

Isis Rising: A Prison Doula Program for Pregnant and Parenting Inmates



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Background

- The incarceration rate among women is increasing faster than that of men.¹ Since 1991, the number of incarcerated women in the US has more than doubled.² More than 200,000 women are currently incarcerated.³
- The majority (61%) of incarcerated women are mothers and between 6-10% of incarcerated women are pregnant when they enter prison.⁴⁻⁵
- Maternal incarceration impacts millions of children. Between 1991-2007, the number of children with an incarcerated mother increased by 131%.⁴
- Many of mothers will return to a caregiving role after their release from prison. Currently, 38 states offer parenting classes for incarcerated mothers.⁶ However, very few of the existing parenting programs have been systematically evaluated.

Purpose

We examined the effects of a 12-week prison-based program on incarcerated mothers' self-reported parenting confidence, knowledge, stress, support received from prison staff and other inmates, and contact with their children.

Isis Rising Program

- Isis Rising is a pregnancy and parenting support program offered at the women's prison in Shakopee, Minnesota.
- The program is comprised of two components:
 - Doula support for women who give birth while incarcerated
 - New Moms Group for pregnant & parenting women
- Pregnant women and women with children under the age of 5 are referred by their case manager when they enter the prison
- Participation is voluntary
- 12, weekly sessions facilitated by doulas (*non-medical labor attendants*)
- The focus of the current study is on women in the New Moms Group.

Methods

Participants

Data were collected from 39 mothers incarcerated at Minnesota Correctional Facility (MCF) – Shakopee who participated in the New Moms Group between April 2011 and Dec. 2012. Women were between 19 and 40 years old ($M = 28.05$, $SD = 5.60$). A majority of women self-identified as white (44%), 20% as Native American, 15% African American, 13% multi-racial, 5% Latina, and 3% Hmong.

Procedure and Measures

Mothers completed an Initial Survey at the beginning of the 12-week program. The Initial Survey contained Likert-type and open-ended questions about parenting and contact with children. Mothers completed a similar Final Survey at the conclusion of the program.

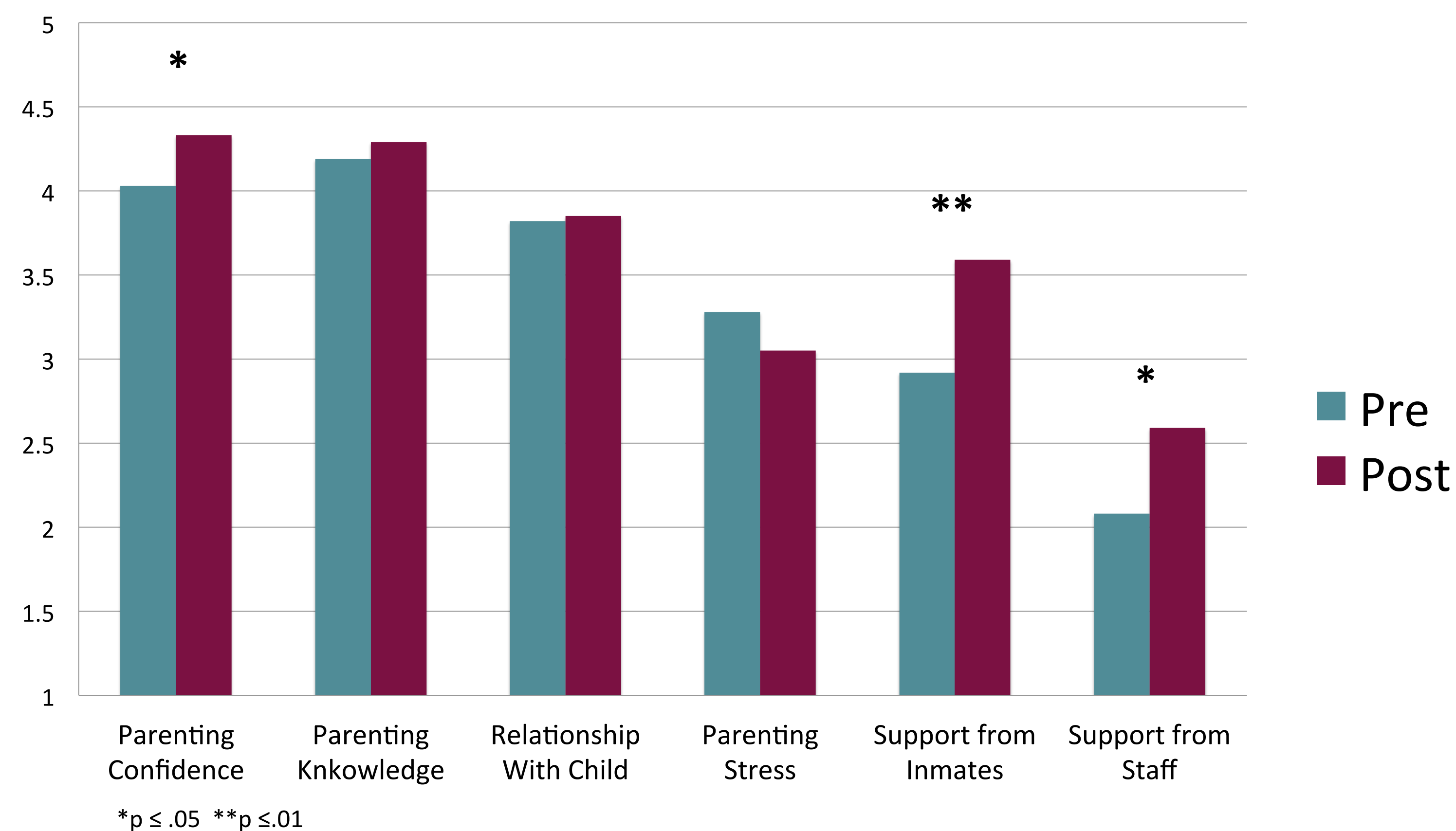
Women indicated responses to the following questions on a 5-point Likert scale (1=not confident, 5=very confident):

- Rate your confidence as a parent
- Rate your level of parenting knowledge
- Rate the level of stress related to being a parent
- Rate the support you have received from other parenting inmates
- Rate the support you have gotten from staff at Shakopee

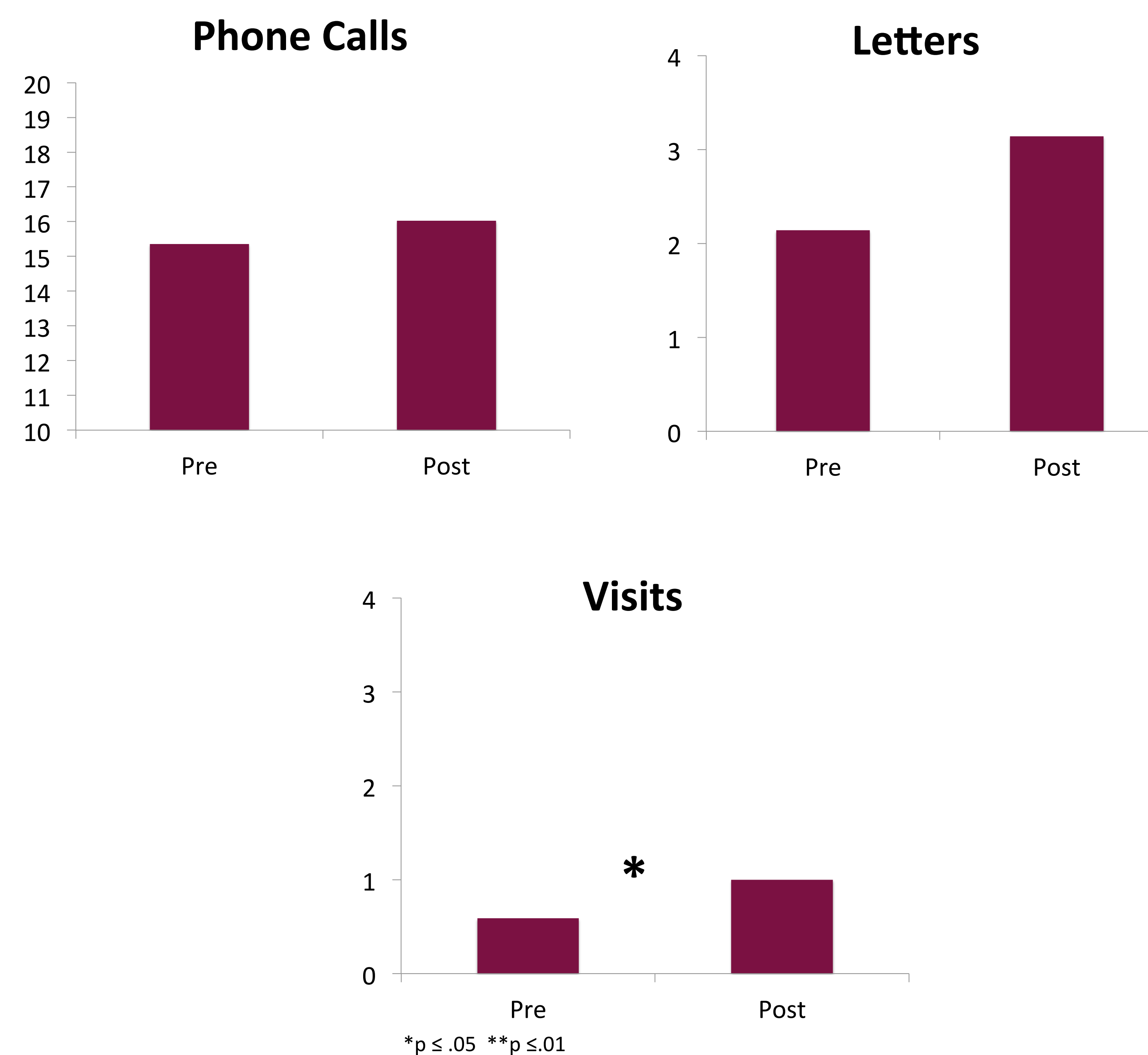
Women also reported the number of letters, phone calls, and in-person visits they had with their children in the previous month.

Results

Observed Differences in Women's Responses to Parenting Survey Questions



Contact with Children



Discussion

- At the end of the 12-week program, women reported significantly more confidence as a parent, as well as increased support from other incarcerated mothers and prison staff.
- The increase in women's confidence as parents and the support gained from other women and staff by participating in the New Moms Group can be invaluable, as women in prison are among the most vulnerable women in society.
- In addition to providing support and parent education, Isis Rising aims to support mothers' relationships with their children. The program appears successful to this end, as mothers reported significantly more visits with their children in the past month. This increase of in-person contact between mothers and children may be particularly important in maintaining mother-child relationships throughout incarceration. The maintenance of these relationships is important as many mothers will return to parenting after their release.

Limitations

- Data were collected from a small sample of women in a single prison, limiting generalizability.
- Data rely solely on women's self-report. Future research should include objective measures of women's behavior and interactions with their children.
- Data were not collected from children or their current caregivers. Future work should incorporate data from multiple informants.
- Absence of a control group allows for examination of within group differences. Future research should compare changes in women who participate in Isis Rising with women who do not.

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