Isis Rising Pregnancy and Parenting Support Group in Prison: 
The Women Served

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Introduction

• Since 1991, the number of incarcerated mothers has more than doubled.¹
• It is estimated that 6-10% of women are pregnant when they enter prison.¹
• Incarcerated women are at risk for numerous physical (e.g., HIV, hepatitis) and mental (e.g., depression, substance abuse) health concerns.²
• In 2007, an estimated 1.7 million children had a parent currently incarcerated in state or federal prison.³
• Children with incarcerated parents often face challenges, such as social stigma, difficulties forming and maintaining attachments with their incarcerated parents, and behavior problems.³

Program

• Isis Rising is a unique program serving incarcerated women by offering parenting support to women with young children, in addition to doula support for pregnant women.
• The program aims to:
  - Empower women in their birth and parenting experiences.
  - Support mothers’ relationships with their children during incarceration
• The program consists of two components:
  1. New Moms Group
     - Available to pregnant women, women who have given birth in the previous year, or women who are parenting young children under 5 years old.
     - Weekly, 2-hour sessions facilitated by trained doulas that teach a 12-week curriculum designed to provide social and emotional support, and increase women’s knowledge about pregnancy and parenting.
  2. Doula Program
     - Pregnant women are matched with a doula and meet with them at least once per month. Meetings involve prenatal education, birth planning, and emotional support.
     - A doula meets the mother at the hospital and provides support during labor and delivery, and the post-partum period. The doula is also present for support when the mother is separated from her infant.

Participants

• Program participants ranged in age from 19 to 40 years old (M = 27.7, SD = 5.5 years).
• Women reported completing between 4 and 16 years of education (M = 11.4, SD = 1.7 years) with a majority of women (63.6%) completing at least 12 years of schooling.
• Compared to the overall inmate population at the prison, Isis Rising participants were more likely to be from racial minority groups.

Life History

• Life Experiences of Program Participants
  - Experienced Abuse as Child
  - Raised by Someone Other than Biological Parent (e.g., grandparent)
  - Ever Placed in Foster Care
  - Experienced Domestic Violence as Adult

  - 17 (36.2%) mothers were raised by someone other than a biological parent. 14 (29.8%) were in foster care as children.
  - 49% of women experienced abuse as a child; 64% experienced domestic violence in adulthood.
  - Participants’ current sentences ranged from 3 to 62 months with an average sentence of approximately a year and a half (M = 18.3 months).

Implications

• Despite their widespread existence, there are limited data on prison-based parenting programs.
• Future research should utilize self-report measures and substantiated cases of adverse childhood experiences. By using multiple methods of data collection, researchers will be able to have a more complete and accurate understanding of incarcerated women’s life histories. With this knowledge, programs can be modified to target women’s specific experiences and needs.
• The data provide a picture of who the program serves and women’s unique needs, while building a foundation for future research on prison-based programs specifically for incarcerated mothers.

Parenting Experiences

• Pregnancy Status Among Isis Rising Participants
  - 18 of the 47 women participating in Isis Rising were pregnant.
  - At the time of their participation, women had between zero (i.e., pregnant with first child) and nine other children (M = 2.8).

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