

Assessing the Impact of InsideOut Dad™ on Newark Community Education Centers (CEC) Residential Reentry Center Residents

Executive Summary

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Introduction

Parental incarceration has been described as one of the most harmful aspects of mass imprisonment in the U.S. It is well documented that the U.S. has one of the highest incarceration rates in the world. Further, multiple surveys have shown that over half of incarcerated male inmates in state and federal institutions are fathers. The absence of these fathers contributes to a cycle across generations of incarceration.

Due to the short and long-term economic, emotional, and social effects of parental incarceration, programs targeting parenting knowledge and skills have become more prominent in jails and prisons in recent years. Despite the expansion of such programs, reviews of the academic literature have found that there are very few in-depth evaluations of parenting programs. Many of the studies that have been conducted have not used rigorous methods or control populations leading to tenuous conclusions about the effectiveness of such programs.

National Fatherhood Initiative's InsideOut Dad™ program, launched in 2005, is now used in correctional facilities in every state and standardized in more than 20 states as well as the city of New York.¹ The program has been the subject of two evaluations in Maryland and Ohio. The current study improves upon previous research on the InsideOut Dad™ program by (1) studying the program in a new location to increase the generalizability of earlier findings; (2) using larger experimental and control groups; (3) adding new research instruments to evaluation surveys that are part of the curriculum; and (4) supplementing quantitative findings with qualitative interviews with participants and stakeholders.

Key Findings

A total of 307 fathers completed the program during the experiment period across the three residential reentry sites in Newark, New Jersey operated by Community Education Centers. A sum of 104 participants was included in the control group. A longitudinal, quasi-experimental design was employed. The two main sources of quantitative data were pre and post-test surveys and data collected on behavioral infractions within the institutions. A subset of participants (n=27) were selected for interviews to learn more about their experiences in the program. Stakeholders (n=6) were interviewed about their perspectives on the design and implementation of the InsideOut Dad™ program. As the quantitative data below indicates, the participants in the program experienced statistically significant changes across confidence, knowledge, behavior, and attitude variables compared to control subjects. Moreover, the qualitative data supports the efficacy of the program.

Quantitative Analysis

Who participated in the program?

¹ "Standardized" means that a state has chosen InsideOut Dad™ as their preferred parenting program for use in male correctional facilities.

- The average age of InsideOut Dad™ participants was slightly under 35. The average age in the control group was slightly above 39. The age of program participants ranged from 18 to 62.
- Both the participant and control groups averaged slightly more than 11 years of education, demonstrating that a large percentage of study subjects did not possess a high school education.
- At each of the three sites and the control group, more than half of respondents categorized their relationship status as “single.”
- Although Blacks were the most common racial/ethnic group represented in the study, many respondents also categorized their race/ethnicity as White or Hispanic.

Program Effect on Confidence and Self-Esteem

- On the Coping Self-Efficacy Scale, statistically significant improvements were found for 4 of the 10 statements for the total program population.
- At each site, a statistically significant improvement was found for the statement, “Get needed support from Newark CEC Residential Reentry Center support staff,” indicating that the program positively affected the relationship between participants and staff.
- The control group experienced no statistically significant changes between pre- and post-test surveys on the Coping Self-Efficacy Scale.

Program Effect on Parenting Knowledge

- The experimental group improved from 78.3% accuracy on 26 survey questions at pre-test to 81.9% at post-test.
- The control group accuracy rate decreased from 77.7% at pre-test to 76.7% at post-test.
- Statistically significant improvements were found for 11 of 26 questions in the total experiment group, while the control group experienced no statistically significant improvements.

Program Effect on Parenting Behavior

- The percentage of program participants who reported calling their children more than once a week increased at post-test (48.6%) compared to pre-test (46.7%). The percentage of participants who reported never calling their children decreased from pre-test (12.3%) to post-test (6.1%). However, changes in calling behavior were not statistically significant.
- The percentage of program participants who reported never writing to their children decreased from 26.7% at pre-test to 15.7% at post-test. Changes in writing behavior were statistically significant for the participant group.

- The percentage of program participants who don't have visits with children decreased from pre-test (22.7%) to post-test (18.7%). Changes in visitation were not statistically significant.

Program Effect on Fathering Attitudes

- Of 20 statements on fathering attitudes, four experienced statistically significant improvements between pre-test and post-test for the experiment group. Most of the statements experienced movements in the desired direction without reaching statistical significance.
- The control group experienced no statistically significant improvements from pre-test to post-test.

Program Effect on Institutional Behavior

- No statistically significant effects were found between institutional infractions before and after program participation despite the fact that InsideOut Dad™ facilitators reported improved behavior among participants and at the facilities in general as a result of the program. This finding can likely be explained by a few important factors not related to the program, such as the merit/demerit system used to track infractions is inadequate to capture changes in improved behavior.

Participant Interviews

Interviews with program participants provided further support that their family background and circumstances represent a wide variety of situations. For instance, some respondents had only one child, while others had six or seven. Similarly, some respondents were in long-term, committed relationships whereas others had little or no contact with their child's mother. There was no problem with recruiting participants at any of the sites, because most of the participants heard about the program from counselors or other residents. At the pre-test interview, the majority of the participants expressed excitement about the program, but very few of the participants had specific goals or expectations.

The assessment of program facilitators and the curriculum were overwhelmingly positive. All of the interviewed participants stated that facilitators performed well and enhanced the curriculum. The participants generally found the handbook they received to cover all appropriate topics.² Multiple participants spoke about how they planned on keeping the handbook after the program concluded. Several interviewees found the InsideOut Dad™ program to be more effective and relevant than other programs they had participated in during their period of incarceration. Participants also often mentioned relationships that developed with other group members as strengths of the program.

² The handbook that participants receive reflects the content in the curriculum. Participants use the handbook during the sessions to reinforce the learning objectives of the curriculum and serves as a reference after they graduate from/complete the program..

Most of the participants believed that the program was already affecting the quality of their contact with children at the time of the post-test interview. Examples include asking more questions of children during phone calls and visits, as well as reacting more calmly to situations. Additionally, when asked about their opinions on long-term effects from the program, the majority of respondents believed their participation would affect future interactions and relationships with their children.

Stakeholder Interviews

Interviews with facilitators and other stakeholders found that there was a high level of excitement and enthusiasm upon being introduced to the program. Most of the facilitators received formal training to learn about the curriculum and protocol. The facilitators described the environment during the first session of each group to be one of hope and interest from the participants.

When asked about program improvements, facilitators mentioned the role of direct family participation, in addition to possible alumni follow-up groups. Facilitators expressed concern that participants viewed graduation as the end of the experience. Other facilitators focused on the size of groups and the amount of times that the group met each week. There was some variation in the size of groups, ranging from about 10 to 25, depending on the site.

Overwhelmingly, the stakeholders believed that the InsideOut Dad™ program was a worthwhile addition to the array of programs available at Community Education Centers. Each of the interviewed facilitators supported the continuation of the program at their facility, as well as possible expansion to other sites where the program was not running.

Conclusions

This study was conducted based on a need to evaluate the InsideOut Dad™ program with more rigorous methods and to add to the body of literature about “what works” in parenting programming in jails and prisons. Statistically significant changes were found across confidence, knowledge, behavior, and attitude variables. Further, many other variables moved in the expected direction without reaching statistical significance. This study also showed that several of the practical issues that emerged in previous evaluations of other parenting programs did not become a problem, such as staff turnover, poor coordination, interruptions during class, a lack of respect, and comprehension difficulties.

Recommendations

Based on the quantitative and qualitative results from this study, a series of recommendations are provided regarding the future of the InsideOut Dad™ program and its

implementation. Specifically, these recommendations are based on feedback from participants and stakeholders about possible program improvements in addition to the survey results.

1. Facilitators should focus closely on expected release dates when forming groups.

Some interviewed participants expressed disappointment about the number of participants who left the group during the 6-week program period. Depending on the nature of the correctional facility, attrition should be viewed as a possible concern. On the positive side, very few participants voluntarily left the program. Normally, departures from the program were caused by court dates, transfers, etc.

2. National Fatherhood Initiative should work closely with participating institutions to incorporate components that directly involve participant's children and/or other family members. Several interviewed participants expressed concern that their family could not directly share their excitement in graduating from the program. Stakeholders also commented on this issue during interviews. A major priority should be a working partnership between National Fatherhood Initiative and program sites to address formal and informal policies which restrict prisoner-family contact.

3. An alumni program should be formed to allow for continued participation, mentoring, and guidance beyond the program period. The desire to continue with the program was voiced by several of the participants during post-test interviews. An alumni group would allow graduates to have a beneficial effect on current program participants. The group would also facilitate the continuation of relationships formed in the group.

4. Any future InsideOut Dad™ curriculum changes should consider fathering knowledge questions that scored relatively low on post-test surveys. Although many questions experienced statistically significant improvements, there were still some questions that had low correct response rates at the post-test survey. Facilitators in future groups should be aware of previous survey results to better understand what areas participants have struggled to understand.

5. Future evaluation research on the InsideOut Dad™ program should include long-term follow-up surveys and/or interviews with participants. The current study did not include a lengthy follow-up period based on the short duration of the study period. However, future studies should aim to incorporate a longer follow-up period and include data on recidivism for program participants.

6. The InsideOut Dad™ program should be implemented as a standard, evidence-based program at the Community Education Centers sites. Additionally, the New Jersey Department of Corrections should consider the program for other state facilities. This recommendation is based on changes in quantitative outcomes, qualitative results from participant interviews, and its overall efficacy as shown in this and the other two independent evaluations.