

Intensive Parenting Ideologies and Risks for Recidivism among Justice-Involved Mothers

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This study employed factor analysis on the Intensive Parenting Attitudes Questionnaire to examine whether the resulting dimensions of intensive parenting related to risks for recidivism for 164 justice-involved mothers. Results indicated that their strong endorsement of essentialism (beliefs that mothers are uniquely qualified and responsible for child-rearing) and parenting that is all-consuming (beliefs that parenting requires great time and effort) were significantly associated with multiple risks for recidivism. The findings clarify how specific intensive parenting beliefs factor into mothers' risks for recidivism and suggest the importance of not encouraging these beliefs in correctional settings

Reasons for Research on Intensive Mothering and Recidivism

Intensive parenting is the dominant parenting ideology in the United States, and it holds parents, especially mothers, accountable for the outcomes of their children, and urges them to expend extensive time and resources on child-rearing, even when such efforts compromise the parent's wellbeing. Research continuously highlights the harms associated with women's intensive parenting beliefs. The connection between intensive parenting beliefs and recidivism for women in the justice system have never been studied before. It is important to know if there is a connection so that practitioners and policy makers avoid referring justice-involved women to programs that promote intensive parenting and so that practitioners do not cause harm by encouraging women on probation and parole to act on intensive parenting beliefs.

The Study

A previously validated measurement, the Intensive Parenting Attitude Questionnaire, was used to examine whether intensive parenting beliefs are connected to widely recognized risks for women's recidivism. This measure was obtained for 164 women on probation or parole in Michigan.

Key Findings

Women's strong endorsement in the belief that mothers are uniquely qualified and responsible for child-rearing and that parenting requires the investment of extensive time and effort were associated with multiple risks for recidivism. This connection was strongest for the belief that mothering must be all-consuming, which was connected to depression and anxiety, anger and hostility, low self-efficacy, and parenting stress.

Recommendations for Practitioners and Policy Makers

Practitioners can avoid encouraging intensive parenting beliefs in their interactions and referrals for justice-involved women. Policy makers can ensure that parenting programs instead help women develop alternative effective parenting strategies.