerous (Sharpe, 2015). Such societal norms create social and structural difficulties for mothers who struggle with abiding by an impossible social expectation of motherhood (Hayes, 2009). For formerly incarcerated black women, structural challenges that make it hard for mothering include erosion of social support owing to high incarceration rates, post-release supervision demands and resumption of parenting after brief loss of parental custody (Haney, 2010; Roberts 2003).

Women of color exist in a world where there is an overlap between poverty and what is legally known as maltreatment of children (Dawson & Berry, 2002). As a result, living in poverty can be easily criminalized as it gives the state an opportunity to impose its interventions on minority groups (Garcia-Hallet, 2019). For Besharov and Laumann (1997), the state is calling it child abuse whilst it is in fact poverty as women of color suffer condemnation when their survival in an oppressive system falls short of the standards of others. This group of women is often stripped off of custodial rights prior to and during incarceration and their challenges overlap between correctional institutions and Child Protective Services (Gurusami, 2019). Again,

following their release from prison, women of color suffer the impact of incarceration as they struggle to prove themselves as "fit" mothers according to expectations of society while they are systemically marginalized (Garcia-Hallett, 2017; Gurusami, 2019).

Plans for Post-release Mothering

Although women desire to resume their parental role and correct their past wrongdoings, they continue to encounter numerous challenges that inhibit their efforts to regain their mothering role (Arditti et al., 2010). Based on a study they conducted on incarcerated women, Beichner and Rabe-Hemp (2014) found that some of the fears expressed by women upon completion of their sentences are: lack of employment opportunities in their hometowns, stigma, and fear of mixing with former acquaintances. Some women expressed their need to relocate elsewhere (Beichner & Rabe-Hemp, 2014). Be that as it may, most of the women who played the parental role prior to their incarceration eventually ended up resuming their mothering role upon release (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008).

Many women in jail report their interest in participating in parenting classes (Purvis, 2013) and reestablishing their relationships with their children (Kazura, 2001). As such, many correctional institutions provide parenting lessons (Collica-Cox & Furst, 2019a). Unfortunately, most of these classes are idealistic and they are almost impractical in reality (Aiello, 2016; Sandifer, 2008). Brown (2012) conducted a study involving mothers on parole and discovered that lessons they learnt while inside were incompatible with their lives. She argues that the parenting classes were based on middle-class ideas of motherhood which is not commensurate with the lives of poor women of color who are overrepresented in U.S. carceral facilities.

Mothers in carceral facilities are resilient, creative, and dedicated to mothering their children regardless of the challenges they face behind bars (Aiello, 2016). Evidence shows that

they communicate and comfort regularly, make care arrangements, and exercise some authority over their children's lives (Rathbone, 2005). Although society embraces mothering as a white middleclass responsibility that is child-centered, highly intensive, and time consuming, evidence shows that women of color tend to resort to alternative mothering strategies compatible with their understanding of what a good mother is (Ailleo, 2016). For example, these women rely on the use of long existing relationships to care for children (Collins, 1994; Uttal, 1999). The biggest undoing for incarcerated mothers is lack of access to paid work whilst they are behind bars to provide for their children and offset the stigma and pain of separation (Aiello, 2016).

Although being incarcerated obliterates their identities as mothers, motherhood gives them a sense of self-worth to resist the derogatory effects of imprisonment (Moe & Ferraro, 2007). Engagement in parenting classes helps maintain mothers' mothering identity even if they have no adequate access to care for their children as per the expectations of motherhood (McMahon, 1995). Parenting programs have been known to have positive skills in terms of easing the transitional process to going home and resuming the parental role (Miller et al., 2014), although some criticism shows that the lessons remain theoretical when it comes to the practical side of mothering especially for women of color (Aiello, 2016).

Theoretical Framework

Although this study is an explorative one that could have otherwise used a grounded theory approach, there are existing theoretical explanations applicable to studying incarcerated mothers. Relevant theories to this study are intersectionality, pathways, and attachment theory.

1. Intersectionality theory

The war on drugs has had a different impact on people as it turned violently against women, particularly those of color, sex workers, or trans women (Birgin et al., 2022). The

intersectionality framework explains how disadvantaged groups encounter multiple facets of oppression based on variables such as gender, race, and class. Since these factors tend to overlap, they result in interconnected forms of disadvantages and depression (Crenshaw, 1991; Garcia-Hallett, 2022). In other words, the idea of intersectionality is that social variables are not independent of each other as they are often complex and intertwined (Beichner & Hagemann, 2016). For Garcia-Hallett, women of color experience multiple issues which exacerbate their chances of being oppressed by the U.S. patriarchal system. For her, the concept of mothering in the U.S. is derived from white middle-class notions of extensive motherwork, which is expensive and almost unattainable by most women of color. Coupled with the racial discrimination based on controlling images that depict women of color as 'bad mothers', the survival of women who risk losing their parental role is often criminalized (Garcia-Hallett, 2022). The odds are even higher for mothers who are in jail, as they struggle to maintain their mothering role from a carceral facility and even post incarceration, resuming parenting can be impossible or risky for unending jail candidature.

The initial development of this theory by Crenshaw (1989, 1991) was focused on Black American women whose challenges intersected on being "woman" and "black". For her, the challenge associated with politics of identity is that it overlooks differences that could otherwise explain disparities that transcend intragroup and intergroup differences (Crenshaw, 1991), thereby obliterating relevant responses to specific situations. Studies show that, unlike their White counterparts, women of color who are involved with the criminal justice system have lower chances of getting employment which exposes them to high risks of committing crimes for survival (Garcia-Hallett, 2022).

2. Pathways

Women go through different situations that implicate them with the criminal justice system and the Pathways theory is amongst individual theories on offending and it reveals certain trajectories of women (such as victimization at home) which are different from those of men (Barberet, 2014). Personal victimization in domestic pathways reveals the structural violence against women in the form of living wages and lack of social safety nets resulting from structural adjustment policies (Barberet, 2014). Amongst the theories developed to understand why women get implicated in crime are those that focus on economic marginalization, gender dynamics and pathways, which is an individual-level theory (Barberet, 2014).

The nature of crimes that get women to be jailed are mostly non-violent, and they are sometimes related to property (Cobbina-Dungy, 2022). Since the jail system tends to house people with shorter periods of confinement, it can be deduced that people housed there, especially women, are committing less dangerous crimes. Nonetheless, prior to their involvement with the criminal justice system, women typically encounter factors that increase their risks of committing a crime. These factors even continue or worsen during their time in correctional institutions.

In many cases, women get implicated in the criminal justice system for possessing drugs for personal use or being involved in non-violent yet highly invisible activities such as drug transportation for small financial gains (IDPC, 2021). Some women are coerced or influenced by male friends to get involved in drugs to fend for their upkeep and their children (Birgin et al., 2021). Women are disproportionately sentenced as they face systematic overuse of pre-trial detention (Birgin et al., 2022). In addition, they are denied alternatives to incarceration as well as a lack of gender-sensitive responses (Birgin et al., 2022).

3. Attachment theory

Attachment theorists emphasize the importance of long-lasting bonds emanating from early emotional attachment between children and their parents (Fraley & Shaver, 2021). Such bonds are considered to be motivational in achieving growth into adulthood. John Bowlby was the first attachment theorist who defined attachment as a psychologically everlasting connection between human beings (Bowlby, 1982). His studies focused more on anxiety and distress experienced by children when their relationship with primary caregivers was disrupted or permanently removed. The connectedness between a child and their primary care provider provided a closeness that made a child seek refuge from the latter when they were frightened to obtain care and comfort (Johnson, 2019). Survival of a child into adulthood was more likely for those children with an attachment to a primary caregiver (Poehlmann, 2005).

As an implication for this study, the absence or removal of a mother from their child disrupts the dependence that the children have on their mothers. It makes a child vulnerable to negative life experiences that inhibit their efforts to grow into adulthood. Therefore, the present study partly aims to understand the nature of the relationship between the mother and their child(ren) before the mother's incarceration.

Relevance of Theories to Current Study

The theories mentioned above were chosen based on their applicability to the current study. Although there could be other theories relevant to this research, the intersectionality theory best explains the disparities that expose women of color to more likelihood of being pulled into the criminal justice system. To complement how mothers end up in carceral facilities, the pathways theory gives highlights into differential experiences that derive them into conflict

with the law. Meanwhile, attachment theory helps explain the collateral damages of mother's imprisonment, especially the impact it has on their children.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODS

Current Focus

This study secondarily utilizes data that were previously gathered by Dr. Dawn Beichner-Thomas, in her study titled "Identifying Program Needs of Women Detainees in a Jail Environment." This study will thematically analyze the mothering experiences of women interviewed in the larger project. While most studies about incarcerated women are heavily skewed towards studying women in prison, studies of those in jail remain scant. Considering that incarceration of women continues to inhibit global efforts to end violence against women, it is even more critical to explore groups of women who face multiple victimizations, especially those mothers incarcerated in jail. Due to the restrictive nature of jail systems, it is imperative to learn of the mothering experiences of women in such facilities. To fully understand circumstances relating to mothering experiences, this study will look at mothering before and during incarceration.

As such, the study had three identifiable objectives: 1) learning of the nature of the mother-child relationship that existed before incarceration, 2) understanding the participants' perceptions of their relationships with their child(en), and 3) respondents' perceptions of the impact of incarceration on their children and how they intend to resume mothering following their release from jail. The primary researcher used a flexible yet guided interview approach to enable the extraction of the necessary information in their study. For the current study, focus was on questions that only related to mothering and children as a way to get answers to the research questions. To attain the intended objectives mentioned before, this chapter is structured with the following subsections: sample, data, analysis strategy, hypothesis, and Institutional Review Board (IRB) concerns

Sample

This study uses secondary data drawn from a population of jailed women in two Midwestern county jails. The primary study used a mixed methods design comprising qualitative (face-to-face interviews) and quantitative analyses (statistically analyzed data by the institutions). Dr. Beichner-Thomas (as the primary researcher) cleaned the dataset of all personal identifiers, such as women's names or other identifiable leads within the data. Participants who were detained and awaiting trial, as well as those serving a sentence in jail, were part of the needs assessment.

The recruitment of participants was done through distribution of flyers in women's housing areas. The flyers had information on what the study was about, Dr. Beichner-Thomas's biography and contact information, the times, and dates for interviews, and how to voluntarily sign up for the study. Confidentiality was observed in the face-to-face interviews by conducting the sessions in a private room, explaining confidentiality forms and subsequent signing of the forms by respondents. The interviews were audio recorded following permission from the women and were later transcribed, leaving out any possible identifiers of the participants. The average time for the interviews was two hours and it covered some of the mainly relevant aspects of the current study such as experiences before incarceration, childhood experiences, substance use, mental health issues and parenting. Given that the current study strictly focuses on mothering experiences, only the 21 women who were mothers were selected from the primary data to analyze their experiences. Thirteen of these were from one county jail and eight from another county jail.

Data

The present study used qualitative data from 21 transcribed interview scripts with mothers incarcerated in the two Midwestern county jails. The transcribed interview data were saved as Microsoft word documents which were uploaded on MAXQDA 2022 software for coding and analysis. The study used a hybrid coding approach which involves both deductive and inductive generation of codes. Deductive codes are created before looking into the data since they are based on pre-existing knowledge from literature surrounding issues affecting incarcerated women. To avoid missing out on emerging codes which may be new or unique, inductive coding is conducted during analysis of data. The qualitative analysis will follow Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2019) six phases of analysis. The phases involve familiarization with the data, coming up with codes, crafting initial themes, revisiting the themes, assigning names and definitions to the themes, and writing up. The next section describes the analysis strategy.

Analysis Strategy

Qualitative Analysis: The current study secondarily analyzed qualitative data that were primarily gathered to explore the needs of women jailed in two Midwestern carceral facilities. The primary researchers did the transcription of the data from its audio-recorded form into text format on Microsoft word. The qualitative analysis entails using Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2019) Reflexive Thematic Analysis (TA) approach, which involves applying the six steps discussed previously. This way of analysis was chosen based on its data-driven approach and flexibility to work on all types of data within different frameworks. This enables TA to answer a wide array of research questions, sheds light on unanticipated themes, and relies on 'organic' coding (Clarke & Braun, 2018).

Thematic analysis identifies themes and meaningful patterns in data related to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The researcher will identify 'shared meanings' as themes from the data. Using the MAXQDA 2022 software, the researcher will assign labels to data in summation as a word or short phrase. With MAXQDA, one can generate a code and also create a code memo. The interview scripts will be read several times before initial coding begins. Coding will involve initial line-by-line coding focused on individual responses before more synthesized and sorting of themes is done across the data. The most emerging themes across the data will be flagged, paying attention to factors such as race, age, and socioeconomic status. Apart from their objective experiences and choices, attention will also be paid to participants' interpretations those experiences. Analysis of the codes will involve reviewing all the codes created by generating code sets or categories. Such process entails putting together codes that relate to each other. Themes will then be identified from the categorized codes based on the code memos that were initially set up. Findings of this study would be generated in a way that can be replicated in future research because qualitative research gives rich and in-depth information that may be contextually relevant.

IRB Issues

The present study is a secondary analysis of deidentified data which therefore sets it free from human subjects' protections requirements. The original studies from which the data were drawn received approval from the Illinois State University Institutional Review Board (IRB 2013-0130). Issues of anonymity and confidentiality are not of concern in the current study. Nonetheless, future studies that involve primary data collection on this particular subject would require IRB approval - in compliance with ethical considerations for studies involving vulnerable human subjects.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

The rate at which women have been incarcerated over the past few decades has since outpaced that of their male counterparts, both in prisons and jail systems (Barberet, 2014). The majority of women who are incarcerated are mothers to children below the age of eighteen (The Sentencing Project, 2022). As women remain primary caregivers to young children (Garcia-Hallett, 2022), it leaves a lot to be desired on what happens to the mother-child relationships when they are separated by the criminal justice system. Whilst multiple studies have focused on women in prison, the current study explores the narratives of 21 mothers detained in two Midwestern county jails to learn about their parenting experiences. The current section unfolds the analyzed data from 21 scripts from in-depth interviews with the jailed mothers.

Description of Interview Sample

The sample comprised 21 mothers who were detained in two Midwestern county jails. For the current study, the participants were grouped together, and their personal information was deidentified by the primary researcher. Although the primary study focused on women in jails, this study only focused on those who were mothers. Table 1 highlights some of the characteristics of the sample. The names of the participants are not their real ones, pseudonyms were used to humanize the narratives of the participants.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Participants (N=21)

Pseudonym	**Age**	**Number of Children**	**Period in Jail**
Rachel	28	7	30
Kate	31	2	61
Josephine	24	1	38
Janet	54	3	30
Teyana	27	3	180
Gianni	41	3	1
Michelle	Missing	3	510
Diana	37	3	42
Winnet	22	2	Missing
Memphis	46	2	Missing
Caroline	23	1	Missing
Noelle	30	2	7
Gabrielle	26	2	30
Meghan	26	2	33
Anna	Missing	2	Missing
Tara	Missing	3	180
Maria	60	1	180
Daisy	53	2	60
Ella	29	2	45
Nancy	49	3	Missing
Vivian	29	6	42

The demographic characteristics of the participants were taken from official data and handed down for the current study in deidentified format. Some of the pieces from the official data, were however missing. Nonetheless, the Table 1 presents the available data whilst highlighting missing sections for certain participants. The most important and relevant information for the current study was their children, and this was evident in all the interview scripts.

The identified ages of the mothers ranged between 22 and 60 years and all of them were repeat offenders. The ages of their children ranged from 1 to 40 years. Consistent with prior research (The Sentencing Project, 2022), most of the children (29 of 43 or 67%) were minors,

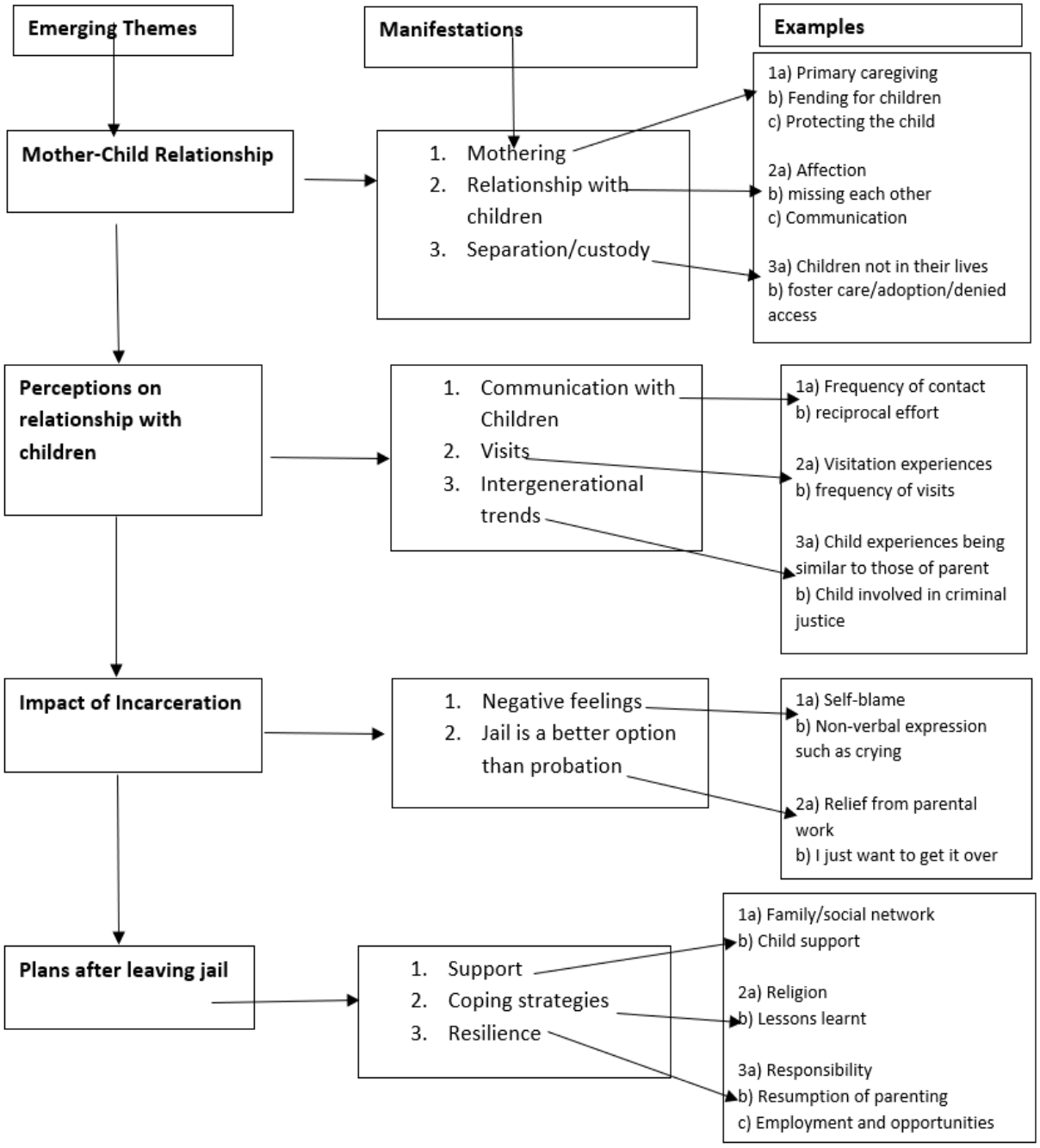
whose ages were below the age of 18. Meanwhile, 6 of the 21 mothers had children who were above 18 years of age, thereby classified as adults. On the other hand, 3 of the mothers - Caroline, Noelle and Winnet, did not mention the ages of their children leaving 12 mothers out of the 21 having children identified as young and below 18 years.

Qualitative Analysis

In order to gain in-depth understanding of the mothering experiences of women in jail, it was imperative to explore their narratives through a qualitative research design. This approach was carefully considered based on the research questions that needed to be answered. For data analysis, a hybrid coding system was used where codes were created prior to accessing the data and then after familiarization with data, new emerging codes were put in place to complement the pre-existing ones. This was done to enable both inductive and deductive understanding of the data. The analysis followed Clarke and Braun's (2018) steps of qualitative data analysis.

Four main themes emerged out of the data, mainly because they were centered on four research questions of the current study. The main themes were *Mother-Child Relationship, Perceptions on Relationship with Children, Impact of Incarceration and, Plans after leaving Jail.* Main themes have sub-themes underneath them. Typically, the most emerging codes from the respondents subsequently lead to most prominent themes. In the presentation of results, the themes are arranged for coherence and in line with the research questions, as such, the ordering of the themes were purely nominal and not based on how prominently it featured from the data. Therefore, the order of the themes does not resemble a rank of quantitative value or a qualitative weight over others. For analysis purposes, however, the frequency of the code or theme will be highlighted. The diagram below shows a mind map which presents the logic on how the themes were arranged as well as the relevant examples.

Fig1. Mind Map



Theme 1. Mother-Child Relationship

To gain understanding on how incarceration impacts the parental role of a mother, it is vital to get insight into the pre-existing nature of the mother-child relationship before the mother was incarcerated. It is understood that incarceration of a parent has negative impact on both the mother and the child. The following section will give insight of the issues raised during the interviews with the detained mothers. Three main sub-themes came out of the exploration of the data namely: *Mothering, Relationship with Children, and Separation/custody*.

Mothering

Being a mother is an identity given to a woman who biologically gave birth to a child. This identification is entirely biological, and it is on this notion that participants of the current study were identified. Perhaps it explains why women remain the only gender that can be 'mothers' regardless of how society is moving away from gendered roles of parenting. On the contrary, mothering is considerably a more empowering experience coupled with actions that a woman feels and defines as mothering and a composite part of this is motherwork. Motherwork refers to laborious nonpaid activities, engagements and care work that is associated with one being a mother (Garcia-Hallett, 2022).

Fourteen of the mothers (14 of 21 or 66%) were not in the daily lives of their children prior to incarceration. Some had separated from their children because their children were adults who were already living their lives without them. Meanwhile, since a lot of them were entangled in the criminal justice system, they have had their relatives or partners take custody of their children. Only a few cited losing their children to the authorities or to adoption by strangers. Although most of the mothers did not have their children at the time of incarceration, it was evident that they had a connection with their children based on their role as primary care

providers for their children prior to their involvement with the criminal justice system or before they had quarrels with their intimate partners. One of them said:

> *Like before I was like uhh… I'm a momma. You know, just gotta focus on these kids but… I have to be right in order for them to - you know what I'm saying? I have to be something for them to build off of or even look up to* ***[Rachel]***

Rachel believed that before anything, she was a mother. In this case, she put the role of motherwork ahead by highlighting some invisible work that she ought to do for the sake of her kids. In her view, she had a role in their lives which she interestingly does not identify in human form, but as 'something' for children to either build from or fall back to or both. Apart from the involvement of the criminal justice, Caroline even believed that she was a good mother:

> *Um, I like to think that I'm a good mother. I try my hardest, everything I do is for my son so. I say I'm a good parent.*

Even in difficult situations, a mother goes an extra mile to provide care for her children. Nancy whose son had cancer had to take care of her child without any financial assistance because she had a criminal record. This validates the idea of motherwork, where a mother is expected to voluntarily deliver some form of care and perform certain activities without compensation. She testified:

> *And I can't even get paid for taking care of him because of my forgeries.* ***[Nancy]***

Regardless of how most of the mothers were not staying with their children at the time of their incarceration, they remained confident that mothering was necessary for their children. It was evident from the interviews that their children were being taken care of by people within their social network such as estranged partners, siblings, and parents. Although the support system was intact for some women, they still emphasized their need to resume parenting post their release from jail. The role of a mother in the lives of children could not go unappreciated. Just as aptly put by Anna:

Yeah but, you know a mother can do more. ***[Anna]***

Relationship with Children

A mother is known to have affection for her child which then enables her to consistently maintain the love she has for the latter. Apart from being separated from their children, the incarcerated mothers strongly believed that they had cordial relationship with their children. Only Maria, Diana, and Janet outrightly stated that they had tenuous relationships with their children. For Maria, her son was 40 and he was an alcoholic going through a similar lifestyle that she experienced, and she expressed displeasure in his behavior. Meanwhile, Diana alleged that she was jailed because her 16-year-old daughter had falsely called police on her which is why she was giving up on her. She however mentioned that she would call her daughter and let her know that she loves her before shunning her out of her life. As for Janet whose three children were all adults, she claimed that they had abandoned her out of shame for her behavior. Nonetheless, the pre-existing bond between a mother and a child remains vital as one of the mothers mentioned:

> *Especially with women because we're so emotional. And you know we breast these children, so it's kinda like that bond. It's like we can't move on without knowing that we never had a kid. We can't live that way. That's gonna always in the back of our head, and you know I have a child out there whose waiting for me to come home, pretty much so.* ***[Anna]***

The jailed mothers expressed that they missed their children, and they had special relationships with them. For instance, they recalled stories about their children growing up and how they were ever present to answer and give guidance on some of the questions their children had as highlighted below:

> *But if they want… my sixteen-year-old wanted to smoke weed, she came to me and told me. She wanted to have sex, she came to me and told me. But they won't talk to anybody*

else, they come to me. That's scary. And now I'm here, I can't even talk to 'em. I haven't talked to my kids in a month and a half. So… ***[Diana]***

Oh, they keep me on my toes. They me want something more and different because my four-year-old is not an average four-year-old. And she talks to me like how I'm sitting here talking to you. She'll be like "you know mom, I want my own room. I don't want to keep laying on the couch so, I don't know what you have to do but, I need my own room." You know, and I just be like "okay, you know I have to get together," and she's like "okay," and she's just you know, every day make me more and more. Like you know, "okay, this is another day. Let me try and see if I can get two jobs." You know, you know and do something more because (inaudible) said "well mom, I need an outfit, and some shoes, and a purse." You know, and I'm like "this girl is on the floor." So like, I can imagine when her teens come what she is gonna say and, uh-oh, so she makes me wanna be better for them. And my two-year-old, oh my goodness. She is just everywhere, you know she a bundle of energy that I have never seen, but she is so smart and she's intelligent. Any you know, she knows her ABC's and she can count to 31 and, you know she is so smart. And um, it was just so funny how, because they haven't seen me and I told my dad "You know I'm about to get out so, bring them," and he brought them Saturday and my little baby she just smiled the whole time. She said" That's mommy, that's mommy, paw-paw! That's mommy!" and I'm like "Aww," and she just smiled the whole time. And she's like "I'm taking my coat off" and she took her coat and stuff off and I'm like "Okay, it time to go because I don't want her to think that she can stay." My oldest daughter, I had to tell her because she will quiz my dad to death. So I had to tell her like "I'm going to jail for 30 days," and she was like "Well, when are you coming back?" She just wanted to know everything, so. ***[Gabrielle]***

Separation/Custody

As previously highlighted, most of the jailed mothers (14 of 21 or 66%) were not with their children at the time of their incarceration. Part of the reason is that they were repeat offenders who occasionally went in and out of the lives of their children thereby having their children adopted or fostered by their relatives or partners. Meanwhile, others had drug issues which made them unsuitable to provide care for their children without having to rely on other people in their support networks. There were, however, some mothers who were struggling to have access to their children due to their estrangement from intimate partners. It is evident in their narratives that their partners were taking advantage of their situation to take custody of children and make the mothers suffer by denying them access to their children. Some of the mothers who were not able to access their children due to the involvement of intimate partners are quoted below:

> *Um, I don't get to see my kids. I know that was one of the questions that you asked. I don't get to see my kids, and that's because of my situation with my husband. You know we're actually in the process of getting a divorce, so he's not gonna bring them up here to see me because that's his way of getting revenge.* ***[Anna]***

> *ever since she made it to his house, he changed his phone number. His mom doesn't answer any of my texts or calls, I call and text her at least three times a week. Like can I please talk to my children? On Christmas, I texted them all and I was like, I just, I know, all I want for Christmas is to talk to my kids or Skype with them. I just wanna see them. I haven't talked to them in months and months.* ***[Noelle]***

Separation from children seemed to be one of the most prominent codes emerging from the data. Mothers whose children were below 18 particularly worried about missing out on developmental milestones of their children such as their first birthday, first day in school or a seasonal event like Christmas where families usually gather together. As parents, they presented efforts to play a role in their children's lives as they believed there was still chance to adequately show care and support for their children. Some mothers like Dianna and Caroline believed they had a special relationship with their young children, and it would be hard for the toddlers to acclimatize themselves with new people and environments. Caroline had this to say:

> *Um, the first week was really tough for me. Like I wasn't used to being away from my son. Like I don't even let him go spend at my sister's or my mom's house. I'm so attached to him. So that was hard, but after the first week it gets easier. You kinda get into the groove of things. And yeah so. It's been better.*

With them being incarcerated and children taken by authorities or their erstwhile partners, some mothers completely lost hope:

> *Me and him are fighting for them back. She had them for like a year. They've been gone almost 2 years, so we don't even know if we're gonna get them back or not……. I miss them, but you know what can I do?* ***[Winnet]***

> *I've already lost my kids* ***[Vivian]***

Vivian had six children whom she lost custody of when the authorities stepped in and they were scattered across foster care, her former partner, and step-grandfather. At the interview time, she only communicated with her son who was living with her step-grandfather. As for those who went through authorities to foster care, she had no idea where they had gone since she could not communicate with them. Similarly, those with her former partner were out of reach because she did not have cordial relationship with him. Clearly, if a mother would have her children taken into custody of those in support of her like in this case, Vivian's step-grandfather, she could have access to them, and it would help the relationship to exist between the mother and her children. In many cases, separation of children is a challenge and odds are even higher if the number of children increase. This is due to the fact that sometimes the mothers are not given ample time to plan for temporary separation from their children before they are detained in jail. More children require more time and more support, yet it is unlikely that they would be taken in under one roof because of their number.

Theme 2. Perceptions on Relationship with Children

This theme is closely related to the preceding one and the only difference is that it is based on the perspectives of the jailed mothers and how they interpret their circumstances with their children. It is possible that mothers perceive their relationships with children based on how they feel whilst they are incarcerated. Some of the indicators of how their relationships were intact included communication and visits between children and their mother. One other code which emanated from the interviews was a trend of recurring behavior across generations where mothers saw a repeated pattern of events that they once experienced growing up, being observable in their children's lives. From this perspective, mothers felt the need to advise their

children, to warn them of the consequences and in some instances, they felt it was too late for them to do anything about it.

Communication with Children

There were varying perceptions of communication as mentioned by the jailed mothers. Most of mothers had options to communicate with their children whilst they were incarcerated although a number of them did not think visits yielded the best experience, especially for their children. In that regard, they would not let their children come down to visit them in jail. Phone was a better option, yet they were deterred by the expenses associated to using that mode of communication. In those communications, young children and mothers missed each other. The children would often ask when the parents would return to them. Although jail time is not extremely long compared to prison time, the magnitude of separating a mother from a child had considerable detriment for the child.

> *Oh it will be at least like every other week, they're like 'when are you coming home Mommy, you didn't do nothing wrong' [sniffles]. Cause I didn't talk to them for the first four months, they're like 'Mommy we thought you were dead, we thought Daddy hurt you' I'm like 'oh, that broke my heart' [sniffles] you know? Cause my parents kept reassuring them, you know like 'Mommy's fine, she's just away right now' and what was it- two weeks ago? My mom walked in their room and she's like 'what are you guys doing?' cause they were packing a bag. They're like 'we're a packing a bag' like 'to go where?' they're like 'we're gonna go find Mommy and bring her home' I was like 'oh I'll call you back' you know? Cause I started crying again [sniffles].* ***[Michelle]***

Judging from Michelle's communication with her children, the young ones were missing their mother and they knew that their mother could be a victim of their father, and they were willing to search and bring her home. A mother typically protects her children because they are vulnerable, and it only made Michelle feel helpless when her young children tried to stand up for her. For mothers like Rachel, communication with the outside world was a challenge when one does not

have social and financial support. She evens puts across a suggestion to have a free phone call for inmates to appeal for help from the outside:

> *No besides the fact that I think they should really should, at least give like the inmates some type of a free phone call or something. So that someone could- like I haven't even, even if I wanted to ask someone to send me something like- just because I haven't been able to- to talk to somebody to be able to put some money on the phone, I can't even- you know? It's kinda hard.* ***[Rachel]***

Visits

None of the mothers thought that having their children visit them was the best experience. They did not like the experience of separating with children after seeing each other for a short time. For some mothers like Rachel, who had many children, they did not like the fact that they do not get to see all the children at once, as the regulations prohibit such large gathering, and it limited them to only two children per visit. She said:

> *but I have children. A lot of children at that. And so… like um even the times I've been here during visitation? I'm only allowed to see two children at a time. And with me having two sets of twins, so it was kinda- I'm like 'I wanna see this set and I wanna see this set' and you know? And I could only see like two children within- you know what I'm saying that time period so if like someone wants to come up and bring like my other children up, I can't see them or- you know visit with them. That was kind of a concern for me.* ***[Rachel]***

Meanwhile, some mothers raised concerns over lack of contact with children during visits. They expressed concern on how it may be traumatic for young children, especially getting to see their mothers through a glass:

> *He don't understand like why he couldn't touch me or why he couldn't hug me and…He didn't talk to me, you know.* ***[Tara]***

> *But, I had to see them behind a glass, but I wish it was more like a conference meeting where we can all be in a room. And I could be able to hug them and touch them and you know, talk to them. You know cause they have phones, but they're off. So it's kinda like you know you gotta say so much that you can. Then when you go back to your room, you wish you should've said this and that, and so you gotta prepared yourself emotionally for*

those type of settings, especially with your children. And you know, they don't understand what's going on. They just see you and wanna hug you. You know you trying to keep yourself strong and I'll break down and cry so. ***[Anna]***

You know, I don't know if she knows if I'm in jail, I prefer she doesn't know ***[Daisy]***

Intergenerational Trends

Some of the jailed mothers highlighted that their children were already entangled in behavior that made them susceptible to the criminal justice system. Some of the reasons for such intergenerational trends were based on recurrent social problems that the parents experienced whilst they were growing up such as rape, broken families leading to moving back and forth in different homes and drug and substance abuse. This is reflective of intersectional challenges that affect mothers who eventually end up implicated in the criminal justice system. These observed characteristics and experiences of their children made the mothers predict their children's possibility of future involvement with the criminal justice system. Since the mothers were largely absent from their children's lives, incarceration made it worse by inhibiting their ability to engage their children for parental guidance.

She's been to a place in Carle. You know, both my kids are suicidal, my girls are. So it's like I see exactly- they're following me. And it's horrible. Attitudes are the same, it's really not good. It's not good. ***[Diana]***

Right, I mean I tell him that you know "people are laughing at you, don't you understand that? You think you're doing silly stuff and people are just laughing at your cause you get ignorant when your drunk." His father was a very, very bad alcoholic as well, but um you know, without sounding like a hypocrite to him because I drank heavy at one time. ***[Maria]***

Right, Um everything that I have put my kids through has been a lesson. I never wanted to be my mother, but I became her. ***[Vivian]***

Theme 3. Impact of Incarceration

The current study partly sought to explore how jail stands in the way of parenting for detained mothers by assessing its impact on mothers and their children. Throughout the interviews, mothers' description of their feelings were coded along with non-verbal expressions which would create a sub-theme of *negative feelings*. The negative feelings mainly came up during their narration of events leading up to their incarceration. Meanwhile, another unexpected sub-theme emerged where jailed mothers expressed that *jail was a better alternative than probation*. Interestingly, the theme validated that motherwork was indeed laborious and it deserved a break. On the other hand, some mothers thought jail was the quickest way to get it over with so that they can return to their children without any strings attached to the criminal justice system.

Negative Feelings

Being jailed made some mothers feel hopeless, shameful, guilty and self-blame. These feelings were notably in relation to their role as mothers where some said they would have lost their ability to control their children by being involved in the criminal justice system. Meanwhile others were angry knowing that being involved with the criminal justice system would certainly make their motherwork harder, especially on providing for their children, getting employment, or even getting housing without having to rely on abusive partners. Most of the non-verbal expressions were in the form of crying, sniffling, sobbing, and taking deep sigh. These were interpreted as negative feelings where the mothers either tried to fight back their shame or felt stupid for being incarcerated thereby separating from their children. In some instances, the mothers were feeling helpless since most identified themselves as victims from earlier on in their lives and they experienced gendered violence through intimate partner violence, yet they ended

up incarcerated with no hope of getting out of the vicious cycle of systematic victimization. Some of the mothers expressed:

> *you gotta be able to blame yourself. [**Maria]***
>
> *It's not that I haven't hurt them, I have. I have somethings that I did, and I know that [sniffles] I know that I did that. [long pause filled with sniffling/crying] yeah.* ***[Janet]***
>
> *So… I choose this bad life and so now I got to accept the consequences...* ***[Gianni]***
>
> *It was part my fault because, I would fight him, or I don't know. I always felt like it was different,* ***[Ella]***

Jail is a better option than Probation

Since mothering takes a lot of unappreciated responsibility, perhaps that is why some jailed mothers thought they were at peace detached from their children and violent households. On the other hand, it is possible these mothers felt more at peace from state surveillance and violent partners since they were already out of the lives of their children. For some mothers, jail time gave them space to reflect and self-introspect so they may come out stronger and resilient. Most importantly, some mothers turned themselves into jail so they could get it over with. They believed being in jail was the only viable option to free themselves from the criminal justice system which constantly surveilled, limited and disrupted their role as mothers. Some of the mothers like Daisy were not able to afford bail so they had to give in. For Rachel who had two sets of twins all below the ages of three, reporting regularly to the police was cumbersome since her husband would not be responsible for children. She has hardships travelling up and down with children in her small van. Further, she was wary of authorities on her parenting when she also needed to work to provide for them. Here is what different mothers said:

> *so um came turned myself in. Um, to resolve this issue so that I could move forward and that I can see my children… So I made the choice to come turn myself in the following day, but I called and asked could he bring my children by my sisters, and he refused not*

to. So I kinda took that lost, but I wanted to come in here immediately to get this out the way. ***[Anna]***

and I accept the responsibility, and they gave me probation at first, and I was complying at first, but I end up getting pregnant and got emancipated. So I wasn't receiving my monthly stipend anymore. I lost my job. I was working at AFNI, and I was in a bad state so. I had to focus on getting stable for my son. That was my main focus, and while doing so I didn't comply with probation, I missed a few meetings and I didn't do my community work hours. ***[Caroline]***

Yeah. Oh no, I had an option. It was a $1000 bail. I'm a poor soul. I can't afford that. ***[Daisy]***

I think- I'm more- I'm happier now, this is finna be over with. Very happy. I'm not sad about me in being jail. ***[Gianni]***

And if I would've told them proper things while I was on probation I wouldn't be sitting here now but I chose to just spend the rest of my days in here rather than be on probation and have to report and all that for two more years because I got in trouble two years ago. I don't even use…. It leads you back to saying screw it. I said I'll just do my time and get it over with ***[Kate]***

now I have somewhere to stay and get my thoughts together, I'm eating. ***[Memphis]***

So being in here is like the best thing, you know. ***[Noelle]***

Umm it's actually been kinda refreshing. Uhh give me to think uh about my like decisions and what I can do better or… um, just basically just some time to myself that I need, you know um to better myself really. ***[Rachel]***

But I don't have any memories of him in here, you know what I'm saying? ***[Michelle]***

Theme 4. Plans after leaving Jail

Most of the participants were optimistic that they would eventually be reunited with their children at some point. In some cases where it was seemingly impossible for mothers to recover their children, optimism could have been a way of coping. Meanwhile, part of what was preoccupying them during their incarceration was fighting to recover their children from authorities, from partners and from relatives. Being in the position of detention, the mothers were

disadvantaged and disempowered from successfully fighting for custody of their children. Only one of the jailed mothers, Gianni was in transit to prison, but she was also hopeful she would eventually be reunited with her children after serving her time. In fact, she had been on the run from police for five years as she argued she was buying time to raise her children into adulthood before she could hand herself over. She succeeded in the plan and all her children were adults by the time she was interviewed. Gianni was proud that she taught her children well and she had raised gentlemen whom she has no doubt would be successful in future. Unlike her, none of her children had behavioral issues or tendency of being prone to the criminal justice system.

Support

Support was one of the most prominent themes from the interviewees. This entailed how they were able to have some people in their social networks take care of their children while they were incarcerated, payment of their communication bills, and any form of encouragement which would result in the mothers feeling strong and hopeful. For someone like Memphis, her support was in jail where she referred to some of her fellow inmates as sisters with whom she was comfortable in enduring her time. Support on the outside, made some mothers feel at peace knowing that their children were being taken care of whilst they were away. Meanwhile, for mothers like Janet who claimed to be abandoned by their children, lack of support was torture to them. Overall, any form of support in terms of child custody did not seem adequate for the incarcerated mothers as they felt they could do more for their children. Without doubt, however, support was necessary for the mothers to endure just like Anna said:

> *But if you always have that support, that can tell you can that gives you more hope, you know? That gives you motivation; you know so, like a support group. You know like a big brother, big sister. You know how they pretty much adopt them, you know? They become like friends, they become a big brother or big sister, a family member, you know.*

We don't really have any bad blood or anything, it's just, since foster care we just never really been around each other, so we don't really know how to act like sisters or be a family. ***[Caroline]***

From Caroline's perspective, the experience she had growing up in foster care where she was regularly separated from her biological sister took away the affection she would otherwise have with her sibling. Such form of separation at the hands of authorities is what some of the mothers thought would have a huge negative impact on children in future.

Coping Strategies

Since most of them were going through their different times and cases in jail, the mothers individually devised their own ways to cope with their situations. Some of these coping strategies would help pass the time, forget about abuse, and refresh their minds in anticipation of a better future with their children. Some turned to religion, reading, or reflecting on the lessons learnt from their experiences. Here are some of their own words on coping:

Sometimes [crying]. Sometimes, I read a couple pages, just long enough to get my mind somewhere else and then [sniffling and sobbing]… ***[Janet]***

And that's where I think getting into the Bible and everything helps because it clarifies you know it can help you clarify it. ***[Maria]***

except for God. You know? I thank God that I found him again should I say, or never left him. Have faith, strong faith. Since I been here, like that's only thing that's been holding me together. And like I literally have turned my life around, like I feel like I can make it now and I have the strength, more strength or you know what I'm saying, I don't feel like… I don't feel as weak as I did, just being… ***[Rachel]***

And it's just I don't like, I try not to, you see when I talk about my kids I get real emotional but I try not to think about my kids and think about home stuff to get me through it. Cause thing about the outside makes it harder in the inside. Um, ***[Noelle]***

I'm accepting who I am and I'm trying to be like "life's okay today." I was up in jail and still say "life is okay today." I'm gonna do whatever I can to put a smile on my face, put a smile on everybody else's face, and just keep moving cause there's really nothing I can do about it. ***[Winnet]***

Resilience

> *But anything a man can do, I can do better.* ***[Vivian]***

Here Vivian gives a strong empowered statement in light of how she has gained her sense of worth and knowing that gender barriers cannot stand in the way to achieve what she wants as a woman and mother.

The support and coping strategies that the jailed mothers had enabled them to develop some resilience against their situations. None of them expressed total doom or taking their own lives, instead, they remained hopeful. The mothers were eager to make a change in their lives, especially for their children. Their children remained central in their need to do better as mothers. In order to understand how they thought they could live after jail, the mothers revealed various plans and ways to address their adversities:

> *Yes, so I feel like I'm learning from experience. I'm getting wiser and gaining knowledge and I'm thankful that you decided to come here and just hear us out.* ***[Anna]***

> *A person who's very strong and smart, and very motivated and ambitious and has a lot of big dreams, that are going to be accomplished.* ***[Caroline]***

> *So… yep. My outlook is great, I'm looking at a whole new life and I cannot wait to start my new life. My new life, I'm ready. Get this little time out of my hands, and I'm ready. Family by my side, they gonna be by my side. They love, I know they love me, and that's all that matters. Go to prison, do my time, and come home to family… That's it.* ***[Gianni]***

> *But now I'm way smarter and way wiser than that, I don't- it don't even matter to me now. I mean it's gonna be hard but I'm not gonna let that stop me at all. At all. Like, I have to keep going, I have to make a way for my kids, you know?* ***[Rachel]***

> *I can say that it has given me the opportunity to go back to school. To get everything done that I need to, to prove to my kids that I have changed.* ***[Vivian]***

Although the mothers were evidently resilient, it remained hard to establish how they would navigate the employment industry with their checkered record of being involved in the criminal justice system. The employment hurdles would eventually derail their resilience and make it hard

for them to be the parents they desire to be for their children. Perhaps this would lead them back into the path to recidivism. A statement that sums up the experiences of the women in jail is beneath:

> *I don't have custody of my children. I'm fighting for that right now. I might lose my rights, I might not. But I'm accepting this you know as a mom, as a woman, as a victim, as a survivor.* ***[Winnet]***

Summary of Findings

After analyzing the data, it was established that jailed mothers struggled with parenting due to their involvement with the criminal justice system. Losing custody of their children to authorities and intimate partners made their experiences untenable. Some partners would take advantage of the women's carceral status to deny them access to children, which affects both the mothers and children. To most of the women who were interviewed, jail was the only option for them to quickly return to their children as parenting under surveillance was hard for them. Although the mothers relied on support to develop resilience and set plans for resuming parenting after leaving jail, their ability to provide for their children were diminished because of their criminal records. The jail situation made the mothers develop negative feelings about their parental experiences and they believed that their children were equally affected. The four main themes explored in the current study were *Mother-Child Relationship, Perceptions on Relationship with Children, Impact of Incarceration and, Plans after Leaving Jail.* The following chapter presents overlaps in findings, insights for future studies, way forward and conclusions.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The current study explored and analyzed the mothering experiences of women who were detained or incarcerated in two Midwestern county jails. The notion was to understand the collateral damages of maternal incarceration on families, with a view to inform possible policy changes that may help in reduction of the surging challenges of incarcerating mothers. The objectives of the study were to understand 1) the nature of the mother-child relationship that existed before incarceration, 2) the participants' perceptions of their relationships with their children, and 3) the respondents' perceptions of the impact of incarceration on their children, and 4) how the jailed mothers intended to resume mothering following their release from jail. In response to the four main research questions answered in the study, the themes that emerged were: *Mother-Child Relationship, Perceptions on Relationship with Children, Impact of Incarceration and, Plans after leaving Jail.* Unlike previous studies, the current study revealed that the majority of the jailed mothers were not in the lives of their children and that intergenerational trends that could implicate children with the criminal justice system were already observed by the incarcerated mothers.

Meanwhile, there were certain overlaps with existing literature which were revealed in the current study. Amongst these, were findings that the mothers were subjected to some form of victimization in their lives and most of them were incarcerated for drug and property-related crimes. In light of the findings, this chapter summarizes the study in connection to other studies that were carried out before, in highlighting novel themes, citing limitations and recommendations for future studies.

Overlaps with Prior Studies

Though not the primary focus of the research, one of the major overlaps found in the study is that incarcerated mothers have a history of abuse. The majority of them reported having been sexually abused by people whom they knew, such as neighbors, or those to whom they depended for survival. Major traumatic life events were common; many of the women recounted such experiences as being separated from their parents because of parental divorce or being raped. They testified to having witnessed violence, experienced neglect, and engaged in substance use while they were growing up. Such findings resonate with research conducted by Beichner and Rabe-Hemp (2014), which established that women who go on to offend have-in most cases- a history of victimization at some point in their lives such as gender-based violence, trauma, and dysfunctional family relationships. Childhood victimization experiences often increase the risks of female offending (Garcia-Hallet, 2019). A large number of incarcerated individuals have proven childhood traumatic challenges (Milavetz et al., 2021). Some of them grew up in an abusive household with a family member who was incarcerated or engaged in substance abuse (James & Glaze, 2006).

Some of the hardships that the incarcerated mothers encountered included being involved in abusive relationships which were even dangerous for their children to witness. One of the interviewed mothers was in jail because of killing her husband, whom she accused of violence as she claimed that she committed the crime in self-defense. Even her children would communicate with her over the phone insinuating that she could have probably been killed by their father. Another one of the mothers highlighted that she feared leaving her children in the custody of an abusive man. Such violent relationships had negative impact on their mothering experiences.

This confirms some form of dependence that women may have on certain men who can subject them to violence and abuse (Poehlmann, 2005; Beichner & Rabe-Hemp, 2016).

Perhaps emanating from the violence and abusive relationships, a considerable number of jailed mothers claimed that being in jail was better than being on probation or any form of state surveillance. Part of this sub-theme was on their experiences in violent relationships where their partners were unwilling to cooperate in parental roles thereby making the mothers have a difficult time complying with the sanctions of being under surveillance. Some women claimed they could not find freedom to balance between work, mothering and fulfilling obligations of probation. This is consistent with findings from a study by Phelps & Ruhland (2022), which highlights some of the difficulties that individuals under mass probation and community supervision encounter. Similarly confirmed by findings of the current study, certain women opt to turn themselves in to jail, as a way with which they can get over the challenges of parenting under state surveillance. Meaning, the women perceived that they had no better option to quickly earn their freedom and reclaim their children, than being in jail to serve their punishment, so they could one day walk out with no strings attached to the State. Even though most of the mothers did not have custody of their children prior to their commitment to jail, they were coping with the optimism that at some point, they could reclaim custody of their children. In that regard, most of the mothers were in a position of disadvantage to fight for the custody of their children, especially for those whose partners were denying them access to their children as a form of exerting control.

Emerging Issues

Apart from overlapping findings presented in the study, there were novel themes that emerged from analyzing the data. One of them was that most of the women who were incarcerated in jail were not in custody of their children before incarceration. This clearly shows that the jailed mothers had other intersectional challenges that affected their parenting experiences, before being involved with the criminal justice system. In fact, some of the mothers who had substance use addictions, claimed they went for considerable amounts of times without getting involved in drug habits when they became mothers. The women proved that mothering was a priority role for them once they started having children in their lives. On the other hand, the toxic relationships the women were involved in seemingly re-ignited the bad habits or set them on a roller-coaster for criminality. Knowing that being a mother was a central part of the women's identities some partners would take advantage to control the women by separating the children from their mothers, which subsequently has a traumatic and mental effect on the mothers. Involvement of a mother with the criminal justice system was being used by authorities and partners as a reason for a mother to lose custody of her children. Regardless of how some of the women had lost possibility of recovering contact with their children, they continue to cope believing that someday they may reclaim their motherhood and have custody of their children. For instance, here is what Vivian said:

> *To get everything done that I need to, to prove to my kids that I have changed. I know that it's only a matter of years before their eighteen and they're coming home. Um I explain to them before they left that "as soon as you turn 18, you can come home. I'm not gonna deny you that. I'm not gonna be that one." Um, I will even be willing, when they're 17 to pay for a lawyer to get them emancipated.*

The other emerging theme was that the mothers were already observing their life experiences being replayed in their children's lives. Some of the mothers observed that their

children had similar personality and attitudes like they had growing up. Such experience made the mothers worry and almost predict with certainty that their children would eventually be involved with the criminal justice system like they were. In such instances, the mothers clearly felt disempowered from guiding their children and providing parental guidance as they were incarcerated and lacking access to some of their children. Some of the mothers ostensibly knew what their children were lacking in their lives, and they believed that they could help to end the intergenerational trends if they were in the lives of their children.

One way that incarcerated mothers would maintain contact with their children was through visits, but based on data analysis for this study, visitation experiences were not considered the best of experiences by most of the mothers to young children. They thought contactless visits were traumatizing to children, while it created worry on part of the mother. As such, most of the mothers perceived that young children could not understand why they see their mothers through a glass as they called for skin-to-skin visits with their young children. Mothers with multiple children required more time and more space to have the ability to meet all the children in one visit, as a way to make the experience simulate a family environment. Separation from a mother could have lasting impact, regardless of how short it can be. That is why the mothers of numerous children wanted to afford all their children equal access and time to interact with them, hoping that it could help the children to bond amongst themselves.

Relevance to Theory

The current study highlighted three theories that were relevant to the current study to explain how incarcerated mothers are positioned vulnerably to the criminal justice system. The three theories complement each other in giving a holistic explanation to the extent of the problem examined in the study. The intersectionality perspective was developed by Crenshaw (1989;

1991) giving insights into overlapping disadvantages that certain individuals encounter resulting in an overall negative experience in their lives. From this perspective, indeed, the interviewed women had intersectional challenges such as history of abuse, drug issues, intimate-partner violence, criminal history, and loss of children custody, which all resembled multiple facets of their lives which made their mothering experiences difficult. The idea of intersectionality is that social variables are not independent of each other as they are often complex and intertwined (Beichner & Hagemann, 2016). Intersectional challenges are even high for mothers who are in jail, as they struggle to maintain their mothering role from a carceral facility and even post incarceration, resuming parenting can be impossible or risky for unending jail candidature.

Pathways theory is amongst individual theories on offending, and it reveals different trajectories that women encounter towards being implicated in the criminal justice. Such different experiences as reflected in the current study may include history of victimization, abusive relationships that can make someone susceptible to the criminal justice system. The theory explains why women get implicated in crime focusing on economic marginalization, gender dynamics and pathways, which is an individual-level theory (Barberet, 2014).

Finally, attachment theory would help to explain the importance of keeping a mother and her child together through its emphasis on the importance of long-lasting bonds emanating from early emotional attachment between children and their parents (Fraley & Shaver, 2021). John Bowlby (1982) claim that human beings have a psychologically everlasting connection between them. The current study revealed some aspects of attachment theory in the sense that the jailed mothers who spoke of bad experiences growing up in broken families were worried to see their children experiencing similar livelihood which made them sure to predict future implication in

criminal justice system for their children. They stressed the need to have an emotionally caring mother in one's life as a way of reducing future possibility of offending.

Strengths and Limitations

Strengths

The current study utilized qualitative research design to understand the narratives of the 21 jailed mothers who participated. Qualitative research design was necessary for answer the research questions about the mothering experiences of jailed women. Since data were collected through guided in-depth interviews, it is important that the participants had the flexibility to dwell on issues that related to their individual experiences. The thematic analysis of data was thorough as it followed Clarke and Braun (2018)'s six steps in Reflexive Thematic Analysis. The analysis strategy guided against loss of important themes and was aided by a mind map to assist in duplication of the process for future studies.

Limitations

Since the study utilized secondary data, the author was precluded from asking follow-up questions. It could have been necessary to get information on why most of the participants did not have custody of their children in the first place and to explore problems they were facing. Another limitation is that the study utilized data from two jails within one state whereas there is need to understand whether the results found were consistent with what some jailed mothers from other states experience.

Policy Implications

Although the majority of jailed mothers did not have custody of their children, others who were still in the lives of their children also risked losing custody of their children, due to their detention or incarceration. Being separated and locked away from their young children had negative impacts on the mother-child relationship. For the mother, it could lead to recidivism, trauma, and mental health issues, while it increases possibility of future criminality on part of the child. Subsequently, as witnessed in the current study, separating the child from their mother could lead to negative intergenerational patterns. Mothers who are incarcerated are disempowered from fighting for custody of their children whilst they are incarcerated. Some women identified jail as the shortest possible way to return to their children but some of them were jailed because they could not afford bail.

Failure to afford bail is a socio-economic issue. It may not be addressed through the criminal justice system. Perhaps for such mothers who are caught up at the intersection of low socio-economic status and criminality, ending cash bail could enable them to continue their mothering role. Ending cash bail as propounded by the Illinois SAFE-T Act can significantly reduce jail population and reunite families that could otherwise disintegrate and be fragmented further into correctional facilities. The SAFE-T Act aim at eliminating the cash bail system starting in 2023, after considerations that some people sat in jail because of their inability to afford bail, even as they had committed minor crimes whereas affluent people could pay for pre-trial release, even for serious offences. Since most incarcerated women commit minor crimes, the policy may have a positive impact on gender disparities within the criminal justice system

In such cases where a mother is incarcerated and she cannot not get pre-trial release, it could be important to make visits a better experience for both the mother and the child. This may

involve those who are convicted and sentenced to jails. Allowing mothers to be visited by a total number of their children at once, as well as allowing them to touch and have conversation could help in maintaining family bonds. Such visitation experience may keep the bond between a mother and her children intact while she serves her sentence.

Recommendations for Future Studies

In light of the limitations of the current study, future studies may need to focus on understanding some of the challenges that can lead women to losing custody of their children before they are incarcerated. Further, it could be interesting to learn how the mother-child separation affects children in their daily lives while their mothers are incarcerated. Experiences of children with incarcerated mothers can give a holistic picture of the problem of separating the mother from her children. Also, since the current study utilized data from one state, it is necessary to carryout similar studies in other states and understand the experiences of women from different settings.

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APPENDIX A: DR. BEICHNER-THOMAS' PRIMARY RESEARCH INTERVIEW GUIDE

Identifying Program Needs of Female Offenders in a Jail Environment

Interview Guide

Although the PIs will ask open-ended questions related to the topics outlined in the guide below, they will also give interviewees an opportunity to provide additional feedback about their needs and the environment she is currently in and identify other related subject matter that was not specifically addressed by the interviewer's questions. Also, the interview guide will vary based upon the woman's status with the jail (i.e., sentenced, awaiting sentencing). The primary topics are as follows:

[1] Explore what is the most important service or program that the respondent perceives to need.

[2] Explore participants' daily experiences (i.e., education, employment, relationships, parenting skills, support systems, physical/mental health, treatment programs, community resources) prior to incarceration.

[3] Develop an understanding of the participants' perceptions of their daily experiences (i.e. how does the respondent view their experiences prior to incarceration?)

[4] Explore participants' daily experiences during incarceration.

[5] Develop an understanding of the participants' perceptions of their experiences during incarceration.

[6] Explore participants' parenting experiences pre-incarceration (i.e., Were the children residing with participant? Was she the primary care provider? What was the nature of her relationship with the child(ren)?)

[7] Establish the nature (i.e., telephone, mail correspondence, face-to-face supervised visitation, overnight visitation) and frequency (i.e., daily, weekly, bi-monthly, monthly, biannually, annually) of communication between participant and child(ren).

[8] Develop an understanding of respondents' perceptions of the quality of the relationships with their child(ren) (i.e., Does the respondent believe that the relationship is one in which she can engage in meaningful parenting or does her confinement preclude her from having such a relationship with her child(ren)?)

[9] Understand the respondents' perceptions of the effects of incarceration on their child(ren) (i.e., Has the respondent observed any behavioral changes in her child(ren) since she has become incarcerated? What related concerns does she have with the child(ren)'s well being during this period of confinement?)

[10] Understand the respondents' perception of their incarceration (i.e., being a good mother, mothering from jail, role definition, disassociating from prisoner identity, self-transformation, self-blame, distinguishing themselves from other inmates and finding ways with their diminished capacity to provide active mothering).

[11] Explore and understand the respondents' release planning and preparation. (i.e., will the respondent return home, what are her support systems: does she have knowledge of community resources, is she willing to utilize resources, will she continue with treatment, will the respondent act as the primary care provider for her family/children, what types of support will her family provide to make the transition from jail to home)?