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Funding Source: MU Undergraduate Research Scholars Program

The influence of family and friends on an inmate's pathway to prison

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An association between deviant peer networks, single or no parent families, and criminal behavior is routinely recognized in Criminology literature (Coughlin & Vuchinich, 1996). The absence of marriage and the failure to form and maintain intact family and peer interactions seems to elucidate the prevalence of crime and deviance (Fagan, 1995). For the purpose of this study, I explored the nature of inmates' family relationships, as well as the people in their life that influenced their behavior before becoming incarcerated by interviewing ten inmates from the Boonville Correctional Center. This paper employs Glaser and Strauss' Grounded Theory (1967) to efficiently acquire and categorize data. For my study, the interview operates as a subjective explanation from the inmates on their perceived reasons for becoming incarcerated, along with the inmates' relationships within their community, peers, and family before coming to prison. Contradictory to expected claims about family structure, most inmates were primarily taken care of by both of their biological parents and had a strong relationship with them. However, 80% had a family member who has been incarcerated. As for peer relationships, it seems that the more the inmates moved around when they were growing up, than the more likely they were to become involved in deviant groups since they may be less selective and more open to unfamiliar peers. Further research needs to add a quantitative component to this study, as well as discover how inmates were integrated into their community and interacted with their peers and family, so we might better understand how certain individuals become incarcerated.