

## 12 Fatherhood and Incarceration: Primary Results on Parenthood and Imprisonment

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After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand and appreciate the importance of the impact of incarceration on the father-child relationship and the need to create programs to address this dilemma.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by increasing awareness of the importance of both the incarcerated father and his child/children when creating a rehabilitation plan.

When a father is incarcerated, his role as parent becomes “at risk” as being in detention undermines some of the fundamental aspects associated with being a parent. Going to prison alters the reciprocal nature of parent-child interactions. A father in prison cannot fully carry out his role as parent because, under such conditions, he is not able to impart a sense of attachment, trust, and security that is fundamental to the child’s development. In addition, stereotypes and prejudices may contribute to painting a picture of the incarcerated father as one who is unable to be a good parent. This could result in a life of failure and feelings of inadequacy with regard to being a father and parent. Furthermore, the absence of adequate role models, the very difficult initial adjustment period to prison life, the lack of cognitive, communicative, and relational abilities, together with the restrictive context of the prison, all make it difficult to develop and maintain adequate father-child ties that are so vital to a child’s development. Simply put, prison conditions alter both the parent-child relationship and how the subject perceives himself as a father and parent.<sup>1-3</sup>

Thus, there can be no doubt as to the importance of corrective interventions that address such negative dynamics and to the importance of support initiatives for prisoners and their families where specified locations and times for meetings between father and child can take place. These environments must be appropriate for developing and maintaining relational continuity, as well as for establishing and promoting a sense of parental responsibility in the incarcerated parent.<sup>4-6</sup>

The objectives of the study are to: (1) establish the father’s perception of his role as a parent, (2) establish the attachment styles of incarcerated fathers; and, (3) explore the relationship between the self-perceived parental role and the attachment patterns of the study subjects.

**Method:** The directors of penitentiary administrations from two Italian regions were involved in this study. One hundred fifty male inmates were enrolled, each of whom was asked to give informed consent. Every participant was administered an articulated medical history questionnaire, in addition to two parental competence evaluation instruments.

**Instruments:** Attachment Style Questionnaire (ASQ) and Self-Perception of Parental Role Questionnaire (SPPR).<sup>7</sup>

**Final Considerations:** The capacity of minors to establish multiple, deep attachments with people, even those who are not part of the immediate family circle, is well known. This is especially true when such figures demonstrate availability and readiness to respond to a child’s signals. As a result, a child’s social network takes on great importance as the child develops, particularly for children whose parents are in prison. This is linked to the correlation between successful prison re-education strategies and the ability to maintain a good relationship between the detained, his children, and his family.



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### Incarcerated Parents, Prison Rehabilitation, Parental Attachment