

Script

Introduction

Taylor: Hello! and welcome back to Reproductive (In)Justice!

Molly: This is Molly, [and I'm Taylor] - and - Last week, the podcast discussed the topic of Crisis Pregnancy Centers.

Taylor: In this episode, we're going to talk about incarcerated women and how diverse cases need diverse solutions. **argument** Currently, inside a system that fails to account for basic human liberties when determining a punishment, incarcerated women are being deprived of their parental right to raise a child in a safe and healthy environment.

Molly: Because of this, Taylor and I will be discussing the effects of visitation on child-parent relationships, the barriers that these women face, and the option of alternative programs.

Topic 1: effects of visitation

Taylor: Ok, so we need to start at the beginning. In 1980, the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act was created to promote visitation between children and their parents after a temporary loss in child custody. However, there are still many barriers that incarcerated women face with regards to their visitation rights.

Molly: Taylor, when I was reflecting on this, I really thought it was a great idea and the Act was created with good intention. However, I start to think about grey areas in Acts such as these that can create more challenges for families. For example, parents who are in prison that are not close to the child's home, may cause irregular visitations schedules.

Taylor: That is a good point. Before we get into the barriers, it is important to note that irregular visits can have lasting impacts on the child's mental and behavioral status. For example, in an article by Andrea Kovalsky, she emphasizes how child misconduct increases when they have had less or irregular visits with their incarcerated mother.

Molly: I found it interesting that she also links child psychology to the amount and regularity of visits as well. For our listeners, when visits are irregular, the children can experience withdrawal, depression, and anxiety, on top of what they are already going through with having a mother in prison.

Taylor: To add to our insight into the effects of visitation, we had the opportunity to speak with Dr. Virginia Beard, a criminology professor from Longwood University. She has degrees rooted in psychology and criminal justice and worked as a counselor in a women's correctional facility

outside of Atlanta, Georgia for about a year and a half. After that, she began to teach classes and continue research on the topic of parenting while incarcerated.

Molly: When asked about the effects of visitation on the children, she had some very good insight on the “double edged sword” as she describes it.

20:50-21:01 - children feel angry/abandoned (11 sec)

22:09-22:24 - children are excited and bring stuff for mom (15 sec)

Topic 2: barriers

Taylor: I love the metaphor she used to explain these concerns for the child’s physical and emotional wellbeing. Not only can mental health become a barrier to a positive visit, but a lack of support from pertinent others - which are those who have influence over whether or not the mother can see her child - can oftentimes create a negative atmosphere as well.

Molly: Dr. Beard mentions that she has witnessed for herself how an abusive spouse can continue to control the incarcerated mother by keeping the children away as a form of punishment. In her own words...

*15:15-15:24 (9 sec)**

Taylor: You know, I hate that the mother’s rights could be determined by one person’s opinion of the mother. I think a team approach and a large support group for the mother is crucial to avoid bias from one individual.

Molly: Knowing your support group is always helpful for mental health stability, at least I know it is for me!

Taylor: Same here! And as a matter of fact, the mother’s mental stability can be another barrier when it comes to visitation. Sometimes, the mother could be in a depressive or emotional state that they may not want their child to see them in. So, they may deny a visit that day because of their own mental health.

Molly: Dr. Beard also discussed how the mothers she worked with could go through a roller coaster of emotions from an adrenaline rush and being eager to see their child to sadness when the visit was over or didn’t go the way they expected. On the other hand, being away from the child causes a lot of anxiety. In her words:

13:29-13:39 - don’t know where there child is/what they’re doing (10 sec)

Taylor: Although visitation is supposed to be helpful for the parent-child bond, she made a good point that the stress of uncertainty can create complications. Speaking of, another barrier comes from transportation and scheduling.

Molly: The mother would have to have very willing and able pertinent others in her life to assist with getting the child to the prison or even scheduling the visit from outside the prison.

Taylor: What would make matters worse is if the mother was incarcerated hours or even states away from the child! Dr. Beard put into perspective how women who are arrested in Farmville could run into a problem like this.

6:58-7:19 - no women's prison in farmville (21 sec)

Taylor: Keeping in mind all of these barriers, I would like to steer the conversation in the direction of visitation rules that are outlined in the Code of Virginia for Virginia State Prisons.

Molly: Oh yes, I think we both have some interesting points on Virginia's own laws within the state correctional system and how they may complicate visitation rights.

Taylor: Well, one positive is that when a prisoner is a primary caretaker of a minor dependant, the children (with no restrictions on how many) are allowed to visit them at least twice a week!

Molly: That's something nice a mother would have to look forward to in her week! Virginia also allows contact visits which are CRUCIAL for the mother-child bond with newborns, infants, and toddlers. Also, most places are considering increasing emphasis on what happens during the visit such as allowing play time in order to bond.

Taylor: All of these are important pieces to benefitting from visitation, but my biggest concern when reading this specific Code of Virginia was the possible biases involved. It states that the Director, warden, or superintendent has full capability to revoke visitation rights based on "reasonable belief" that the child may be harmed during visitation or if the child is considered a security risk.

Molly: After learning about this, Taylor and I looked at the Virginia Department of Corrections and AFOI websites to learn more about what inmates and their families have to go through.

Taylor: Molly, what did you think about the website's information?

Molly: At first glance, I was like 'wow', that is a lot of rules, and seems overwhelming for a child. Everyone has to get patted down, follow a dress code, and be preregistered online to visit. This made me wonder about people who do not have access to computers or wifi. Especially after learning one in eight people live below the poverty line.

Taylor: I think you make a really good point about the computer/wifi access. Not everyone is privileged enough to have access to information about these resources. We also learned about how phone conversations are limited to twenty minutes, and our conversation with Dr. Beard shed even more light on this barrier.

11:11-11:26 - your 20 minute call costs money (15 sec)

Molly: Just imagine if you were a teenager in high school trying to confide in your mother but she only has enough money for 5 minutes or none at all. It must be so hard for these children to feel connected and heard.

Topic 3: alternative programs

Molly: Now, I also want to talk about Mark Osler's Article, Intensive Parenting and Banishment as Sentencing Alternatives for Defendant Parents. For our listeners out there, Osler talks about two groups of defendant parents who are about to face incarceration: Good parents and bad parents.

Taylor: I also found the solutions in this article very intriguing. First, he defines good parents as parents who can and want to have a positive impact in their child's life. On the other hand, bad parents put their children at major risk or are incarcerated due to abuse or violence.

Molly: I think the most important part of the article was Osler's idea of alternative sentencing.

Taylor: I agree, I think it is a fantastic idea! For those listening, Osler's alternative sentencing for good parents starts with a parole sentencing. The parents then have access to counselors, addiction counseling, parenting classes, and spend a required amount of time with the child, such as helping coach a sports team.

Molly: I also think this is a great response to reducing the number of people incarcerated. Meanwhile, for bad parents, Osler offers up the idea of "banishment". Osler describes "banishment" as the parent having to leave the county or region where the child is to serve their parole, while also working to provide child support.

Taylor: I love how this makes the parent accountable while simultaneously keeping the child safe! Virginia actually has some alternative programs available and a system of determining who gets placed in these programs. Those eligible, specifically, are defendants who "would have been sentenced to incarceration for a nonviolent felony and whose identified risks and needs the court determines cannot be addressed by conventional probation supervision."

Molly: You know, I think Dr. Beard had some really good points about how to differentiate between who should be placed in alternative programs. Those with a longer sentence, say 25+ years, may not really have a chance to be a parent in the child's life. But...

24:32-25:03 - 1-2 year sentence options (31 sec)

Taylor: I completely agree with her statements. I would like to end this section of the podcast on one statement she made that I could not have said better myself.

27:25-27:38 - every prisoner is different (13 sec)

[2 min and 5 sec of interview audio](#)

Closing Statement:

Molly: The collective goal of the episodes in this podcast was to inform listeners of the modern day injustices to women's reproductive rights. We hope you learned a little bit more about what women go through in their everyday struggle with reproductive (IN)justice.

Taylor: As for our episode, the main takeaway is that policy needs revision to help the children of incarcerated mothers. Reproductive justice is about them too, and they have the right to be raised in a healthy and safe environment. So, we hope you learned that every case is different, and each needs a different approach to ensure mental and physical wellbeing of all those involved.