Scientific Research Publishing

"Mommy, I Want to Talk to My Dad": Exploring Parental Incarceration, Bibliotherapy, and Storybooks

Avon Hart-Johnson[1,2], Geoffrey Johnson[2], Renata Hedrington-Jones[1]

[1]Barbara Solomon School of Social Work and Human Services, Walden University, Minneapolis, MN, USA
[2]DC Project Connect, Inc., Washington DC, USA
Email: avonhartjohnson@gmail.com

Abstract

Parental incarceration often involves caregivers explaining the absence of a significant attachment to a child. Developmental scholars suggest that bibliotherapy and storybooks can provide both illustrative and explanatory frameworks for caregivers to discuss difficult topics with children. Storybooks paired with caregiver wisdom might help children to understand and adjust to the loss of a parent. However, scientific-based derivatives of caregiver experiences and communication practices integrated into storybooks are largely absent from the literature. To address this gap a qualitative community-based action research study was carried out in three contiguous phases, with 22 caregivers during 8 focus groups in the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan area. Phase one entailed exploring caregiver-child communication practices related to parental incarceration. The second phase involved creating topic-specific stories integrated with bibliotherapeutic principles drawn from caregivers' perceptions and narratives. The third phase included developing a web portal to host digital storybooks and companion resources. Catalytic validity was established through collaboration with the project team. Data analysis resulted in a robust theoretical framework and grounded theory entitled, Caregivers' Family Relations Assessment and Communication Strategies (C-FRACS). Findings assert caregivers' prerogatives on child well-being as a priority as it intersects with communication practices and epistemological concepts of explaining jail, prison, and parental incarceration to children.

Keywords

1. Introduction

Approximately 2 million people are in jails and prisons across the United States, half of whom are mothers and fathers of minor children. Most of these children are under 10 years old (Annie Casey Foundation, 2016). Incarceration of a parent can yield unconscionable social costs to families and is especially difficult and confusing for young children to comprehend. As children seek a greater understanding about the loss, parental incarceration often involves caregivers explaining the absence of a significant attachment figure to a child. From this point of interpersonal communication, attunement, and empathy, caregivers might bridge the gap between a child grieving the loss of the absent parent and offering ways to cope. Conceptualizing prison, jail, and the purpose of carceral facilities as well as the reasoning for a parent's separation and detainment may be difficult for young children to understand and challenging for caregivers to put into age-appropriate language. Yet, caregivers tend to intuitively understand a child's readiness for these sensitive discussions (Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2021). Caregivers also realize the potential intensity of emotions and nuanced familial circumstances surrounding parental incarceration. This gives insights into the child's and caregiver's temperament needed for these discussions. Yet, these discussions may be still difficult to navigate, and few resources exist that capture caregivers' insights and wisdom specific to this social phenomenon. Discussion with a child about parental incarceration calls for the caregivers' discussions to be broad yet unique to the child. Trauma-informed practice and expressive arts scholars suggest that bibliotherapeutic storybooks can provide both illustrative and explanatory frameworks to discuss difficult topics with children (Walker et al., 2020; Malchiodi, 2015).

While there is a growing body of children's literature on parental incarceration, many such works are based on singular experiences and anecdotal narratives (Larsen Walker et al., 2020). One method to address this gap and enhance the genre is to introduce scientific methods and rigor, thereby mitigating susceptibility to confirmation and personal bias aligned with anecdotal narratives. The empirical methodology can moderate and hold accountable preconceived notions and value judgment through the researcher's systematic protocol and ethics. This may increase the applicability and generalization of bibliotherapeutic resources for children. However, as noted, these scientific-based derivatives of caregiver experiences integrated into storybooks are largely absent from the literature. This qualitative research study was designed to explore caregivers' communication practices with their children regarding parental incarceration. Further, the researchers sought to understand caregivers' perceptions of the use of bibliotherapeutic storybooks to discuss the incarceration of a parent with minor children (under 10 years old.). This paper is based on a hybrid, community-based action research study with 22 caregivers of young children with parents in jail or prison. Eight focus group sessions were held in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia (The D.C. Metropolitan area). This paper is one of the mul-

tiple articles informed by the substantive domains and caregivers' perspectives, identified in the study's grounded theory: Caregivers' Family Relations Assessment and Communication Strategies (Hart-Johnson et al., 2022).

2. Related Literature

It is well established that parental incarceration is an adverse childhood experience that aligns with future health-related risks (The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). This means that if intervention is not administered to allay the trajectory of adversities, these children not only are susceptible to potential challenges during the incarceration, but also, possibly well after the parent returns home (Testa & Jackson, 2021; Wildeman et al., 2018).

In this section, theories of loss and stigma are presented. Next, parental incarceration and the possible deleterious impacts on children are discussed, followed by insights on how caregivers' communication might buttress the adverse impacts of maternal and paternal imprisonment. Finally, the principles of bibliotherapy introduce strategies for how age-appropriate literature might advance children's comprehension of challenging topics such as parental incarceration.

2.1. Theory

Two theories underpin this research. The first theory is ambiguous loss (Boss, 1999). Boss suggested that when a significant loss occurs without closure or explanation, it can bring about ambiguous loss. The ambiguity tends to exacerbate feelings of grief and loss.

Incarceration can be embarrassing. This condition aligns with the second theory, social stigma. Families and even children sometimes feel singled out and treated differently because of family member incarceration. According to Goffman (1997), social stigma entails assigning value to others as if they are *less-than*. As a result, some people have feelings of inferiority and shame associated with being singled out and treated differently due to familial incarceration.

2.2. Parental Incarceration

Incarceration poses risks to child well-being. The Annie Casey Foundation (2016) found that children who are separated from their incarcerated parents, even for a brief time, can face adverse psychological and emotional outcomes on par with exposure to violence and/or abuse. Kjellstrand et al. (2020) indicated that additional adversities include familial instability, academic challenges, social stigma, and emotional distress

While trying to cope with loss, children are naturally curious about where their parents are (Poehlmann-Tynan & Pritzl, 2019) and if they are harmed in jail or prison. Young children (under age five) may worry and may have deep emotional concerns without the maturity and vocabulary to voice their feelings to their caregivers (Gualano et al., 2017; Neuman, 1998). According to Elliott & Reid (2019), older children (under 10 years) may become preoccupied with loss,

receiving unclear information from family members and peers, exacerbated by external influences and fears stoked for example, by television images of prison systems. Ultimately, children may fear for their incarcerated parent's safety.

Correa et al. (2021) suggested that young children generally have difficulty in understanding and grasping the nature of carceral systems. In the absence of clear communication about their parents, children's imaginations may leave them with unrealistic and growing anxieties.

Many children will face parental incarceration exacerbated by the risks of other adverse experiences (Beresford et al., 2020), such as poverty, instability, abuse, and frequent changes in caregivers. According to Beresford et al. (2020), many affected children of the incarcerated will encounter continual disruptions to an already fractured family system, with possible impacts on their academic life. Affected children may endure high-stress transitions (e.g., moving to lower-cost dwellings, changing school districts), all of which are rarely explained beforehand (Larsen Walker et al., 2020).

However, not all children will experience adverse circumstances. A significant number of these children will remain with their nonincarcerated parent or transition to grandparents, relatives, or to non-kinship caregiving arrangements where their lives are enhanced and their coping skills strengthened.

2.3. Caregivers' Communication and Children's Comprehension

Caregivers can play a vital communicative role in supporting children when the parent is in jail or prison. Meadan (2020) indicated that children rely on their caregivers to keep them safe, inform them of issues impacting their lives, and guide them through difficult circumstances. These caregivers can play a significant role in safeguarding and promoting child well-being through supportive and attuned caregiving and creating a clear dialogue with children.

Addressing a child's inquires and concerns about a parent's imprisonment can be one of the most difficult discussions caregivers encounter with children. Similar to sharing other sensitive topics, caregivers may struggle to articulate perspectives and concepts to young children in a manner that is developmentally appropriate and understandable (Kelly, 2018). As such, many caregivers may avoid this task (Hart-Johnson et al., 2022). Other caregivers have found ways to broach the often emotionally-laden topic by using communication strategies aligned with interventions. These practices can enhance children's coping and abilities to deal with difficult information (Ferm et al., 2005).

Discussions on parental incarceration can be hard on the caregiver, as well. Responding to children's queries and sharing information about parental incarceration can be emotionally draining for caregivers. These discussions can leave caregivers with internal conflict over what and how much about the incarceration itself should be shared with children (Young et al., 2020).

2.4. Bibliotherapy and Storybooks

Bibliotherapy has a long-standing reputation as a modality for helping children

understand difficult topics. Most modern-day theoretical frameworks of bibliotherapy can be traced back to the early 1900s. Bibliotherapy was coined by Samuel McChord Crothers in 1916, where he posited that books could indeed have therapeutic properties, thereby offering non-clinical users a method of evolving to a better state of being after reading specific literary works (McChord, 1916). Bibliotherapy further encompasses using literature to explain difficult situations, help the reader to make meaning of the circumstances, and to promote coping and emotional healing (Drolet et al., 2022; Malchiodi, 2015). As McChord Crothers posited "… a book is a literary prescription put up for the benefit of someone [sic] who needs it" (McChord, 1916: p. 293).

Caregivers have used storybooks to illustrate many difficult talking points [e.g., divorce, separation, death] (Neuman, 1998). However, there is a dearth of empirically derived and tailored storybooks using bibliotherapeutic techniques to explain parental incarceration, prison, and jail. While the available children's literature on the subject offers the promise of meeting children's needs and providing basic topic-specific talking points, most of these literary works are largely aligned with anecdotal stories. Many of these books are highly personalized and based on the lived experiences of self-published authors. According to researchers, some of these books also present jails and prisons as dark and scary places, where parents are presented in threatening conditions, thereby exacerbating children's fears (Larsen Walker et al., 2020).

Moreover, Larsen Walker and colleagues, found that many books in this genre were a combination of poor writing quality, harmful political ideologies related to prisons and jails, dated ideas relative to science, and stereotypes and representations of culturally irrelevant content. Although these authors of the storybooks may have held good intent, in some cases unfamiliarity with culture, ethnic groups, and nuanced situations might result in depictions of families, incarceration, and ideas that are inconsistent with the caregivers' realities and situations in which children are exposed. The content may also be incongruent with strength-based intervention recommended for families and children as they deal with and recover from their familial loss.

3. Methods

This qualitative study was designed to explore caregivers' communication practices with children regarding the incarceration of a parent(s). The researchers also sought to understand the potential of using storybooks (with bibliotherapeutic properties) to assist with these discussions. An a priori assumption and literature review led us to posit that these tools might hold promise as resources for coping and healing for the users.

Participatory or action research requires iterative and continuous adjustments. There are methodological decisions that require researchers' astute project management skills, balancing resource allocations, and adhering to principles of action research to meet the project objectives (Herr & Anderson, 2015). This section explains the research team configuration, the project management, resource

requirements, the primary objectives, problem definition, scope, recruitment, focus groups, and data analysis.

3.1. Research Team, Project Resources, and Objectives

Our goal was to meet multiple objectives for this research study, which the project team coined the "Storybook Research Project." The team comprised 3 co-principal researchers, 3 graphic artists, 1 voice-over specialist, a project manager/web implementation manager, a web designer, and a child psychologist. As noted, the first goal was to understand the communication practices of caregivers using focus group data collection (from caregiver community partners). The second goal was to better understand the utility of storybooks with integrated bibliotherapy principles based on feedback from our partners (and extrapolate from caregivers' narratives and prevalent themes, scenarios to use as frameworks for the storybooks). A third goal was to create a web portal to host digital versions of storybooks, using voiceovers and other digital resources, including, e-books, fact sheets, and helpful resource links, as well as to inform the creation of bibliotherapeutic storybooks in paperback format.

The project team's responsibilities varied. The co-principal researchers managed all facets of the research study. The graphic artists created the characters in each storybook. The methodology of storybook creation is briefly explained later in this section. The voice-over specialist's role was to create an audio voice-over for each digital storybook. The project manager/web implementation manager was responsible for overseeing the contracted web development according to the co-principal researchers' requirements. The child psychologist was hired to review each of the children's books.

The objectives/goals were codified in the two central research questions:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): How do parents/caregivers communicate with children about parental incarceration?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): How do parents/caregivers perceive the use of customized stories as interventions for children affected by incarceration?

According to Herr & Anderson (2015), action-oriented studies consider the research questions across all aspects of the project scope. The nature of this research requires researchers' fluidity and flexibility as insiders/participants share perspectives during the systematic inquiry. In the current study, caregivers were considered insiders and subject matter experts who informed the project. The project execution phases and steps that align with answering the research questions follow.

3.2. Project Scope and Proposal

The research protocol and project management steps are explained as a multi-pronged approach. Figure 1 depicts the project sequence and major milestones occurring during the research timeline. The project representation in Figure 1 is divided into two major processes. The top half of the diagram depicted

Multi-Pronged Approach
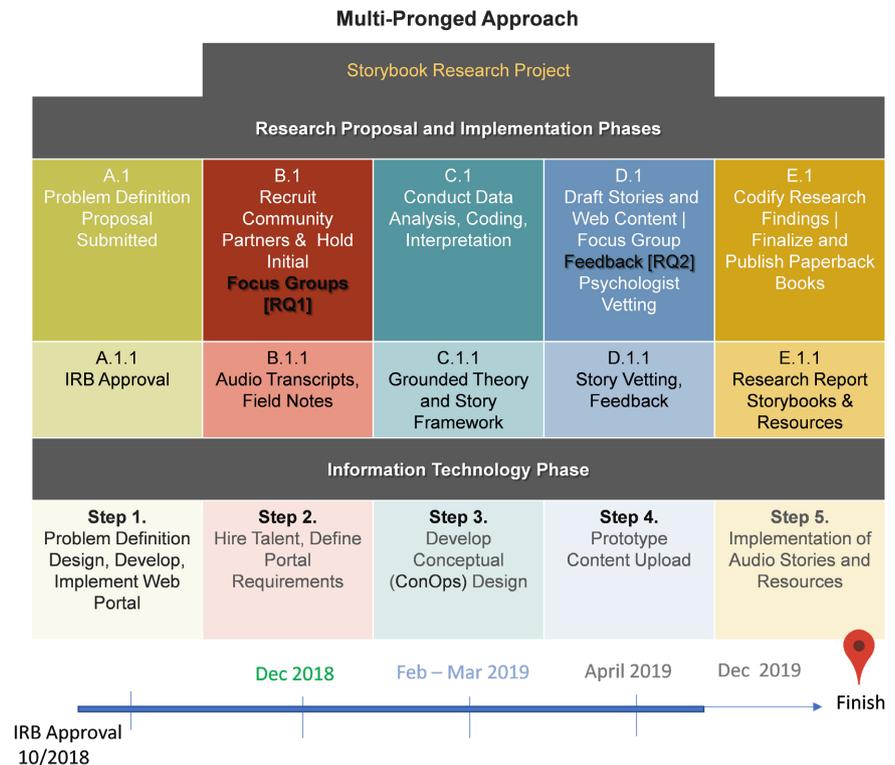
Figure 1. Storybook research project.

in Figure 1, labeled "Research Proposal and Implementation Phases," is annotated by A.1 through E.1, with outcomes and deliverables labeled A.1.1 through E.1.1.

Figure 1, block A.1, also represents the concept of operations for a web portal, the systematic plan for creating storybooks from the caregivers' thematic narratives, and the overview of how the literary works would be vetted before publication. This phase is explained in the sections that follow.

The bottom half of Figure 1, labeled "Information Technology Phase," was carried out in five steps in parallel with the research study milestones annotated as Step 1 through Step 5. In brief, the technology phase entailed developing the design of the web portal to house the information resources (books, resource sheets, etc.) that would be developed during the post-data analysis and implementation phase of this project. Step 2 involved hiring talent to create the illustrations and design the web pages. Step 3 entailed fully developing and testing the prototype. Step 4 entailed content upload, and Step 5 involved fully implementing the portal use.

3.3. Purpose and Proposal Submission

The problem definition, project scope, research design, and methodology depicted in Figure 1, were submitted as a proposal for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. The approval was granted in October 2018.

The research purpose entailed understanding what if any caregivers' chal-

lenges were encountered when explaining parental incarceration to children under 10 years old. Additionally, the research team endeavored to understand how children's storybooks aligned with caregivers' narratives could be created without interjecting bias, unrealistic scenarios, and harmful graphic images. To understand this problem a community-based participatory research approach was used.

Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) generally engages participants at the outset and through the continuum of the study (Chen et al., 2010). However, our community partners were recruited after the proposal was approved and informed consent was granted to adhere to IRB stipulations. During the remainder of the study, participants made direct contributions and provided insights to meet the research study objectives.

3.4. Recruit Community Partners

Recruitment entailed multiple sampling strategies, including snowball, purposeful, and convenient sampling. We intended to employ a wide range of options to recruit and to hear multiple perspectives from caregivers who had experience raising children with incarcerated parents. Inclusion criteria were concerned with caregivers of all gender and races who: 1) were over 18 years old; 2) spoke fluent English, and 3) cared for a child who was 10 years or younger with a parent who was incarcerated in jail or prison. While we sought the expertise of all gender groups, only those who self-identified as women responded.

Twenty-two caregivers were recruited for this study (see Hart-Johnson & Johnson, 2022). Eight focus groups provided data collection of caregivers' knowledge, challenges, and nuanced techniques for discussing parental incarceration. Communication was considered non-verbal and verbal, as well as the choice not to discuss the matter at all.

3.5. Focus Group Data Collection and Do-Over Narratives

Focus group durations ranged between 60 and 90 minutes. Audio recorders were used to capture dialogue. Focus group informants participated in an icebreaker session where they were assigned pseudonyms. They were instructed by the facilitator to use this name when answering or contributing to the discussion.

During each focus group session, stimulus material was used to generate discussion. Specifically, a graphic artist hired for this project created a caricature that represented a young child with an incarcerated parent. To remove ethnic characteristics, anthropomorphic cartoons with features similar to an animal with child-like features were used. According to some scholars, children's literature is considered user-friendly when the stories feature animals with human characteristics (Dolokova, 2008). Children tend to have an affinity for and are naturally drawn to these types of illustrative designs (Dolokova, 2008).

Interview questions included such probes as:

1) How do you communicate with children about parental incarceration?

2) What is not being said during the discussions?

3) How do you feel when having these discussions?

4) When, if at all do these discussions occur?

Caregivers took turns answering the questions using pseudonyms assigned during an icebreaker exercise.

The seminal text aligned with Rubin and Rubin's (2012) research, indicated that after intense discussions interviewees may feel exposed. In some cases, the participants might second-guess their role as caregivers as they reflect upon their lived experiences. It is the facilitator's responsibility to leave participants feeling valued and secure upon the conclusion of the interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). To accomplish this task, the team used a historic method similar to capturing focus group participants' "personal summaries" (Krueger, 1998: p. 48).

This method involved encouraging participants to collectively and symbolically "rewrite" their stories, for two reasons: 1) to reveal more about their ideas about informing their children about parental incarceration, 2) to collect participants' creative ideas and elements of story creation.

The first author led the group in the story-creation exercise, using a large poster-sized flip chart and markers. The facilitator captured the caregivers' responses via flipchart notations.

A variation of the following lead-in questions was posed to participants: "If you were able to create the perfect story/scenario of explaining parental incarceration to your child, how would it unfold?" The facilitator encouraged contributions by asking the following probes, inviting every member of each group to add to the story:

- How does the story begin?
- Who is in the story (characters)?
- What happens first?
- What is the main theme and ideas unfolding?
- How does the story end?

We named this process "Do-over Narratives" in our field notes because the caregivers were able to experience a bit of cathartic release when redoing the stories based on their collective and dictated successful endings.

The participants also expressed a bit of levity when collectively writing their stories, sharing such comments as "… before we hold the big discussion, we will have a big dinner and strawberry shortcake for dessert." This helped to close out the focus group sessions on a light-hearted note.

Finally, focus group data must be carefully managed and verifiable (Krueger, 1998). This means that others should be able to follow the methodology and arrive at similar analytical conclusions. The researchers documented the workflow and followed the systematic steps to ensure efficiency, accuracy, and verifiability (Hart-Johnson & Johnson, 2022).

Preparation for the focus groups was informed by Krueger (1998), which laid the foundation for data analysis. These steps included: Developing a plan for the

sessions (interview guide), identifying materials and supplies, refining the questionnaire and icebreaker, developing moderator/facilitator guidelines, engaging community members/informants, and preparing for data analysis.

3.6. Data Analysis, Coding, and Interpretation

After information from the audio transcripts was translated and deidentified, data analysis comprised of first- and second-order coding was independently conducted by each of the co-principal researchers. The results were subsequently triangulated to refute and discover disconfirming outliers. Concurrent theoretical sampling and data analysis led to theoretical saturation.

Following the initial coding, the research team scheduled off-site meetings to isolate and focus on theory generation. Theory is considered a set of constructs that show relationships and explain how and what happens through linkages of high-order themes that address the research questions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Comparative data analysis was used. Specifically, data were compared and contrasted with the previous focus group data. Comparative analysis allows the researchers to check their reasoning and interpretation against other focus group data to see if the initial evidence holds strong and true. Comparative analysis entails (Glaser & Strauss, 1967): 1) comparing data points to others to form categories; 2) integrating properties and categories; 3) creating the theory and establishing the context, and 4) building the theoretical framework (See **Figure 2**, Caregivers' Family Relations Assessment and Communication Strategies (C-FRACS Theory).
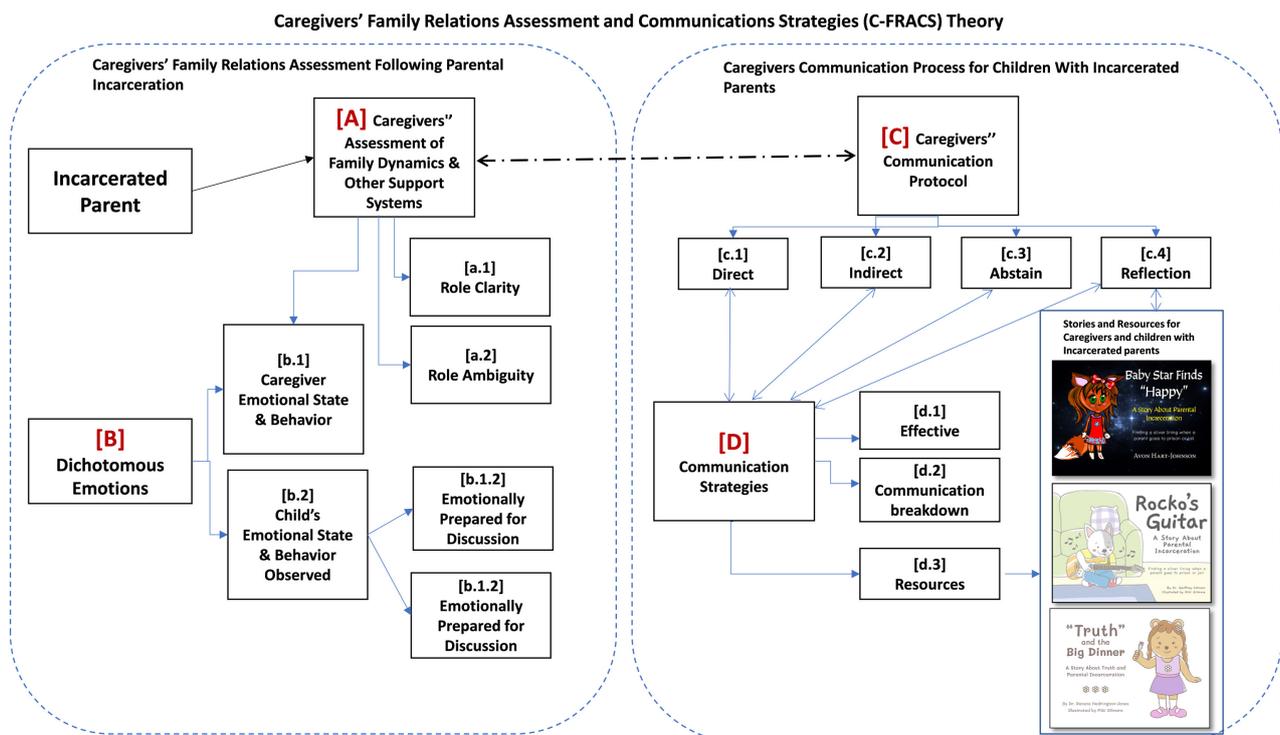

Figure 2. Caregivers' Family Relations Assessment and Communication Strategies (C-FRACS) theory.

While the initial theory was drafted, the research team continued to evaluate and test the data and relationships during the remainder of the last 3 focus group sessions.

In summary, theory creation involved developing conceptual categories and properties, testing them against divergent explanations and evidence, and using theoretical abstracting (aligned with theory and extant literature, i.e., one category was labeled role ambiguity which aligned with ambiguous loss (Boss, 1999)). The theoretical relationships were validated against the data and other sources such as field notes, do-over narratives, and extant literature. Theoretical categories and relationships were used to develop the initial network diagram illustrated in Figure 2 (see Hart-Johnson & Johnson, 2022).

3.7. Align Story Concepts to Theoretical Framework

The C-FRACS theoretical network diagram, field notes, and do-over narratives became the basis for storybooks. In brief, the theory has four major processes that are initiated by the incarceration of a parent. The major processes and sub-processes are denoted as:

- Caregivers' Assessment of Family Dynamics and Other Support Systems
  - Role Clarity
  - Role Ambiguity
- Dichotomous (mirrored) emotions
  - Caregivers' emotions
  - Children's emotions observed
- Gatekeeper Communications Protocol
  - Direct
  - Indirect
  - Abstain/Abstention
  - Reflection/Reflexivity
- Communication Strategy
  - Effective
  - Communication Breakdown
  - Resource (utilizing stories and resources as intervention)

In brief, the C-FRACS theory suggests that a family assessment conducted by a caregiver generally precedes discussion about parental incarceration (see Figure 2, [A] Caregivers' Assessment of Family Dynamics & Other Support Systems). In this assessment, the caregiver determines support systems within and outside of the family system. The family roles may shift to fill the gap of incarcerated parents where in some circumstances, they become more defined or fuzzy (role clarity (a.1) or role ambiguity (a.2), respectively). For example, perhaps a caregiver transitions to the role of head of household out of financial necessity. As such, the children's roles may shift to support the family system (e.g., taking on household chores, caring for siblings, and becoming emotional support for the adult and visa-versa).

Dichotomous emotions (Figure 2, [B]) represent a mirroring of emotions where the caregivers and the children were found to express the same types of emotions (aligned with the incarceration). The diagram represents both the caregiver's emotions as well as the children's emotions observed (b.1 and b.2). Resultant emotions may position the caregiver and children to be ambivalent toward discussions on incarceration (b.1.1) or they may be amenable, where they are prepared for the discussion (b.1.2)

The Gatekeeper Communication Protocol (C) explains the process of caregivers' communication choices. Communication usually fell into four domains: direct (c.1), indirect (c.2), abstain (c.3), or reflection (c.4). Direct communication represents confident, straightforward, clear, and age-appropriate discussions with children. Indirect may include making up false narratives, only sharing partial truths, and sequencing information using a staging approach to broach the initial discussion and subsequent follow-ups. Caregivers also may have decided to abstain from the discussion. Generally, all caregivers in the study used a mode of reflection as an evaluative review of their talks with children. Collectively, the C-FRACS framework provided the foundation and attributes to align and construct children's books.

3.8. Draft Stories, Web Content, Integrate Feedback

Generalizability and the ability to make reasonable theoretical assertions were important in the context of creating storybooks. The design included identifying themes aligned with the context-specific theory, C-FRACS. The design also required book creation for children with broad backgrounds. Therefore, the content was designed to be generalizable to the degree attainable.

Glaser & Strauss' (1967) seminal research indicated that grounded theory has both predictive and explanatory power germane to substantive contexts. Auerbach & Silverstein (2003) indicated that generalizability is achieved through theoretical sampling. Ultimately, generalizability is achieved by an in-depth exploration of context-specific research concerns (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In the context of our initial five focus groups, data were analyzed and the tenets of the C-FRACS theory were developed. The future three focus group samples provided more clarity and definition. This characteristic of grounded theory enabled the construction of a theoretical framework (See Figure 2).

Moreover, each draft story had to adhere to the storybook requirements identified in Table 1 and bibliotherapy standards identified in Table 2, adapted by Maich & Keans (2004). These guidelines helped to establish objective guidelines for each author to create a storybook.

Before holding the final three focus groups, stories were drafted based on prevalent themes. In some cases, the author's used scenarios derived from the transcripts. Mapping the stories to the C-FRACS theory also allowed for structure and boundaries within the context of the research. Essentially, the stories emerged from what we "heard" in the data.

Table 1. Storybook requirements.

Requirements	Description
Requirement 1: Theory Alignment	The book should align with the theoretical findings.
Requirement 2: Character Development	The characters and storylines should be convincing where a child and caregiver could imagine and identify themselves as having experienced the same or similar circumstances.
Requirement 3: Convincing Storylines	The storyline should illustrate problem-solving techniques, evoke emotions, illustrate how the characters reduced feelings of anxiety and stress, and provide a means for relevant discussion about the book's content.
Requirement 4: Generate Emotional Response	The story might engender empathy, respect, tolerance, acceptance, positivity, comprehension, and new literacy skills.
Requirement 5: Objectivity	The narratives and illustrations should refrain from bias, subjectivity, problematizing parents, and polarizing depictions of incarcerated persons.
Requirement 6: Realism	The stories should refrain from using unrealistic fairytale outcomes or unrealistic story endings.

Table 2. Bibliotherapy standards.

Bibliotherapy Principle	Description
Age-appropriate	The content had to meet the developmental level of children in age groups: (0 to 5); (5 to 7), and (7 to 10).
Reading Level Analysis	Reading and ease of use were determined by using the Flesch Kincaid reading score for fifth-grade level parents/caregivers (Flesh, 2007; Tahir et al., 2020).
Story Narrative Simplicity	The story is simple, has repetitive themes, is convincing, and uses sensory elements (sight, sound, taste, touch, smell).
Culture and Diversity	Considers diversity, culture, and refrains from gender stereotypes.
Coping and Healing Intervention Properties	Demonstrates coping and overcoming a challenge/odds.

For example, a common theme identified in C-FRACS was that children's roles were sometimes juxtaposed and adult responsibilities were imposed on children (i.e., caring for a sibling, providing a meal, cleaning the home). This meant that at least one storybook had to cover family dynamic roles and respon-

sibilities.

After the three researchers drafted an initial storybook, the work was circulated among the remaining focus groups for feedback.

4. Findings

The findings of this research study are explained in a theoretical framework and detailed research study (Hart-Johnson & Johnson, 2022). Here, we narrow the focus to illuminate segmented findings through the description of tailored storybooks and the process of disseminating resources hosted on a web portal. Select caregiver quotes illustrate the alignment with C-FRACS grounded theory and linkages to the data.

4.1. Baby Star Finds "Happy": For 0 to 5-Years-Old

During the focus groups, a strong theme emerged and was captured under the subprocess, Dichotomous Emotions: children's emotions observed (Figure 2, b.2). This process represents children's emotional responses relating to the imprisonment and absence of a parent. Some caregivers shared that they believed children with an incarcerated mother struggled more than a father because of the disruption to the maternal attachment bond.

Caregivers posited that in such cases, it is difficult for young children to adjust even if they have a supportive caregiver. The caregivers divulged that children under their care often felt a sense of guilt and responsibility for their parent's arrest and incarceration, as if it was their fault. This sentiment is expressed through one caregiver's recommendation shared with focus group members:
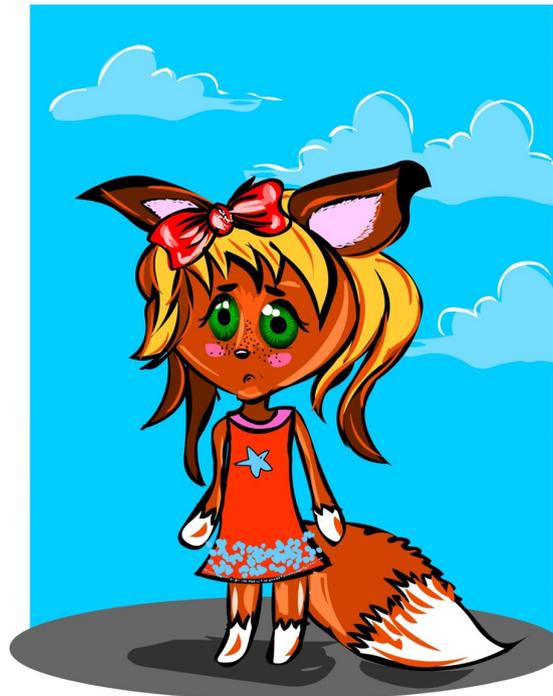
Figure 3. Central character of baby star finds "happy".

"*Tell her that she did not have anything to do with her* [*mother's incarceration*], *and it's not her fault anyway. They try to assure her that their incarceration is not her fault.*"

The story, *Baby Star Finds* "*Happy* highlights through character development how children can manifest seemingly unrealistic feelings of self-imposed blame and guilt about family matters" (Hart-Johnson, 2019-2021).

In the story, Baby Star is the central character (see Figure 3) and her parents and siblings are described as a close-knit family system. The narrative reveals that while there were foreshadowing events hinting that there might be challenges with the mom not returning home some evenings, Baby Star and the family were shocked and saddened when dad must break the news that Momma Star is in jail.

Baby Star takes on the onus of guilt because she failed to make a wish upon a four-leaf clover. Unrealistic as it may seem, she sets out to find a clover, only to discover a bunny rabbit whom, she affectionately named "Happy." The story unfolds, detailing their reciprocal and supportive relationship, where Happy symbolizes attachment bonds. The story also reveals that grieving the loss of a parent is not always consistent, but rather intermittent. The book infers that, sometimes, grieving children play. During other times, children just do not understand how incarceration is impacting their lives. This concept in the book was influenced by a caregiver's comment:

"*I feel like the younger child is not aware, not understanding what's going on so they're still able to be a kid; by that I mean they can be running around happy and oblivious to the dangers of the world.*"

We heard similar stories from caregivers, who voiced concerns about young children learning about their incarcerated parents. One caregiver indicated that her child directly approached her for information about the incarcerated parent. She recalled the child saying, "*Mommy, I want to talk about my dad.*" This request from a child conveyed many caregivers' concerns. The significance of this statement forms the baseline for most discussions. The challenge includes what to say and how to say it.

When communicating with children about incarceration, caregivers generally held one of three positions: Use direct communication and be truthful with the children, or be indirect or do not share information at all (Figure 2, [c.3]).

Baby Star's dad plays an instrumental role in conducting the family informal assessment and determining the support the children need (Figure 2, [A]). Daddy Star is also the main communications gatekeeper (Figure 2, [C]), ensuring that the children are informed about where their mother has gone.

In the story, readers learn that communication is important in maintaining contact via jail-originated phone calls to home. Communication protocols are illustrated in (Figure 2, [C]). It is through this mode of communication that Baby Star's mom tells her child (Baby Star) that the incarceration is not her fault. The mom also illustrates how to offer an apology for her behavior that resulted in her going to jail (without giving details of the events leading up to the sentence). The mom tells Baby Star also that she loves her.

This book highlights several other features, including the power of symbolism, friendship, sibling relationships, dads as heads of household, family bonding and support, as well as a focus on sensory elements. The family bonds and support systems are illustrated in (Figure 2, [A]). The book also illuminates a phenomenon reported in the literature called Symbolic Imprisonment, where initially when the mom went to prison, the whole family felt that they were sharing the sentence (Hart-Johnson, 2017). This was also emphasized in the C-FRACS data, where a caregiver shared, "I feel like we're all in jail, we're all in prison."

4.2. Rocko's Guitar: For 5 to 7-Years-Old

Rocko's Guitar details several components of C-FRACS theory and illustrates the challenges of paternal incarceration, compassionate deception, children's internalizing and externalizing behaviors in school environments, and the power of support systems (Johnson, 2019-2021). Each of these elements was extrapolated from the data aligned with C-FRACS.

In the story, *Rocko's Guitar*, the process of assessing the well-being of the family system (Figure 2, [A]), is carried out by the mother. The story conveys the father-child bond existing between Rocko, the central character, and his dad a musician. Prior to incarceration, the dad was head of the household.

Central to Rocko's story is the use of compassionate deception (embedded in Figure 2, [d.2] communication breakdown). Rocko's mom did not know how to tell Rocko the sad news that his dad, a budding musician was in prison. Therefore, she instead informed Rocko that Dad left to go on tour in Europe. Rocko's mom believed that this alternative story was better than imposing an emotional burden on Rocko. This sentiment was shared by many caregivers in the focus group. They stated concern about sharing too much information about the incarceration status of parents.

This theme is also identified under the C-FRACS, Gatekeeper Communication Protocols (Figure 2, [C]): "abstain" or abstaining from discussing the truth. This construct represents how some caregivers abstained from truthful discussions and may have used "indirect" or even deceptive means of communicating with children about parental incarceration.

Figure 4. The central character, "Rocko" in Rocko's guitar.

This storyline directly aligns with a caregiver who shared, "I told my child that (one of the incarcerated parents) was in Europe."

In the story, Rocko internalizes his dad's abrupt absence, feeling confused (depicted in Figure 4). He felt that he was unworthy of his father rendering a final hug and saying goodbye before leaving for travel. In the story narrative, his worry and concerns are initially held within (internalized), but anger ensued and he eventually projected his emotions and confusion in the school classroom as mild disrespect for his teacher, showing defiance (externalized).

We draw this behavioral example from caregivers who discussed their concerns about children's conduct in school, especially if they lacked an understanding of the nature of the incarceration. One caregiver reflected on her children's externalizing behavior in school: "They're walking down the hallway when they should be in class [or] they are acting up. You don't want them to be like this and it makes for long nights."

Another caregiver offered: "They are A and B students but it's just their behavior is unbearable."

The story about Rocko highlights another important concept found in the data. Rocko learned the truth concerning his father's incarceration through a friend who happened to work at a community center that Rocko attended. Caregivers in our study spoke of how children often received second-hand renditions of what happened to their incarcerated parents. One caregiver warned that this situation has repercussions:

"*So, you have grandparents, maternal and paternal.* [*In addition to*] *grandparents, you have aunts and uncles, always surrounding the child, always around… As the child gets older, the child begins to question more and more about when the father is coming home.*"

While the focus group caregivers mainly described family members interjecting and discussing incarceration with children, others indicated that people outside the family may tell the child the truth. Therefore, caregivers advised that it is paramount that parents get ahead of the situation and share the truth with the children, themselves.

Finally, Rocko's story highlights examples of how caregivers can recover from telling children mistruths. The story illustrates forgiveness, apologies, coping strategies, and familial and external support systems identified in the C-FRACs-related data.

4.3. Truth and the Big Dinner: For 7 to 10-Years-Old

The final storybook created for this research study is *Truth and the Big Dinner* (Hedrington-Jones, 2019). The main crux of the story highlights the central problem: Truth's mother is not coming to dinner because she is in jail.

This story directly addresses the difference between truth telling to compassionate deception. The story highlights several components of the C-FRACS theory, including: the Caregiver's Assessment of Family Dynamics and Other

Figure 5. Central character "truth," in, truth and the big dinner.

Support Systems, role clarity, role ambiguity, and communication strategies.

Interwoven in the storylines are the developmental milestones and behaviors associated with becoming a seven- to ten-year-old. There is a focus on self-image and personal identity as it fits and aligns with assimilating with family and relatives.

Truth, the main character, wants to fit in and be accepted (Truth's image is depicted in Figure 5). Family is a support network highlighted throughout the book (Figure 2, [A]). During the "Do-Over Narrative" segment of the focus groups, caregivers indicated that if they could do things differently, they would surround their children with supportive family and friends when telling the child about their parent's incarceration. This concept is illustrated by the following participant's views:

"*Maybe a small group of the family* [*should be present*], *but not everyone converged on her at one time. It could be an auntie or grandmother or someone that she really has a bond, and to sit down and have a conversation.*"

Consistent with pre-adolescent child development, caregivers in our study also highlighted the importance of children fitting in. They distinguished that there is an important intersection between acceptance and children's self-blame. This is conveyed through a caregiver's comments as she shared her own child's thoughts using first-person narration: "If I were a better child or maybe if I was a little girl, this wouldn't happen or that wouldn't happen."

This comment illustrates how children sometimes believe that if they were better children, perhaps their parents would not have become incarcerated.

Lastly, Truth learns through her journey how the support of aunties, grandmothers, and other family members can help with coping with loss. The elders in the story demonstrate how information is shared in ways that children comprehend using analogies and symbolism. The story ends with a focus on understanding the difference between secrets and lies. It features forgiveness, apologies, and reasons for hope. Caregiver attunement, protective practices, and caring are highlights consistent with the content and the ideas expressed by caregivers in our research study.

4.4. Feedback from Caregivers and a Child Psychologist

Findings from this study included feedback from caregivers to inform each storybook. Each book was presented to the final three (3) focus groups for participant feedback related to the content, relevancy, and potential responses from children. Participants were apprised of the inclusion criteria and methodology used for book creation.

During these focus groups, the books were shared beforehand and during the initial opening of the focus groups as a refresher. Caregivers offered detailed commentary on the application and viability of the stories, such as the following caregiver's critique of the story, *Rocko's Guitar*:

"*Rocko had a support system in place, most importantly* [*he had*] *his mother. But it seemed like she was* [*remorseful*], *after the fact. Maybe she did not know how to handle the fact that the child's father was in jail. She lied to him. I always believe that lying is not good under any circumstances no matter the age of the child. Kids are not stupid. They know something is wrong. They know that their parent is not in the picture and lying to a kid for whatever reason is wrong! Then it just struck me that she was* [*also*] *a part of the support system*"

Detailed comments such as the aforementioned were used to tweak the books and refine the core messaging. Additionally, a child psychologist reviewed and offered a critique. The psychologist examined each book for age and developmental appropriateness. Also, each book was evaluated on addressing the following questions:

- How, if at all, do the books offer intervention and illustrate coping strategies?
- Are the concepts simple and aligned with the age groups purported?
- What concepts align with character behaviors? How are they demonstrated?
- In what ways are characters demonstrating coping and resilience?
- Do the characters and their behaviors offer parents communication examples and strategies for:
  - Overcoming difficult situations that mirror situations of loss
  - Ambiguity,
  - Familial separation, and
  - Recovery?

The previous examples are an excerpt of the full list of criteria used for the vetting process. After the feedback was applied, the final drafts were published in paperback format and in digital media.

4.5. Web Portal and Resources

Dissemination of resources for caregivers' immediate use was deemed important. We heard during focus groups that our community partners, the caregivers, needed resources to use on demand. Therefore, as soon as the stories, resources, and other content were vetted by the research team, caregivers, and a child psychologist, the web team uploaded the documents for use. The resources created for this project were stored on a web portal as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6. My story and me web portal.

We selected a user-friendly name, "My Story and Me," as a masthead that represented the web-based content. This name was conjectured to be inviting and would enable users to feel a part of the project as well as feel comfortable accessing the tools and resources on a platform that was not highly technical. Child-friendly depictions of diverse children drawn from stock images were used to capture the essence of child-friendly resources.

The portal had three (3) major entry points: Our Research, Our Purpose, Get Resources. The "Our Research" link described our research study and provided researcher bios and profiles. The "Our Purpose" link discussed the science, empirical literature, and the reasoning for using storybooks and bibliotherapy. The purpose of the project was clearly described as aligned with our research questions and focus groups.

The "Get Resources link" housed the digital versions of the storybooks with voiceovers so that parents could use them with their children using smartphones, tablets, computers, or devices of their choice.

The web portal remained operational and funded for 2 years. The content was then redirected to the second author's nonprofit organization and placed under their resource list.

4.6. Disseminating Resources to Community Partners

Research is often informed by community members who are at risk for a host of adverse conditions, yet upon completion of the study, they are rarely the direct recipient of the project. Although it is critical to disseminate the work to academic texts, journals, and conferences (Vaughn et al., 2013), it is also important that the work is accessible to community partners/research participants.

As a post-research campaign to reach members of the community, we launched our "Reading Circles." These literary reading circles are intentionally focused on topic-specific content where a facilitator leads the group in rich discussions about books. The facilitator orients the audience to delve into the bibli-

otherapeutic intricacies of the story, focusing on the emotional content, sensory elements, deeper meaning, and how the content relates to their lives. Through this process, participants reflect and share their own childhood experiences as compared to the stories. Ultimately, the reading circle attendees would experience catharsis and create an action plan for themselves.

We also disseminated the research at local and international conferences germane to the topic and social phenomenon. At a conference in Huddersfield, England (Hart-Johnson, Johnson, & Hedrington-Jones, 2019), the research team highlighted the preliminary findings and the status of the project. We subsequently were able to present the study as well as host workshops on using our tailored storybooks on parental incarceration with bibliotherapy practices.

5. Discussion

This study explored the interpersonal communication of caregivers and their children related to parental incarceration. The crux of this paper focused on how storybooks might bridge the gap between a child grieving the loss of a formative relationship and caregivers sharing ways to cope with difficult life circumstances. This research confirms Larsen Walker et al. (2020) hypothesis that bibliotherapeutic literature can help children with incarcerated parents develop problem-solving skills, model resilience, demonstrate effective coping, and illustrate attributes of strong character building (Malchiodi, 2015).

Our study participants' feedback was congruent with seminal works that suggested storybooks can help children understand their world, increase comprehension, and help children to venture outside of their environments without ever leaving their homes (Abasi & Soori, 2014).

The uncertainty of prison sentencing, prison visits and constraints, and the continuum of events ranging from arrest to release from prison are often ambiguous and filled with vagueness, leaving caregivers with often inadequate information. As such, they may at times feel helpless and limited, and with a pervasive sense of discomfort related to unknowns (Legal Information Institute, n.d.).

Adequate caregiver-child communication might clear up the confusion about an absent parent without imposing an emotional burden on children. In fact, the discussion might help young children of the incarcerated parent to reframe any thoughts about somehow causing the event to occur (based on their tendency for egocentric thinking during childhood).

Young children may not comprehend such terms as jail, prison, arrest, sentencing, and courts (Cain & Oakhill, 2008). Given that their vocabulary is still evolving and cognitive maturation is ever increasing, children who are about five years old and under may only understand that their parents have suddenly disappeared (Abasi & Soori, 2014). Children who are aged six to ten may have increased acquisition of word comprehension and recognition. This age group might have different information needs based on comprehension age-match.

It is widely reported that communication is an integral part of socio-emotional skills building and family bonding. This interpersonal skill also increases

the chances of creating a stress-reducing environment for child nurturing (Parchment et al., 2022). Yet, not all caregivers are comfortable with the pedagogy of using children's literature as an aid and instruction guides as tools, deferring that responsibility to helping professionals and educators (Coppola et al., 2013). Further, some caregivers may feel ambivalent about sharing sensitive and potentially stress-inducing information, even with the aid of resources. As such, caregivers may avoid completely having the discussions.

Although some caregivers may doubt their competency to deliver the information about incarceration without further inflicting emotional burdens and anguish on young children, others have mastered this feat, delivering information in age-appropriate and child-sensitive ways. This study has provided the framework to capture the essence of caregivers' practices and problem-solving techniques in the storybooks and resources created for this project.

The study also affirms that harnessing caregivers' abilities and wisdom can add to the literature base by offering first-hand insights to cultivate dyadic discussions and communication practices with children. Future research should continue a focus on the dynamics of caregiver-child communication from the perspectives of incarcerated parents.

As noted at the outset, conceptualizing prison, jail, and the purpose of carceral facilities as well as the reasoning for a parent's separation and detainment may be difficult for young children to comprehend and challenging for caregivers to put into age-appropriate language. The books, *Baby Star Finds "Happy"*, *Rocko's Guitar*, and *Truth and the Big Dinner*, each provide an inside glimpse into jails and prisons without interjecting stereotypes or demoralizing the parents as "inmates."

For example, in the book, *Rocko's Guitar* (see Figure 7), the dad is depicted talking on the pay phone from the prison. This illustration aligns with the literature that recommends that authors should avoid depicting parents in a negative light where children might fear for their parent's safety (Larsen Walker et al., 2020). The authors/researchers refrained from using frightening illustrations, dark images, and threatening environments that might add to children's worries and concerns.

Figure 7. Rocko and dad speak by telephone.

The act of reading a storybook is a form of communication. The stories provide a basis for caregiver-child interaction and possible bonding.

As Gualano et al. (2017) indicated, the mere act of reading to a child can increase vocabulary and build attachments. Caregiver-child communication helps to lay the groundwork for children's comprehension as well as enhances listening skills.

How caregivers navigate difficult circumstances in the family can model how children adjust to loss, cope with grief, and deal with potential stigma. The storybooks offer opportunities and talking points for the caregiver-child didactic discussions.

There is evidence that empirical-based interventions such as bibliotherapy can reduce stress, help children to understand and cope with incarceration and, potentially, reduce adverse outcomes (Drolet et al., 2022; Gualano et al., 2017; Malchiodi, 2015).

Storybooks can help children to understand the complexity and dynamics of the world. The use of stories can improve a child's comprehension as well as stimulate a framework for discussion about difficult situations and associated feelings/emotions related to estranged, fractured, or stress related to formative relationships (Dolokova, 2008). To illustrate a broad range of heterogeneous experiences, it seems reasonable that books about parental incarceration should be generalizable across cultural contexts related to arrest, jail, prison, and communication regarding incarceration. These stories would be even more beneficial if they were vetted by such experts as child development psychologists as well as caregivers/parents.

As noted, young children have difficulties conceptualizing prison and jail as well as the purpose of these carceral facilities. They may also struggle with understanding the reasoning behind a parent's whereabouts and detainment. Each of these topics could be explained through prose captured in a storybook and other tailored resources (Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2021; Poehlmann-Tynan & Pritzl, 2019) without explaining the details or morals associated with an alleged crime. Using tailored books as guides, caregivers can explain complex topics, using developmentally aligned language. One method of ensuring that books meet these standards is through the use of bibliotherapeutic principles combined with subject-matter-expert vetting.

The intentional design of the storybooks created for this project also met the requirements (Table 1) of alignment with theoretical findings, creating convincing characters in the stories, and integrating opportunities for caregivers to discuss problem-solving, stress reduction, and elements such as apologies, forgiveness, and truth-telling.

Creating stories aligned with caregivers' experiences and frequent encounters, while removing personal biases and meeting the aforementioned requirements, entailed analyzing the data and using creativity. Scholars suggest that storybooks help adults to draw from personal childhood experiences, reflections on overcoming struggles, acknowledging that life is not all about fairytale endings and

that, sometimes, we must accept that bad things happen to good people (Abasi & Soori, 2014).

The storybooks created for this project each provide realistic endings (Hart-Johnson, 2017; Hedrington-Jones, 2019; Johnson, 2019-2021). The stories do not promise or establish a precedent that the parents will come home and life will be "rosy." Instead, the realism of a parent not coming home right away is a starting point for discussion for the caregiver to consider the unique circumstances of the child.

The C-FRACS model notes that caregivers and children often experience similar emotions where a "mirroring effect" ensues. This assessment is highlighted in each of the books, as well.

The study also aligns with findings from Nesmith & Ruhland (2011) and Lohre (2017) that illuminated the need for caregivers to have resources and tools that enable them to reflect upon their own lived experiences, while also being attuned to the well-being of their children.

Finally, the stories provide opportunities for children to see themselves and to live vicariously through the lessons learned from others. This idea is evidenced in the caregiver's quote as follows:

"*I have to say when I first heard that story, it really hit home for me and the child I'm caring for. The child has a very, very close relationship with his father and it hit home… But to teach them* [*that incarceration*] *was not the normal process. This is, unfortunately, what has happened... but let them talk about it with the adults. With the smaller children, yes, a book is good. If they can write, if they can listen to someone else going through some of the same feelings that they have, it might help.*"

6. Conclusion

This qualitative study was designed to address the communication and storybook literature gap. The prevalence of incarceration positions the United States as the highest jailer in the world, leaving a legacy of children with incarcerated parents. While recent trends have shown some level of decline, what remains constant is that half of the prison population of adults have minor children. The nonincarcerated caregivers need tailored resources to help with the often sensitive and emotionally-laden discussion.

The literature conveys that children with incarcerated parents are the least to be informed about their parent's location and well-being, leaving children to worry, possibly internalize guilt, and sometimes feel abandoned due to a lack of clear and age-appropriate communication. The storybooks and resources associated with this project are designed to help caregivers to facilitate communication with young children and to bolster confidence when holding sensitive discussions.

While books are only a starting point for discussion, caregivers can establish a plan to help children sort out and make sense of their lives, especially if they are

informed of how it will change. Caregivers are by default in the best position to be their children's role models, demonstrating interpersonal communication and problem-solving skills. Other examples certainly can come from literature.

With so many adversities surrounding incarceration, caregivers might benefit from tools that help to focus on the abstract rather than the granular detail of the incarceration. Children tend to want to know that their parents are safe and that their parents' and caregivers' love is unconditional. Creative interventions such as storybooks can help with challenging situations such as parental incarceration.

7. Implications

This study makes important contributions to better understanding the dynamics of discussing parental incarceration with young children. This body of work contributes to the knowledge base on how bibliotherapy using tailored storybooks can help caregivers to have candid conversations with children using tools designed specifically for the parent-child dyad. Given the growing number of mothers and fathers who are incarcerated, this study provides insights for helping professionals, educators, and new caregivers to navigate the nuances of explaining jail, prison, and incarceration.

Future research should evaluate the efficacy of each of the tailored storybooks proposed in this study. Further, the research could extend this study's focus to examine the communication practices of caregivers who are men, gender nonbinary, and fictive kin perspectives.

Data from this study could be used to inform community-based organizations, parenting programs enforced by the court systems, and within the prison setting itself.

Acknowledgements

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

Abasi, M., & Soori, A. (2014). Is Storytelling Effective in Improving the English Vocabulary Learning among Iranian Children in Kindergartens? *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies, 2,* 7-11. https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.2n.3p.7

Annie Casey Foundation (2016). *Children of Incarcerated Parents, a Shared Sentence. The Devastating Toll of Parental Incarceration on Kids, Families, and Communities.*

https://www.aecf.org/resources/a-shared-sentence

Auerbach, C. & Silverstein, L. B. (2003). *Qualitative Data: An Introduction to Coding and Analysis* (Vol. 21). New York University Press.

Beresford, S., Loucks, N., & Raikes, B. (2020). The Health Impact on Children Affected by Parental Imprisonment. *BMJ Pediatric Open, 4,* e000275.
https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjpo-2018-000275

Boss, P. (1999). *Ambiguous Loss: Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief.* Harvard University Press.

Cain, K., & Oakhill, J. (2008). *Children's Comprehension Problems in Oral and Written Language: A Cognitive Perspective.* Guilford Press.
https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjpo-2018-000275

Chen, P. G., Diaz, N., Lucas, G., & Rosenthal, M. S. (2010). Dissemination of Results in Community-Based Participatory Research. *American Journal of Prevention Research, 39,* 372-378. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2010.05.021

Coppola, G., Ponzetti, S., & Vaughn, B. E. (2013). Reminiscing Style during Conversations about Emotional-Laden Events and Effects of Attachment Security among Italian Mother-Child Dyads. *Social Development, 13,* 702-718.
https://doi.org/10.1111/sode.12066

Correa, P., Hayes, N., K., Bhalakia, A., M. Lopez, A., Cupit, K. K., Kwarteng-Amaning, T., & Van Horne, B. S. (2021). Parents' Perspectives on the Impact of Their Incarceration on Children and Families. *Family Relations, 70,* 162-170.
https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12529

Dolokova S. (2008). *Storytime Activities in Primary Classes and Kindergartens.* Master Thesis, Masary University of Borno, Faculty of Education.

Drolet, J., Lalani, N., & McDonald-Harker, C. (2022). Using Creative Art Research Approaches to Assess Arts-Based Interventions with Children in Post-Disaster Contexts. *Social Work Research Using Arts-Based Methods,* 117-126.

Elliott, S., & Reid, M. (2019). Low-Income Black Mothers Parenting Adolescents in the Mass Incarceration Era: The Long Reach of Criminalization. *American Sociological Review, 84,* 197-219. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122419833386

Ferm, U., Ahlsén, E., & Björck-åkesson, E. (2005). Conversational Topics between a Child with Complex Communication Needs and Her Caregiver at Mealtime. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication, 21,* 19-41.
https://doi.org/10.1080/07434610412331270507

Flesch, R. (2007). Flesch-Kincaid Readability Test.
https://rockstar-english.com/lessons/advanced/12-Flesch_Kincaid_Readability_Test.pdf

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research.* Aldine de Gruyter.

Goffman, E. (1997). Selections from Stigma. In L. J. Davis (Ed.), *The Disability Studies Reader* (pp. 203-215). Routledge.

Gualano, M. R., Bert, F., Boglino, G., Martorana, M., Andriolo, V., & Siliquini, R. (2017). Effects of Bibliotherapy on Treating Depression: A Systematic Review. *European Journal of Public Health, 27,* ckx186.244. https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckx186.244

Hart-Johnson, A. (2017). *African American Women with Incarcerated Mates: The Psychological and Social Impacts of Mass Imprisonment.* McFarland.

Hart-Johnson, A. & Johnson, G. (2022). Caregivers Family Relations Assessment and Communications Strategies (C-FRACS): Bibliotherapy Storybooks for Children with Incarcerated Parents. *Psychology and Behavioral Sciences, 11,* 157-168.

Hart-Johnson, A. (2019-2021). *Baby Star Finds "Happy"*. Extant One.

Hart-Johnson, A., Johnson, A., & Hedrington-Jones (2019). Storytelling for Children with Incarcerated Parents. Project Title: Parents and Caregivers' Perceptions of Storytelling as a Creative Intervention for Children with Incarcerated Parents. In *International Children with Incarcerated Parents Conference Symposium*. https://157-168www.inccip.org

Hedrington-Jones, R. (2019). *Truth and the Big Dinner*. Extant-One Publishing, Inc., & Avon Hart-Johnson Publishing, LLC.

Herr, K., & Anderson, G. L. (2015). *The Action Research Dissertation.* Safe Publications.

Johnson, G. A. (2019-2021). *Rocko's Guitar*. Extant One.

Kelly, M. (2018). Difficult Conversations. In A. D. Peterkin, & A. Skorzewska (Eds.), *Health Humanities in Postgraduate Medical Education* (pp. 233-266). Oxford Academic. https://doi.org/10.1093/med/9780190849900.003.0010

Kjellstrand, J., Yu, G., Eddy, J. M., & Clark, M. (2020). Children with Incarcerated Parents and Developmental Trajectories of Internalizing Problems across Adolescence. *American Journal of Criminal Justice, 45,* 48-69. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-019-09494-4

Krueger, R. A. (1998). *Analyzing & Reporting Focus Group Results*. Sage Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483328157

Larsen Walker, S., Connery, C., Norris Blackson, G., Divine, T. F., Day Walker, T., Williams, B., Finke, J. A., Bartel, K. (2020). Developing Resilience in Youth with Incarcerated Parents: Bibliotherapeutic Blueprint with Tweens and Young Adult Literature Chapter Books. *Journal of Correctional Education, 71,* 37-56.

Legal Information Institute. (n.d.). *Sentencing*. https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/sentencing

Lohre, S. B. (2017). *Attune With Baby: An Innovative Attunement Program for Parents and Families with Integrated Evaluation*. Doctoral Dissertation, Antioch University.

Maich, K., & Kean, S. (2004). Read Two Books and Write Me in the Morning! Bibliotherapy for Social Emotional Intervention in the Inclusive Classroom. *Teaching Exceptional Children Plus, 1,* 5.

Malchiodi, C. A. (2015). *Creative Interventions with Traumatized Children*. The Guilford Press

McChord, C. (1916). *A Literary Clinic*. https://cdn.theatlantic.com/media/archives/1916/09/118-3/132285593.pdf

Meadan, H., Chung, M. Y., Sands, M. M., & Snodgrass, M. R. (2020). The Cascading Coaching Model for Supporting Service Providers, Caregivers, and Children. *The Journal of Special Education, 54,* 113-125. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022466919884070

Nesmith, A. & Ruhland, E. (2011). Caregivers of Children with Incarcerated Parents. *The Open Family Studies Journal, 4,* 105-116. https://doi.org/10.2174/1874922401104010105

Neuman, M. G. (1998). *Helping Your Kids Cope with Divorce the Sandcastles Way*. Random House.

Parchment, T. M., Small, L., & Bhana, A. (2022). Caregiver-Child Communication: The Case for Engaging South African Caregivers in Family-Based Interventions. In F. M. Ssewamala, O. Sensoy Bahar, M. M. McKay (Eds.), *Child Behavioral Health in Sub-Saharan Africa* (pp. 303-315). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-83707-5_15

Poehlmann-Tynan, J., & Pritzl, K. (2019). Parent-Child Visits When Parents Are Incarcerated in Prison or Jail. In J. Eddy, & J. Poehlmann-Tynan (Eds.), *Handbook on children with Incarcerated Parents* (pp. 131-147). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-16707-3_10

Poehlmann-Tynan, J., Cuthrell, H., Weymouth, L., Burnson, C., Frerks, L., Muentner, L. et al. (2021). Multisite Randomized Efficacy Trial of Educational Materials for Young Children with Incarcerated Parents. *Development and Psychopathology, 33,* 323-339. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579419001792

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2012). *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Tahir, M., Usman, M., Muhammad, F., Khan, I., Idrees, M., Irfan, M., & Glowacz, A. (2020). Evaluation of Quality and Readability of Online Health Information on High Blood Pressure Using DISCERN and Flesch-Kincaid Tools. *Applied Sciences, 10,* Article No. 3214. https://doi.org/10.3390/app10093214

Testa, A., & Jackson, D. B. (2021). Parental Incarceration and School Readiness: Findings from the 2016 to 2018 National Survey of Children's Health. *Academic Pediatrics, 21,* 534-541. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acap.2020.08.016

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2019). *Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences: Leveraging the Best Available Evidence.* National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Vaughn, N. A., Jacoby, S. F. Williams, T., Guerra, T., Thomas, N. A., & Richmond, T. S. (2013). Digital Animation as a Method to Disseminate Research Findings to the Community Using a Community-Based Participatory Approach. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 51,* 30-42. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-012-9498-6

Walker, S. L., Connery, C., Blackson, G. N., Divine, T. F., Walker, T. D. et al. (2020). Developing Resilience in Youth with Incarcerated Parents. *Journal of Correctional Education (1974), 7,* 37-56.

Wildeman, C., Goldman, A. W., & Turney, K. (2018). Parental Incarceration and Child Health in the United States. *Epidemiologic Reviews, 40,* 146-156. https://doi.org/10.1093/epirev/mxx013

Young, B., Collier, N. L., Siennick, S. E., & Mears, D. P. (2020). Incarceration and the Life Course: Age-Graded Effects of the First Parental Incarceration Experience. *Journal of Developmental and Life-Course Criminology, 6,* 256-279. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40865-020-00143-7