



YOUNG FATHERS IN JAIL

Associations Between Father Experiences, Father-Child Relationships and Community Stability

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JUNE 2020



INSTITUTE FOR JUSTICE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT
FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY • COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORK • IJRD.CSW.FSU.EDU

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Abstract: Research on paternal incarceration has paid less attention to young fathers incarcerated in pretrial jail settings. This study describes the characteristics of a sample of 103 jailed fathers aged 18 to 25 and explores associations between father experiences, father–child relationships, behavioral health factors, and recidivism. Results show jailed young fathers have several risk factors as well as strengths. Their father–child relationship is positively associated with training on fathering skills, employment experiences, and self-efficacy, and negatively associated with incarceration history. Employment is the only variable that explains the differences in recidivism. Implications for a future research agenda are discussed.

Keywords: fathers, jail, incarceration, characteristics, father–child relationship, recidivism

1. Introduction

Fatherhood is common among incarcerated individuals. More than half of incarcerated individuals in state and federal prisons in the U.S. have children under age 18 and more than 90% of these incarcerated parents are fathers (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010). Despite a growing base of literature on fathers in the general population (e.g., Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Carlson & Magnuson, 2011; see Shafer & Bellamy, 2016) and on paternal incarceration (e.g., Curtis, 2011; Haskins et al., 2018; Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2017; Roxburgh & Fitch, 2014; Schwartz-Soicher et al., 2011), little is known about fathers incarcerated in jails, particularly the young fathers. The reasons are threefold.

First, previous research has focused more on convicted fathers in prisons than fathers in jails, probably due to the transitional nature of jail settings that bring more difficulties to

researchers in recruiting, maintaining, and tracking study participants. Prisons are administered by states or the federal government and typically hold incarcerated individuals with sentences of more than 1 year (Kaeble & Glaze, 2016). Jails are often run by local law enforcement and are primarily comprised of pretrial detainees or otherwise convicted individuals with short stays (Zeng, 2020). Compared to prisons which have a relatively stable environment but are often located far away from communities, jails are less likely to have programming supports for individuals, the release dates for individuals are much less predictable, but individuals have opportunities to stay connected to families. These contextual features imply that fathers in jail may have disruptions from their children and families that differ from fathers in prison.

Second, there has been more research on the child and maternal outcomes as a result of paternal incarceration (e.g., Arditti et al., 2003; Geller et al., 2011; Haskins et al., 2018; Turney et al., 2017) while less research has been conducted on the incarcerated fathers themselves, such as how they manage their dual identity as an incarcerated individual and a father (e.g., Tripp, 2009) and what challenges they may face both in and out of jail (e.g., Freudenberg et al., 2007; Lindquist, 2000), though the answers to these questions have important intervention implications to incarcerated fathers.

Third, among the few studies that focus on fathers in jail, the ages of participants range from 18 to 59 but the studies do not address specific age periods (e.g., Modecki & Wilson, 2009; Spjeldnes et al., 2015; Tripp, 2009; Turney et al., 2017). However, incarcerated young fathers likely have special characteristics and service needs compared to older ones in terms of readiness for fatherhood, frequency of father–child contact while being incarcerated, risk behaviors, and mental health issues (Buston, 2010; Galardi et al., 2015; Ladlow & Neale, 2016; Weinman et al., 2005).

In light of the limited understanding of young fathers incarcerated in jails, this study describes the experiences of jailed young fathers and explores associations with father–child

relationships and factors that influence community stability such as employment, fathers' behavioral health factors, and recidivism. The study is based on the framework of Stryker's (1987) and Burke's (2006) identity theories. Jailed young fathers have dual identity as an incarcerated individual and as a father. Individuals' identity as an incarcerated individual, in addition to environmental factors, may disrupt establishing an identity as a parent as well as disrupt their experiences with community stability (Burke, 2006; Stryker, 1987). Overall, the purpose of the study is to build on current knowledge on jailed young fathers and provide evidence that may inform policy and program shifts that positively support their reintegration into families and communities.

2. Literature Review

2.1 General Profile of Incarcerated Fathers

According to Glaze and Maruschak (2010), incarcerated fathers accounted for 49% of incarcerated individuals in state and federal prisons in 2007. More than half of fathers in prison had one or more prior incarcerations. For fathers in state prisons they were a source of support prior to incarceration: 35.5% lived with one of their children in the month before arrest; about 54% fathers were primary financial supporters to their children. Both national statistics and primary studies on small samples of fathers in prison indicate that this group has relatively low education, low income, high rates of substance abuse and mental/behavioral problems, experiences of violence and traumatic events, and multiple incarcerations (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010; Kjellstrand et al., 2012).

Although there is no official count on fathers incarcerated in jail, an estimate in 2002 show 66.2% of people in jail are parents and 86.4% of jailed parents are fathers (McMillen, 2012). In general, jailed fathers also have a high prevalence of substance abuse, with marijuana the most commonly used drug (Bronson et al., 2017), have high recidivism rate, and face multiple health and social problems (Freudenberg et al., 2007). Small sample studies show that

among jailed fathers, only a small number finish high school, and they often have several prior incarcerations (Modecki & Wilson, 2009).

Research on incarcerated fathers indicate that these men have risk characteristics that differ from the national general population in education, socioeconomic status, and behavioral characteristics (Modecki & Wilson, 2009). Incarcerated young fathers have been described as having multiple competing and challenging identities including early entry into parenthood, criminal history, disadvantaged background, and behavioral and mental problems that may prevent them from being stable fathers (Ladlow & Neale, 2016. p. 114). Although there are no direct national statistics on recidivism rates among incarcerated fathers, the potential risk of recidivism among incarcerated fathers could be high as this group shares many characteristics, such as less education, criminal history, unemployment, substance abuse, and younger age, that are known to associate with higher recidivism rates (Alper et al., 2018; Luther et al., 2011; Robertson et al., 2016; Spjeldnes et al., 2012). In recent years, researchers have called for a switch from the “risk framework” to a “redemption approach” that emphasizes the construction of positive identities of young fathers with incarceration histories in an effort to encourage positive fatherhood and improve community stability post-release (Ladlow & Neale, 2016. p. 114).

2.2 Parental Status and Dual Identity

Parenthood can bring incarcerated men both challenges and opportunities. Compared to incarcerated nonparents, incarcerated parents have a higher level of distress and anger associated with child living arrangements and child contact (Roxburgh & Fitch, 2014). Incarcerated fathers often experience emotional stress related to fatherhood and express concerns about the loss of father involvement (Arditti et al., 2003; Hairston, 1998). Parental status is positively associated with hostility among fathers in jail (Lindquist, 2000) and prison (Roxburgh & Fitch, 2014).

Most incarcerated fathers value their paternal identity and try hard to be good parents (Hairston, 1998; Kazura, 2001). A qualitative study conducted by Tripp (2009) find that jailed fathers have a strong commitment to their paternal identity and use diverse strategies to minimize their connection with their “inmate” identity and to sustain their father identity. For example, they discourage visits from their children so children do not see them as “inmates”, often use “turning point narratives” that frame the current incarceration as “the last time” and as a turning point towards improved selves and better fathers, and describe how their father identity shaped decisions they made to seek help in the incarceration process (p. 38).

2.3 Father–child Relationship among Incarcerated Fathers

The father–child relationship has important implications for both incarcerated fathers and their children. For incarcerated fathers, a self-perception of poor fathering role and father–child relationship is associated with higher risk of depression (Hairston, 1998; Swanson et al., 2013); conversely, a perception of a good father–child relationship is associated with an estimated higher level of social support from all sources including family, friends, and significant others (Swanson et al., 2012). Healthy father–child relationships have positive effects on incarcerated fathers during incarceration and after release (Hairston, 2007; Swanson et al., 2013) and are associated with positive child outcomes despite the incarceration context (Kazura, 2001; Poehlmann et al., 2010). Incarcerated fathers who have closer relationships with their children before and during incarceration are more likely to have higher levels of father involvement, more weekly work hours, and lower recidivism rate after release (Visher et al., 2013).

Multiple factors, including institutional policies and family circumstances in terms of children’s attitude and children’s mother’s attitude, may influence incarcerated fathers’ relationship with their children (Swanson et al., 2013). Moreover, the experience and characteristics of incarcerated fathers play a role in their father–child relationship. Charles et al. (2018) found that fathers’ criminal and antisocial behavior was associated with lower levels of

father involvement when fathers had low-quality relationships with their male relatives. Galardi et al. (2015) suggested that incarcerated fathers with more adverse childhood experiences had less contact with their children while incarcerated, and incarcerated fathers' age, education, marriage status, children's age, and fathers' commitment to children all influenced their frequency of contact with children. One study found that fathers with higher level of education and fewer incarceration experiences were more likely to have responsive parenting styles which were more likely to promote stronger father-child relationships, while fathers with lower level of education and more incarceration episodes were more likely to adopt restrictive parenting styles (Modecki & Wilson, 2009).

3. Current Study

3.1 Theoretical Framework

Our study is informed by theoretical perspectives of Stryker's (1987) and Burke's (2006) identity theories that could be used to explain the formation and development of paternal identity. According to Stryker, individuals have multiple identities organized in hierarchy and behave in ways that reflect social expectations of the identity ranking highest in the hierarchy. This process involves the internalization of social expectations related to the major identity and the manifestation in behaviors according with the expectations (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; see literature review of Peled et al., 2012). Applying identity theory to the formation of paternal identity, "paternal identity emerges from how fathers internalize the roles they are expected to fulfill" (Peled et al., 2012, p. 894). Namely, fathers internalize the social expectations of fathering roles in constructing paternal identity and conduct fathering behaviors according to the salience of paternal identity in their identity hierarchy. Moreover, fathers' perception of fatherhood is a developmental process influenced by fathers' individual experience as well as changes in child development, family crises, and historical shifts in the society (Palkovitz &

Palm, 2009). Incarceration can disrupt the ability for young fathers to form a positive fathering identity.

Identity theory shows the social expectations of fathering as a primary role is essential in forming paternal identity. Lamb and colleagues (1985, 1987) presented the fathering role as consisting of three dimensions: (1) interaction or engagement with the child; (2) accessibility or father's availability; (3) responsibility or father's duties, including caretaking, financial contribution, and future planning for child. Financial support was once identified as a main fathering role but in recent years there has been a trend that requires a change of fathering from financial providers to fathers who are expected to undertake more daily physical and emotional child care tasks (Buchler et al., 2017; Charles et al., 2018; McGill, 2014).

In this study, we chose father–child relationship as an access point to learn more about the young fathers in jail because, as suggested by previous research, father–child relationship has important implications for incarcerated fathers' community stability in terms of their behavioral and mental health, perception of social support, postrelease reintegration, and recidivism. Also, based on identity theories and related research findings, it appears that incarcerated fathers' perception of father–child relationship is an important indicator of their internalization of the socially expected fathering role, and thus provides understanding about how they construct their paternal identity. By exploring what characteristics of incarcerated fathers are associated with their father–child relationships, the field may better identify the individual factors that contribute to the formation and development of their paternal identity, and thus better support successful postrelease reintegration.

3.2 Research Questions

Based on the gaps in current literature on young fathers incarcerated in jail and our theoretical framework, three research questions are explored in this study:

I: What are the group characteristics of young fathers (18 to 25 years old) incarcerated in jail?

II: Are there associations between jailed young fathers' experiences (including incarceration history, employment experience, training in fathering skills, self-efficacy level, depression level, substance use experience, violence exposure experience, and trauma history) and their father-child relationships?

III: Are there associations between recidivism and jailed young fathers' individual experiences and their father-child relationship?

4. Method

4.1 Data Collection

The data used in this study came from the baseline survey of 103 jailed fathers who were recruited to participate in a postrelease fathering-based transitional program delivered by a nonprofit organization in an urban Midwestern city that aims to create positive outcomes for children and families by serving fathers. The study was approved by the University Institutional Review Board of Human Research Protection Office.

Participants were screened for eligibility before enrollment to the study. Eligible participants must have been 18 to 25 years old, a father (biological, adoptive or stepfather), incarcerated in one of the two city jails at enrollment, to be released to the metro area where the study took place, and have an anticipated release date. The two city jails were managed by the same jurisdiction but one jail was low and medium custody and the other was maximum custody. Participants who could not speak English, who did not cognitively understand study participation, or who had sex offense records were excluded from the study (because the nonprofit organization excluded individuals incarcerated for sexual offenses from the program). Eligible fathers were identified at booking as meeting the major inclusion criteria, then all names of eligible fathers were provided to the research team. A researcher then scheduled an individual

meeting with each eligible father to describe the study, obtain consent and then conduct an interview packet immediately after consent.

Participants were enrolled 37 to 47 days prior to their release. The enrollment of participants was on a rolling basis ranging from May 2015 to August 2016. The prerelease/baseline interview consisted of surveys on demographics, family formation, and father–child relationship, as well as assessment instruments on general self-efficacy, psychological distress, substance abuse, and exposure to trauma and violence. Recidivism data for 83 trackable participants were collected up to May 2017 (20 participants went straight to state prison from jail).

4.2 Measures

We used 10 variables to describe the group characteristics of study participants and explore the associations between father–child relationships and community stability factors such as incarceration history, employment experience, training on fathering skills, general self-efficacy, depression, substance use, community violence exposure, trauma history, and recidivism. Cronbach’s alpha was used to assess scale reliability for all composite variables except for variables measured by standardized assessment instruments.

Father–child relationship was measured by 10 to 29 items depending on the age of child about whom participants selected to answer the questions. If participants had more than one child, the child for the survey was selected randomly. Participants would randomly select the name of a child from slips of paper with names of their children listed separately and apply questions only to the child selected. The measure was developed for the nonprofit organization by a private research firm. The 29 items align with Lamb’s three dimensions of fathering role (interaction, accessibility, and responsibility). Participants were asked to think over the 6 months prior to their current incarceration and identify their behavior or child’s behavior listed in the items regarding their relationship with their child. Participants whose child was under 4 years

responded to the first ten items covering daily childcare and accompanying behaviors such as *taking child to parks and recreation centers; kissing, hugging, and disciplining child; bringing or building things for child; attending religious activities with child*; and fathers' feeling of whether "*my child trusts me*". Participants whose child was above 4 but under 6 years responded to the first ten items, as well as another nine items that emphasized father–child emotional interactions pertained to the developmental stage of child: "*My child shared with me when he/she was upset about something / struggling with a problem / succeeded at something*", "*I asked my child to describe some of the fun and exciting things he/she is doing*", "*When I brought my child something, I knew what he/she wanted*", "*I observed my child engaged in activities with their friends*", "*I showed up on time when my child expected me to be there*", "*My child and his/her friends came over to my house/apartment*", "*I have done chores with my child*". Participants whose child was above 6 years responded to the previous 19 items, as well as additional 10 items on fathers' engagement in child's school-related activities and child's future planning: "*I have spoken with my child's teachers*", "*I helped my child do homework*", "*I knew how well my child was doing in school subjects*", "*I discussed the importance of going to college with my child*", "*I participated in events where my child has been rewarded or celebrated*", "*I acknowledged my child's accomplishments*", "*I visited my child's school*", "*I was involved in my child's extracurricular activities at school*", "*I knew my child's best friends*", "*I knew what school subjects are of interests to my child*". All the answers to the 29 items were in a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 to 5 (*1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, 5 = Always*). Cronbach's alpha for the items under each group of participants was provided (child under 4, $\alpha = .37$; child above 4 but under 6, $\alpha = .84$; child above 6, $\alpha = .92$). For each participant, an average score of answers to all the items that were applicable to him was calculated as a measurement of his level of father–child relationship.

Incarceration experience consists of three dimensions measured by (a) previous incarceration, based on the question “*Prior to your current incarceration when you enrolled in the study, have you ever been incarcerated?*” (1 = Yes, 2 = No); (b) incarceration times. If participants chose “yes” in previous question, he would be asked how many times (1 = Once, 2 = Twice, 3 = Three, 4 = Four, 5 = Five, 6 = Six or more); and (c) length of current incarceration, based on the question “*How long have you been incarcerated for this time?*” (1 = Less than one month, 2 = 1–3 months, 3 = 4–6 months, 4 = 7–12 months, 5 = Greater than 1 year).

Employment experience consists of four dimensions measured by: (a) employment, based on the question “*were you employed one month before present incarceration?*” (1 = Yes, 2 = No); (b) length of job. If participants answered “yes” to previous question, they were asked “*how long were you at your previous job?*” (1 = 1 month or less, 2 = 1 to 3 months, 3 = 3–6 months, 4 = 6–12 months, 5 = More than 1 year); (c) weekly working hours (1 = 1–10 hours, 2 = 11–20 hours, 3 = 21–40 hours, 4 = 41–59 hours, 5 = 60 or more hours); and (d) self-reported employment skills. The 29 items under this dimension covered participants’ self-evaluation of their knowledge and skills related to job seeking, interview preparation, and job maintaining. All the answers to the 29 items were in a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 to 5 (1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, 5 = Always). The sum of scores on all the items were calculated as a measurement for each participant’s self-reported employment skills ($\alpha = .96$).

Training in fathering skills was measured by 10 items centering on the amount of fathering information/training that participants received from family, mentors, education, or service settings prior to their current incarceration. Topics under this scale include “*what makes an effective father*”, “*how to use fathering skills in daily life*”, “*the importance of establishing paternity*”, “*children’s developmental stages*”, etc. All the answers to the 10 items were in a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 to 4 (1 = None, 2 = A little, 3 = Some, 4 = A lot). The sum of

scores on all the items was calculated as a measurement for each participant's level of training in fathering skills ($\alpha = .91$).

General self-efficacy was measured by the Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale, a widely used 10-item self-administered questionnaire developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995) to assess individuals' belief in their ability to cope with daily hassles and stressful life events. Participants in this study were asked to complete the scale by recalling their experience over the 6 months prior to their incarceration. Answers were in a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 to 4 (*1 = Not at all true, 2 = Barely true, 3 = Moderately true, 4 = Exactly true*). A sum of responses to all 10 items yielded the composite score for each participant.

Depression was measured by the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10), a 10-item questionnaire for measurement of anxiety and depressive symptoms that a person has experienced in the previous 4 weeks (Kessler et al., 2002). Answers were in a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 to 5 (*1 = None of the time, 2 = A little of the time, 3 = Some of the time, 4 = Most of the time, 5 = All of the time*). A sum of responses to all 10 items yielded the composite score for each participant.

Substance use was measured by the Chemical Use, Abuse, and Dependence Scale (CUAD), a semistructured instrument for detection and diagnosis of substance use severity and substance use disorder in research and clinical contexts (McGovern & Morrison, 1992). Participants were asked to report their habits of substance use in the 6 months prior to incarceration. We used two dimensions as measurements for participants' substance use experience: (a) substance use frequency. Participants reported their frequency of using alcohol, amphetamines, cannabis, cocaine, hallucinogens, inhalants, opioids, PCP (pentachlorophenol), sedative, and other substances in a Likert-type scale ranging from 0 to 5 (*0 = Not at all, 1 = Less than once per month, 2 = Once or twice a month, 3 = Once per week, 4 = Two to several times a week, 5 = Daily*). A sum of responses was used as a measurement for each participant's level of

substance use frequency; (b) substance use duration. Responses were in a Likert-type scale ranging from 0 to 4 (*0 = Not at all, 1 = Less than 1 month, 2 = Between 1 and 6 months, 3 = Between 6 month and one year, 4 = More than a year*), and a sum of responses was used as a measurement for each participant's level of substance use duration.

Community violence exposure was measured by the Survey of Exposure to Community Violence (Self-report Version; Richters & Saltzman, 1990). Participants were asked to recall their experience over the 6 months prior to their incarceration and report how often they had seen or heard the listed 12 types of violence in their home and community. Responses were in a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 to 4 (*1 = Never, 2 = Once or twice, 3 = A few times, 4 = Many times*) and a summed score was used as a measurement for each participant's level of community violence experience.

Trauma history was measured by the Trauma History Questionnaire (THQ), a 24-item self-report scale covering crime-related trauma, general disaster trauma, and physical and sexual trauma experience (Hooper, Stockton, Krupnick, & Green, 2011). We used two dimensions to measure participants' trauma history: (a) trauma events, namely the number of traumatic events that participants reported they have experienced; (b) trauma frequency. For each reported event, the participants also indicated the number of times they have experienced it. A summed number of times of each trauma event was used as a measurement for each participant's trauma frequency. Among the 103 participants who completed the baseline interview, 41 participants did not finish assessment on their sexual trauma experience due to a misoperation of our research assistants who accidentally left off sexual trauma questions in implementation, which means only 62 participants provided valid data on trauma experience.

We defined recidivism as a new arrest, adjudication, conviction, or incarceration. This definition was used in order to be consistent with the measure of recidivism used by Bureau of Justice Statistics (Alper et al., 2018). Recidivism was recorded as a categorical variable with

binary results of “yes” or “no”, in which “yes” referred to new crimes or probation/parole violations that resulted in a new arrest, adjudication, conviction, or incarceration since the release from last incarceration. As the enrollment to the study was on a rolling basis and each participant had a different release date, combined with the national statistics that the average length of stay in jail was 25 days in 2018 (Zeng, 2020), in our study, a period of 2 years was the longest possible time that participants may have to recidivate when recidivism data were collected.

4.3 Analytic Strategy

Based on our research questions and the properties of variables, Spearman correlation, Pearson correlation, Independent Samples *t* Test, and Pearson chi-square test were conducted to explore the associations between participants’ experiences (incarceration history, employment experience, training on fathering skills, self-efficacy, depression, substance use, violence and trauma experience) and their father–child relationships. Chi-square test and *t* test were performed to examine the associations between each applicable variable and recidivism. Variables that emerged as having associations with recidivism were included in a logistic regression analysis to further examine their predictive effect on recidivism.

5. Results

5.1 Group Characteristics of Sampled Young Fathers in Jail (See Table 1)

Demographics. The ages of study participants ($N = 103$) ranged from 18 to 25 with an average age of 22.6. Due to the demographics of the jail in this Midwestern city, most of participants were Black (90.3%). Participants generally had low levels of education, 44.7 % did not finish high school, 38.8% had a high school or GED degree. Participants also had low income prior to incarceration, with 33% reporting no income and 40.8% reporting an annual income less than \$10,000.

Relationships and children. Nearly all the young fathers were unmarried (99%). Three quarters of participants (75.7%) had a girlfriend or partner and nearly half of participants

(46.6%) lived with their girlfriend or partner prior to incarceration. Approximately 27.2% of participants had a child with current wife/partner/girlfriend. Over half of participants had one child, 27.2% had two children, 19.4% had three or more children. Nearly one third of participants (31.1%) had children with two or more biological mothers. The total number of children to enrolled participants was 179. Most of the children were at or less than 6 years of age (95%). One-fifth of children were less than 1 year, 49.2% were between 1 to 3 years, 25.7% were between 4 to 6 years. Forty-four percent of participants lived with their child/children in the 30 days prior to incarceration. No participants reported being legally prohibited from seeing their child. But 23.3% of participants reported that they were expected to pay child support, 70.8% of whom once had late or skipped payments.

Incarceration experience. More than three quarters of participants (78.6%) had been incarcerated prior to the incarceration in which they participated in the study. Among the fathers who had incarceration histories, 29.6% had one previous incarceration, 25.9% had two previous incarcerations, 44.5% had three or more previous incarcerations. For the current incarceration, a majority of participants (86.4%) had been in jail for less than 1 month.

Employment experience. More than half of participants (54.4%) were employed one month before incarceration. Among the fathers who were employed, 73.2% took one legal job, 23.2% took two legal jobs; 55.4% of them worked for 21 to 40 hours per week, 26.8% worked for 41 to 59 hours per week; however, a quarter of them (25%) maintained their job for more than one year, 48.2% of them were at their job for 1 to 6 months.

Father-child relationship. For all participants, 10.8% reported that they never received any form of information or training in parenting skills, but nearly half of them (47.6%) reported that they knew well what actions are considered child abuse, child neglect, and domestic violence, as well as the harmful effects of these kinds of behavior. Approximately 38.2% of participants had been contacted by police for hitting or screaming at their child's mother or a

member of their family. For the scores on father–child relationships, most (96.8%) had an average score above 3.16 ($3 = \textit{Sometimes}$) and more than half (68.4%) had an average score above 4 ($4 = \textit{Often}$), which means participants generally perceived themselves as having a good father–child relationship.

General self-efficacy. The Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale has 10 items with responses to each item ranging from 1 to 4. Thus, the total score of self-efficacy ranges from 10 to 40. The higher the score, the more confirmed the people’s belief in their ability to cope with difficult situations or stressful life events. In our study, participants have a mean score of 33.6 on general self-efficacy. This score is higher than the international average self-efficacy score (29.55) generated from 19,120 participants across 25 countries (Scholz, Dona, Sud, & Schwarzer, 2002).

Depression. Participants had a mean score of 24 on the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (total score ranges from 10 to 50). According to the cut-off scores developed by the Clinical Research Unit for Anxiety and Depression (CRUFAD), School of Psychiatry at the University of New South Wales, scores from 10 to 15 indicate low or no risk on anxiety or depressive disorders, scores from 16 to 29 indicate medium risk, and scores from 30 to 50 indicate high risk (Andrews & Slade, 2001). In this study, 22.3% of participants scored between 10 and 15, 51.5% scored between 16 and 29, and 26.2% scored between 30 and 50. In other words, more than three quarters of participants (77.7%) had a medium or high risk of anxiety or depressive disorders.

Substance use, violence exposure, and trauma experience. Of all participants, 83.5% had different levels of substance use and duration over the 6 months prior to incarceration, 42% reported daily use of drugs or alcohol, and 90.3% had different levels of violence exposure. Among the 62 participants who completed the Trauma History Questionnaire, 88.7% experienced different forms of crime-related trauma events, all of them experienced general trauma events, and 74.2% of them had physical and sexual trauma experience.

Recidivism. For the 83 participants whose recidivism data were tracked within 2 years of release from the incarceration which they were enrolled in this study, 50.6% ($n = 42$) had no recidivism, 26.5% ($n = 22$) had a new charge for criminal behaviors, and 22.9% ($n = 19$) had violations for the condition of probation or parole. The overall recidivism rate within 2 years of release was 49.4%.

5.2 Associations Between Group Characteristics and Father–Child Relationship (See Table 2)

Using Spearman correlation and Pearson correlation, statistically significant positive relationships were found between father–child relationships and several variables including training on fathering skills ($r = .32, p < .01$), self-reported employment skills ($r = .42, p < .01$), length of job prior to the incarceration ($r = .21, p < .05$), weekly work hours ($r = .28, p < .01$), and general self-efficacy ($r = .31, p < .01$). A negative relationship was found between father–child relationship and times of incarceration ($r = -.22, p < .05$). No statistically significant correlation was found between participants’ trauma experience and their father–child relationship, nor between participants’ depression level and their father–child relationship.

Independent Samples t Test was conducted to compare the differences of father–child relationship within binary variables/dimensions such as employment and previous incarcerations. Results show that there were statistically significant differences in father–child relationship between participants who had a job prior to incarceration ($M = 4.28, SD = 0.41$) and who had no job ($M = 4.07, SD = 0.55$), $t(93) = 2.14, p < .05$; also between participants who had multiple incarcerations ($M = 4.13, SD = 0.52$) and who had not ($M = 4.39, SD = 0.27$), $t(60) = -3.09, p < .01$.

5.3 Predictors of Recidivism (see Table 3)

Chi-square test and t test were performed to examine the associations between recidivism and variables/dimensions including previous incarceration, employment, father–child

relationship, self-efficacy, depression, substance use experience, violence exposure experience, and trauma history. Results show that when examining these variables separately, employment (employed or not), substance use frequency, trauma events, and trauma frequency surfaced as making a difference in recidivism rate. Among the 42 participants who did not recidivate within 2 years of release, 32 (76.2%) of them had a job prior to incarceration; among the 41 participants who recidivated, 15 (36.7%) of them had a job prior to the incarceration in which baseline survey conducted. Chi-square test shows this difference in employment was statistically significant ($\chi^2(1) = 13.25, p < .01$). Also, Independent Samples *t* Test shows there are statistically significant differences in substance use frequency (recidivism ($M = 6.15, SD = 3.97$), no recidivism ($M = 4.29, SD = 3.08$); $t(81) = -2.389, p < .05$), trauma events (recidivism ($M = 9.2, SD = 3.04$), no recidivism ($M = 7.23, SD = 3.12$); $t(49) = -2.23, p < .05$), and trauma frequency (recidivism ($M = 19.4, SD = 12.22$), no recidivism ($M = 10.45, SD = 9.68$); $t(49) = -2.91, p < .01$) between participants who then recidivated and who did not.

A logistic regression analysis was conducted to further examine the predictive effect of the four variables/dimensions (employment, substance use frequency, trauma events, and trauma frequency) on recidivism. As we only had completed trauma experience data for 62 participants, and “trauma events” and “trauma frequency” were two dimensions measuring one variable that could not be included in one model, we established three regression models to investigate the predictive effects of each variable/dimension.

In Model 1, we only used employment and substance use frequency as covariates in order to make use of the recidivism data on 83 participants. Logistic regression analysis shows that the model is effective ($p < .01$ in Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients) and the model has a high level of goodness-of-fit ($p > .05$ in Hosmer and Lemeshow Test). After controlling for substance use frequency, participants who were not employed prior to the baseline survey had a higher risk

of recidivism compared to people who were employed ($p < .01$, $OR = 5.07$, 95% CI: 1.92–13.42).

In Model 2, we used employment, substance use frequency, and trauma events as covariates. Overall 52 cases that had both recidivism data and completed trauma experience data entered analysis. The coefficients of regression model are statistically significant ($p < .05$). Goodness-of-fit of model is high ($p > .05$). Also, after controlling for substance use frequency and trauma events, participants who were not employed prior to the baseline survey had a higher risk of recidivism compared to people who were employed ($p < .05$, $OR = 4.75$, 95% CI: 1.41–15.99).

In Model 3, we used employment, substance use frequency, and trauma frequency as covariates. Similar to Model 2, an amount of 52 cases entered analysis. Model 3 has statistically significant coefficients ($p = .05$) and a high level of goodness-of-fit ($p > .05$). After controlling for substance use frequency and trauma frequency, people who were not employed prior to baseline survey had a higher risk of recidivism compared to people who were employed ($p < .05$, $OR = 4.64$, 95% CI: 1.39–15.51).

Overall, logistic regression analysis shows that employment (employed or not) is the only dimension that can explain the differences in recidivism (recidivated or not) after controlling for substance use and trauma experiences.

6. Discussion

Descriptive statistics of our study participants provided a profile for the young fathers incarcerated in jails of this urban Midwestern city: most of them have low level of formal education, low income, multiple contacts with the correctional system, high unemployment rate, and limited work histories. They have relatively unstable relationships, and many of them have children with different biological mothers. One-tenth of the young fathers never received training in fathering skills and nearly 40% of them have alleged domestic violence history. At the same

time, the young fathers generally perceive themselves as having good father–child relationships. They show high self-efficacy but also have high prevalence of depression, substance use, and trauma experience.

The characteristics of our sample share many similarities with previous descriptions on incarcerated fathers in terms of overrepresentation of unmarried status (Kemper & Rivara, 1993), low education and multiple incarcerations (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010; Modecki & Wilson, 2009), high prevalence of substance abuse (Bronson et al., 2017; Glaze & Maruschak, 2010), mental health issues (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010), violence and trauma experience (Kjellstrand et al., 2012), and other behavioral health problems (Ladlow & Neale, 2016). Though these features seem to confirm the “risk framework” of incarcerated young fathers (Ladlow & Neale, 2016. p. 114), the current study identified strengths in the study participants. Fathers in our study reported perceived good father–child relationships, which are related to high levels of father involvement including daily child-care and father-child interactions. This strength or characteristics corresponds to findings on unmarried young fathers that indicate they have high levels of father involvement such as accompanying the child, physical care, and strong emotional attachments even when not able to provide regular financial support (Hairston, 1998). Another strength is that the young fathers in our study showed high level of general self-efficacy. Substantial research has suggested that paternal self-efficacy, which refers to a father’s beliefs in his competency to complete childrearing tasks and which comes from a harmonious father–child relationship (Kwok et al., 2013), is positively associated with father involvement and child outcomes (Kwok et al., 2013; Trahan & Cheung, 2016; Trahan, 2017). As paternal self-efficacy is an extension of general self-efficacy, it is reasonable to assume that the high levels of general self-efficacy among the young fathers in our study are beneficial for their father–child relationships and may help promote high levels of father involvement. Our study results have supported the positive association between general self-efficacy and father–child relationship. However, it should be

noticed that our study participants also had high prevalence of depression. As self-efficacy is usually negatively associated with depression or serves as a mediator between stressful life events and depressive symptoms (Dhillon & Arora, 2017; Maciejewski et al., 2000), it is unclear why the two conflicting characteristics coexist in our study participants. This puzzle requires further examination in future research.

Our finding on the negative association between father–child relationship and times of incarceration is congruent with previous research that shows that fewer incarceration events are related to responsive parenting styles, which tend to generate positive father–child relationships (Modecki & Wilson, 2009). Also, we expected the positive association between father–child relationship and training in fathering skills. It added to the evidence that paternal education increases the likelihood of high-level father involvement (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1999). Contrary to previous research on the general population that revealed negative associations between depression and father involvement (Takehara et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2012; Sweeney & MacBeth, 2016), we did not find statistically significant relationship between the two variables, though the p value for a negative correlation is .057. It is not clear if increasing the sample size would generate a statistically significant finding, but future studies that examine the two variables or identify possible mitigation factors would be helpful to promote understanding of the relationships between depression and father–child relationship.

Studies on fathers in the general population have yielded mixed results on the impact of employment status on father involvement. Hook and Wolfe (2012) examined more than 3000 fathers across four western countries. They found fathers spend less time on interactive care and being alone with children on weekdays compared to weekends, suggesting a negative impact from work hours on father involvement. McGill (2014) found that long work hours are not necessarily related to less time with children, as fathers can incorporate children into their leisure time by various means. Research on disadvantaged fathers have generated similar reports on

positive relationships between employment and father involvement, in which stable employment and higher income are associated with higher level of father involvement (Castillo et al., 2013; Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1999). These findings are consistent with the viewpoints on how unemployed, low-income fathers construe fatherhood: they understand fatherhood as a set of responsibilities mainly exhibited by the role of breadwinner according to traditional social values (Strier, 2014; Weinman et al., 2005). Research on young male criminal justice involved individuals also suggests that they tend to view financial provider as a key role of fatherhood (Buston, 2010). Thus, despite the trend of requiring traditional breadwinner fathers to become more equal partners in parenting (Buchler et al, 2017; McGill, 2014), the positive relationships between employment experiences and father–child relationships in our study suggests that young fathers in jail, who are also a subgroup of disadvantaged fathers, may view financial contribution as an essential part in fatherhood.

For predictors of recidivism, our study found that employment is the only variable that can explain the differences in recidivism after controlling for substance use and trauma experience. Contrary to some studies that identified father–child relationship as a predictor of recidivism risk (Maley, 2014), we did not find an association between father–child relationship and recidivism.

This study has several limitations. In terms of measurement, father-child relationship in our study was measured from fathers' perspectives. We did not have observational data on the actual experiences of fathers or the actual experiences of children of the fathers in this study. Also, measurement errors and social desirability effects are possible as all the data with the exception of recidivism are self-reported. Particularly, the Cronbach's alpha for the items measuring father–child relationship of the study participants whose child were under 4 was .37, suggesting a poor internal consistency of these items. This low Cronbach's alpha value may due to the small number of items (10 items for this group of participants) that didn't cover enough

aspects of father–child relationship pertaining to the child’s age. Adding more relevant items on father–child interaction and father’s duties including daily caretaking and financial contribution in future survey may help improve the reliability of measurement. In addition, several other defects exist in our data. We only have full trauma data for 62 participants due to data collection errors. The lengths of time over which recidivism data were collected varied by participant. Outside of recidivism, all the data we used came from the baseline survey. These limitations suggest that our study results should be reviewed in context and additional research is needed. However, despite these drawbacks in measurement and data collection, this study contributed to current literature by adding to the little knowledge on jailed young fathers’ characteristics and experiences, as well as on the associations between father–child relationships, behavioral health factors, and recidivism. The study also underscores the importance of a establishing a more robust set of literature specific to young fathers incarcerated in pre-trial settings.

7. Conclusion

Young fathers in jail are underrepresented in literature. The paucity of research on this group of individuals suggests that classification studies on incarcerated populations are necessary in future research to provide accurate portrayals of differential experiences. Our study shows that these young fathers have several risk factors that may influence their father–child relationships. Given the unclear effectiveness of most parenting programs targeting incarcerated young fathers (Buston et al., 2012), more research is needed to understand how to best intervene on these risk factors. Meanwhile, despite the disadvantaged status of these young fathers, we agree on the importance of constructing noncriminal identities and call for a strength-based perspective. This means the intervention/helping efforts should not only focus on risk factors but also integrate strengths such as self-perceived good father–child relationships and high levels of self-efficacy, both of which suggest a potential for positive outcomes.

As found in our study, several dimensions of employment surfaced as important predictors of father–child relationships and recidivism. This finding has two implications. First, incarcerated young fathers may view financial contribution as a major part of fatherhood, thus sustainable employment placement may be essential in helping young fathers with incarceration history establish their paternal identity and successfully return to families and communities. Second, because pretrial detention disrupts employment, the use of lengthy (i.e., anything beyond a day) pretrial incarceration could have consequences beyond the father. Both policy and programming shifts that could mitigate that impact should be seriously reconsidered.

Word count: 10,575

Declaration of competing interests: none.

Submission declaration and verification: The work described in this manuscript has not been published previously. It is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. Its publication is approved by all authors and explicitly by the responsible authorities where the work was carried out. If the manuscript is accepted, it will not be published elsewhere in the same form, in English or in any other language, including electronically without the written consent of the copyright-holder.

This work was supported by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2015-IG-BX-0001).

Data availability statement: Due to the nature of this research, participants of this study did not agree for their data to be shared publicly, so supporting data is not available.

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Table 1*Characteristics of Sampled Young Fathers in Jail*

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n (%)</i>
Demographics				
Age	103	22.6	2.0	
18 to 21				28 (27.2)
22 to 25				75 (72.8)
Race	102			
Black/African American				93 (90.3)
White (non-Hispanic)				1 (1.0)
Multiracial				8 (7.8)
Education	103			
No high school				1 (1.0)
Some high school				45 (43.7)
High school degree or GED				40 (38.8)
Some college or technical degree				17 (16.5)
Income	99	1.1	1.3	
No income				34 (33.0)
Less than \$10,000				42 (40.8)
\$10,000 to \$19,999				10 (9.7)
\$20,000 and above				13 (13.1)
Relationships and children				
Have a wife	103			1 (1.0)
Have a girlfriend or partner	102			78 (75.7)
Lived with girlfriend or partner	78			48 (46.6)
Have child with current wife/partner/girlfriend	103			28 (27.2)
Have child/children	103			
1 child				55 (53.4)
2 children				28 (27.2)
3 children or more				20 (19.4)
Child's mother	103			
1 biological mother				71 (68.9)
2 biological mothers				24 (23.3)
3 or more biological mothers				8 (7.8)
Children's age	179	2.8		
Less than 1 year				36 (20.1)
Between 1 and 3				88 (49.2)
Between 4 and 6				46 (25.7)
Above 6				9 (5.0)
Lived with child/children	179			79 (44.1)
Pay child support	103			24 (23.3)
Incarceration experience				
Previous incarcerations	103			
No				22 (21.4)
Yes		2.7	1.6	81 (78.6)

Once				24 (23.3)
Twice				21 (20.4)
Three or more				36 (35.0)
Length of current incarceration	100	1.1	0.4	
Less than 1 month				89 (86.4)
1 to 3 months				10 (9.7)
Employment experience				
Employment one month before incarceration	103			
Yes				56 (54.4)
No				47 (45.6)
Legal jobs	56	1.3	0.5	
1 job				41 (39.8)
2 jobs				13 (12.6)
3 or more jobs				2 (1.9)
Length of job	56	3.3	1.3	
1 month or less				5 (4.9)
1 to 6 months				27 (26.1)
6 to 12 months				10 (9.7)
More than 1 year				14 (13.6)
Weekly work hours	56	3.1	0.8	
1 to 20 hours				8 (7.8)
21 to 40 hours				31 (30.1)
41 or more				17 (16.5)
Father-child relationship	95	4.2	0.5	
[1, 2]				1 (1.0)
(2, 3]				1 (1.0)
(3, 4]				28 (27.2)
(4, 5]				65 (63.1)
General self-efficacy	102	33.6	5.0	
10-20				2 (2.0)
21-30				24 (23.3)
31-40				76 (73.8)
Depression	103	24.0	9.4	
10-15				23 (22.3)
16-29				53 (51.5)
30-50				27 (26.2)
Substance use	103			
Frequency		5.0	3.7	
Not at all				17 (16.5)
1-5				48 (46.6)
6-10				32 (31.1)
11 or more				6 (5.8)
Duration		5.6	4.1	
Not at all				17 (16.5)
1-5				41 (39.8)

6–10				33 (32.0)
11 or more				12 (11.7)
Community violence exposure	103	22.3	7.6	
0–12				10 (9.7)
13–24				49 (47.6)
25–36				42 (40.8)
Trauma experience	62			
Crime-related trauma				
Events		2.0	1.1	
None				7 (11.3)
1–2				32 (51.6)
3–4				23 (37.1)
Frequency		0.3	1.3	
0–2				59 (95.2)
3 or more				3 (4.8)
General disaster trauma				
Events		4.8	2.0	
1–3				17 (27.4)
4–6				36 (58.1)
7–9				9 (14.5)
Frequency		9.0	7.2	
1–10				42 (67.7)
11–20				15 (24.2)
21 or more				5 (8.1)
Physical and sexual trauma				
Events		1.1	0.9	
None				16 (25.8)
1–2				42 (67.7)
3–4				4 (6.5)
Frequency		4.2	5.8	
None				16 (25.8)
1–10				35 (56.5)
11 or more				11 (17.7)
Recidivism	83			
Yes				41 (49.4)
New crimes				22 (26.5)
Probation/parole violations				19 (22.9)
No				42 (50.6)

Note. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation.

Table 2**ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN GROUP CHARACTERISTICS AND FATHER–CHILD RELATIONSHIP***Correlations for variables*

	Father–child relationship	
	<i>R</i>	<i>p</i>
Incarceration times	–.221*	.032
Length of current incarceration	–.083	.425
Length of job	.205*	.046
Weekly working hours	.282**	.006
Self-reported employment skills	.417**	.000
Training on fathering skills	.322**	.001
General self-efficacy	.307**	.002
Depression	–.196	.057
Substance use frequency	–.061	.560
Substance use duration	–.027	.794
Community violence exposure	.102	.325
Trauma events	–.083	.535
Trauma frequency	–.187	.159

Independent samples t test for variables

	Father–child relationship					
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Employment	Yes	4.28	0.41	2.135*	93.00	.035
	No	4.07	0.55			
Previous incarceration	Yes	4.13	0.52	–3.091**	60.42	.003
	No	4.39	0.27			

*Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$; *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation.*

Table 3*PREDICTORS OF RECIDIVISM*

<i>Independent samples t test for variables</i>					
	Father-child relationship				
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>p</i>
No recidivism	4.16	0.42	.149	74.00	.882
Recidivism	4.14	0.57			
Incarceration times					
No recidivism	2.45	2.07	1.659	77.71	.101
Recidivism	1.78	1.59			
General self-efficacy					
No recidivism	32.67	4.86	-1.278	81.00	.205
Recidivism	34.15	5.67			
Depression					
No recidivism	23.71	8.54	-.078	81.00	.938
Recidivism	23.88	10.43			
Substance use frequency					
No recidivism	4.29	3.08	-2.389*	81.00	.019
Recidivism	6.15	3.97			
Substance use duration					
No recidivism	5.19	3.52	-1.504	81.00	.137
Recidivism	6.54	4.58			
Community violence exposure					
No recidivism	21.71	6.05	-.854	81.00	.396
Recidivism	23.07	8.30			
Trauma events					
No recidivism	7.23	3.12	-2.231*	49.00	.030
Recidivism	9.20	3.04			
Trauma frequency					
No recidivism	10.45	9.68	-2.906**	49.00	.005
Recidivism	19.40	12.22			
<i>Chi-square test for variables</i>					
Employment					
Recidivism	Yes	No	Value	<i>p</i>	
Yes	15	26	$\chi^2(1) = 13.25^{**}$.000	
No	32	10			
Previous incarceration					
Recidivism	Yes	No	Value	<i>p</i>	
Yes	31	10	$\chi^2(1) = .10$.748	
No	33	9			
<i>Logistic regression results for recidivism</i>					
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI

Employment	1.623	0.497	5.069	.001	[1.92, 13.42]
Substance use frequency	0.132	0.073	1.141	.069	[0.99, 1.32]
Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients				.000	
Hosmer and Lemeshow Test				.218	
<i>N</i>			83		
Employment	1.559	0.619	4.752	.012	[1.41, 15.99]
Substance use frequency	0.079	0.091	1.083	.383	[0.91, 1.29]
Trauma events	0.045	0.097	1.046	.644	[0.87, 1.26]
Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients				.048	
Hosmer and Lemeshow Test				.214	
<i>N</i>			52		
Employment	1.535	0.616	4.641	.013	[1.39, 15.51]
Substance use frequency	0.079	0.091	1.082	.384	[0.91, 1.29]
Trauma frequency	0.008	0.027	1.008	.754	[0.96, 1.06]
Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients				.051	
Hosmer and Lemeshow Test				.263	
<i>N</i>			52		

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$; *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; *B* = unstandardized coefficients; *SE* = standard error; $Exp(B)$ = exponentiation of B coefficients; CI = confidence interval.