

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

Leah Schillmoeller¹, Erin Casey¹, Rebecca Shlafer, Ph.D.²

¹Institute of Child Development, ²Department of Pediatrics, University of Minnesota

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

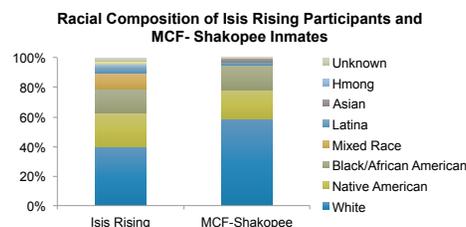
- Isis Rising** is a unique program serving incarcerated women by offering parenting support to women with young children, in addition to doula support for pregnant women.



- 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:
 - 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.
 - 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.

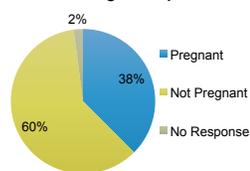


Number of Participants by Session

Quarter	Year	New Moms Group	Doula Program
4	2011	16	10
1	2012	8	3
2	2012	8	1
3	2012	8	2
4	2012	7	2
		47	18

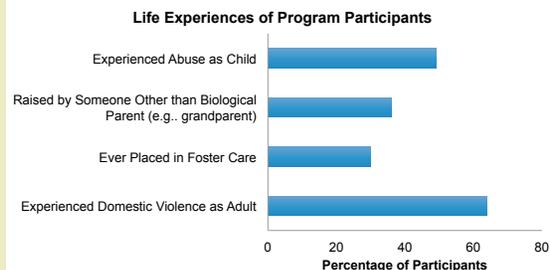
Parenting Experiences

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 ($M = 2.8$).

Life History



- 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.

Acknowledgments

Research reported in this publication was supported by the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences of the National Institutes of Health Award Number UL1TR000114. This content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institute of Health. This project was made possible in large part by the willingness of women incarcerated at MCF-Shakopee, Minnesota DOC Staff, and the doulas' effort in facilitating groups and supporting incarcerated women during their pregnancies and parenthood.

References

- Maruschak, L. M., Glaze, L. E., & Mumola, C. J. (2011). Incarcerated parents and their children: Findings from the Bureau of Justice Statistics. In M. Eddy & J. Poehlmann (Eds.), *Children of Incarcerated Parents: A Handbook for Researchers and Practitioners*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press.
- Fazel, S., & Baillargeon, J. (2011). The health of prisoners. *The Lancet*, 377 (9769), 956-965.
- Eddy, M. J., & Poehlmann, J. (2010). *Children of Incarcerated Parents: A Handbook for Researchers and Practitioners*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press.