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Thinking Matters Symposium

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## Caregiver Incarceration, Stigma, & Mental Health

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# Caregiver Incarceration, Stigma, & Mental Health

## A Systematic Literature Review

Designed by Megan Madden, Meg West, Ramsey Wilson, & Brandon Pelletier of the MSW School of Social Work with Professor Rachel C. Casey, PhD.

### Abstract

Parental incarceration has adverse effects on children and young adults socially, physically, and mentally (Phillips et al., 2002). Caregivers with either past or present incarceration experiences increase adolescents' tendency to correlate behaviors with exposures to traumatic events (Kautz, 2017).

Our team conducted a systematic literature review to uncover previous research studies that focus on the young adult population to understand connections between the variables of stigma, caregiver incarceration, and mental health.

Over one hundred articles later, we were able to identify 23 previously conducted research studies that met inclusion criteria. In the end, the team's research yielded a lack of valid data relating to the research question. To date, the young adult population is lacking representation in research.

### Background

National estimates suggest that 2.3 percent of children and young adults have parents that are incarcerated (Mears & Siennick, 2015).

Research shows that adolescents who have a parent who is incarcerated can suffer from trauma-reactive behaviors, dysfunctional relationships, intergenerational crime, a decrease in school performance, and an increase in behavioral problems as well as cognitive thought processes (Kautz, 2017).

After reviewing the literature, it became apparent that there is a gap in research surrounding young adults.

### Methods

#### Inclusion Criteria

- Literature published between 2016-2021
- Young adults ages 18-29
- Individuals with a current or previously incarcerated parent(s)
- Studies conducted in the United States

#### Databases & Analysis

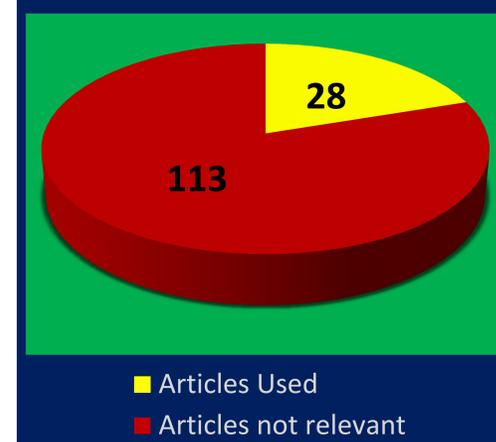
- Looked at 9 databases
  - Results came up with 100 articles
  - 23 fit the inclusion criteria
- Analyzed articles to find themes, similarities, and differences
  - Themes emerged around stigma, mental health, and incarcerated parents

\*see charts for more information

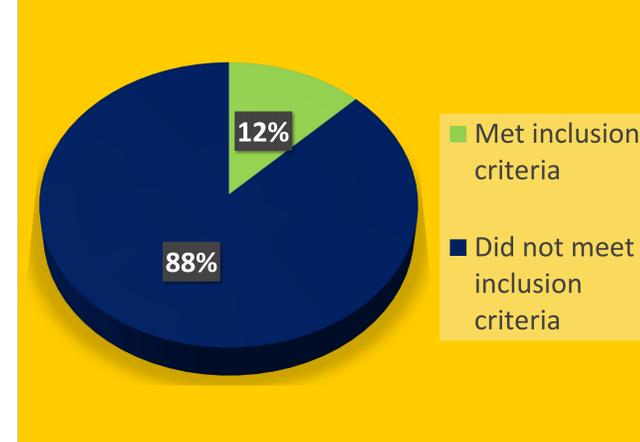
### Question Asked

“What is known about perceived stigma, mental health symptoms, and caregiver incarceration?”

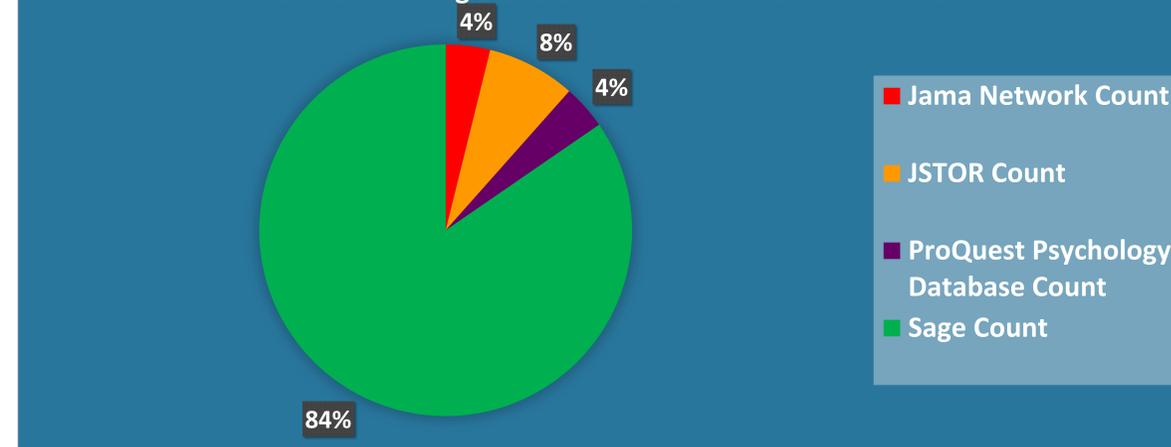
Articles Reviewed



Database Results out of 28 Total Used



Databases meeting inclusion criteria and their contribution



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### Results

#### Parental Incarceration

- The research confirmed that populations with incarcerated parents experience stigma as well as childhood adversity
- Research is limited for this population because the literature is focused on children rather than young adults

#### Stigma

- Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) specifically relate to having an incarcerated parent (Thomson, et al, 2020).
- Children of incarcerated individuals often experience social isolation from outside supports such as church groups, human services, communities, and schools.

#### Mental Health

- The literature identified several mental health issues including anti-social behaviors and thinking, anxiety, depression, and trauma.
- These types of experiences put a young adult at a higher risk to use drugs and break the law. Changing the family structure and putting a financial strain on the family (Leung, D.Y.L, et al, 2020).

### Discussion

- **Situating of the Findings in the Literature**  
The research confirmed that populations with incarcerated parents experience stigma as well childhood adversity.

- **Implications for Practice**  
Family therapy suggested so that young adults have communication with incarcerated parent. Getting the family back together once the parent has been released.

- **Implications for Future Research**  
Look at emerging adult populations and how parental incarceration has impacted their mental health and stigma experiences.

- **Limitations of the Research Methods**  
Initially was a questionnaire but limitations faced due to COVID, and researching a vulnerable population.