

Parenting programs in jail could be positive for mothers, children

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Mothers in jail would benefit from participation in parenting programs, which could help their children avoid negative outcomes down the road, say researchers at the University of Michigan School of Public Health Prevention Research Center.

Over the last two decades increasing numbers of women have been incarcerated, leaving young [children](#) without their primary caregiver, according to the U-M researchers, who studied incarcerated women in Flint, Mich.

These women reported stress with parenting in the first place but found increased difficulty trying to cope with raising children while behind bars. Parenting programs can be found in prisons, yet even those are few and far between, but they are not offered in jails, the researchers say.

The U-M team used an existing parenting intervention, the Strengthening Families Program, and adapted it for the jail setting. Working with a community-based agency in Flint called Motherly Intercession, agency Director Shirley Cochran and U-M's Alison Miller implemented the pilot program in the Genesee County jail. The Parenting While Incarcerated program began with 45 mothers, ages 21-48, but because of the transient nature of the jail population, slightly more than half completed the program.

"Mothers were very enthusiastic about the opportunity to participate in the program. It was a chance to focus on their child in a positive way

while they were incarcerated," said Miller, an assistant research professor in the School of Public Health's Department of Health Behavior and Health Education.

"While incarcerated, it is common for women in particular to be far from their families, and thus, visitation and connection with children becomes much more difficult."

Women in the program were most interested in discussing effective communication, understanding how children manage stress, finances, drug and alcohol use, self-care and stress reduction, the study showed. Following the [parenting program](#), the researchers found that mothers were less in favor of corporal punishment.

"The parent-child relationship is critically important for healthy child development, which is important in preventing negative outcomes for the next generation," Miller said. "This relationship is also a potentially powerful motivator for change for the parent.

"If jailed parents have the opportunity to learn not only specific [parenting skills](#), but also new strategies for self-care and stress management, they may be able to better cope with the stressors outside the jail setting."

The study, "Parenting While Incarcerated: Tailoring the Strengthening the Families Program for Use with Jailed Mothers" was published in the Children and Youth Services Review.

Provided by University of Michigan

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