Young offenders as fathers: what works in parenting interventions?

Dr Katie Buston
Senior Investigator Scientist, MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit
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Overview

• What research evidence is there for effective parenting interventions for incarcerated male young offenders who are fathers?

• Current work with Barnardo’s and the Scottish Prison Service evaluating a parenting intervention within HMP YOI Polmont, Central Scotland: early results
Background

- Up to 1 in 4 YOs actual/expectant fathers
- Most desire to be ‘good fathers’
- Break the cycle of negative parenting practices
- **Prison is PRIME opportunity for intervention work:**
  - Time
  - Drink/drug free
  - Motivation to learn/change
Evidence?

- History of parenting interventions delivered to YOs in UK, but patchy/not sustained/little rigorous evaluation
- Boys and staff like interventions
- Probably short term knowledge gains and attitude change
- Promising, but little clear evidence of nature of effectiveness
Way forward?

- Evidence based approach would borrow ideas from parenting intervention lit generally, and limited evidence from intervention for older prisoners/work with younger fathers in community

- BUT young offender fathers have specific developmental, rehabilitative and contextual needs
  - Young and incarcerated: doubly disadvantaged
  - Separation from child/partner; resettlement issues
  - Prison delivery: opportunities and limitations

SO LEARN FROM OTHER EVIDENCE but need to be sensitive to particular needs of these young men
Barnardo’s Scotland: developing a parenting intervention for YOs

- Parenting finally on SPS agenda = FUNDS!
- 2014: Barnardo’s Scotland win SPS tender
- Two SPS parenting officers appointed
- Acknowledgement of best evidence based practice in similar areas: Parenting Matters in NI with adult father prisoners; Five to Thrive attachment based parenting work
- Barnardo’s facilitator initially works with SPS officers to ensure intervention compliance and meet training needs; long term sustainability
Barnardo’s parenting intervention

- 10 week course, one full day a week
- Separate one to one work
- Option to extend on completion with weekly half day drop ins
- Delivered by experienced Barnardo’s facilitator and SPS parenting officer (PO), plus outside guests for specific topics
- Approx 6-8 fathers
- Discussion, DVDs, worksheets, arts & crafts, quizzes, skills work; games:
  - Informal atmosphere; supportive relationships with POs
  - Three special (and extra) bonding visits facilitated by POs; one to one feedback on interaction with child
- End of programme ceremony attended by (ex)partner, child(ren), governor. Certificate, buffet!
How might it work: theory of change?

- **Content**
  - Facts e.g. around passive smoking
  - Opportunities for reflection/discussion
  - Skills based work

- **Sharing with other boys in similar situations, present & past lives**

- **Relationship with facilitators**
  - No prison hierachies/laws of jungle here
  - kind & sensitive relationship

- **Nurturing ethos**
  - Tea/coffee/biscuits in prison environment
  - Comfy bright room
  - ‘special’ e.g. certificate, visit from governor

- **Enhanced opportunities for contact with child/partner**
  - Focused one to one work: including visit feedback
Formative evaluation: early thoughts/findings: dads

Participation starts off patchy building to full house; boys requesting to repeat course/attend drop ins

Lots of expressions of appreciation and gratitude to facilitators: esp re nurturing elements

Boys generally very engaged in all elements, good reflection on previous weeks’ work
Formative evaluation, early thoughts/findings: facilitators

Challenges of working in prison environment: attitudes of hall/other staff; inflexible rules/routines

Facilitator discomfort with some crimes: “I am not having him on the course – no way I’m teaching kiddie fiddlers to be better kiddie fiddlers”

Some attitudes of boys difficult to constantly challenge: replicated by visitors on occasion
Conclusion

• Long way to go before we have established evidence on exactly WHAT works and HOW, especially in longer term

• Ultimately need to see improved outcomes for children from baby-young adulthood and beyond

• BUT boys like it, engage, recall and build as programme progresses, appear to reflect on own practices

• Dedicated staff committed to developing programme – SPS and Barnardo’s

• Commitment from SPS to sustainability; generally good fit with other institutional practices
Next steps

**Interview boys:**
- Likes/dislikes re programme
- Processes leading to knowledge/attitude/behaviour change
- Their own childhood and parenting practices and how programme encouraged them to reflect on that (or not)

- Feedback into development of programme with Barnardo’s and SPS
- More rigourous evaluation of ‘finalised’ programme
Thank You, any questions?