

# HIGH-RISK EARLY ADOLESCENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF JAIL AND OFFENDER EXPERIENCES

**Johanna B. Folk, Danielle H. Dallaire, & Janice L. Zeman**  
The College of William and Mary

Although a far-reaching phenomenon, little is known about youths' understanding of incarceration or offenders. Using mixed methods, this research assessed 106 youths' ( $M = 11.54$  years; 56.6% girls; 78.3% Black) understanding of jail and offenders. Caregivers reported youths' exposure to the criminal justice system through parental arrest (42.5%) and incarceration (32.4%). Factors found to influence youths' understanding include age, gender, and parental involvement in the criminal justice system. Results from the current study offer a snapshot of high-risk youths' understanding of jail and offenders, as well as some factors that influence them. This information may be useful for those who work with children of incarcerated parents, where misconceptions may influence psychological adjustment and the need for targeted interventions is paramount.

*Keywords:* incarceration, conceptual development, at-risk youth

The majority of state (55%) and federal (63%) prisoners report having a child under the age of 18 (Mumola, 2000), resulting in over two million youth affected by parental incarceration in this country alone (Glaze & Marushak, 2008). Of note, 35% of inmates are estimated to have children in early adolescence between the ages of 10 and 14 (Glaze & Marushak, 2008). Despite its far-reaching impact on children in the United States, scant research has examined youths' understanding of incarceration and perceptions of offenders.

The popular media, however, has paid recent attention to this subject. For example, in a recent documentary about mothers in prison (McShane, 2011), a father explains to his young son whose mother is incarcerated that "prison is a place where bad people go when they do bad things." Trying to process this information, the son responds, "Where do good people go when they do bad things?" Answering questions such as this can be challenging for caregivers and human service workers alike, and youths' understanding about what type of people are incarcerated and what happens while they are incarcerated may impact their psychosocial adjustment and ability to cope with the potential stress of being separated from an incarcerated parent (e.g., Dallaire, 2007; Kampfner, 1995). It may be particularly important to study early adolescents' understanding of incarceration given they have

---

Johanna B. Folk, Department of Psychology, The College of William and Mary; Danielle H. Dallaire, Department of Psychology, The College of William and Mary; Janice L. Zeman, Department of Psychology, The College of William and Mary.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Johanna Folk, Department of Psychology (MSN 3F5), George Mason University, Fairfax, VA 22030. E-mail: jfolk@gmu.edu.

recently transitioned from concrete operational thinking to abstract thought, enabling them to better understand others' and societal perspectives (Fabes, Carlo, Kupanoff, & Laible, 1999). More broadly, determining what youth with exposure to parental incarceration understand about correctional facilities and offenders may help guide caregivers and human service workers as they explain parental incarceration to youth and their peers.

Research on youths' understanding of the legal system has indicated the importance of considering age, life experience, and language abilities as contributing factors. Youth ages 8 – 17 who experience parental incarceration provide markedly diverse descriptions of incarceration that consistently lack accurate and balanced information (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). For example, some youth perceived incarceration as entirely positive for reasons such as the presence of a gym and cable television. In contrast, other youth described incarceration negatively with a focus on factors such as serving bad food and having a toilet in your room. Despite these marked differences in children's responses, this qualitative investigation included no systematic investigation of the factors contributing to children's differing perceptions.

The current study builds on previous research by examining factors that influence knowledge of incarceration and perceptions of offenders (i.e., age, gender, cognitive and language abilities, life experience) using a sample of high-risk, early adolescents, some of whom have experienced parental incarceration. These factors were selected because, in addition to the theoretical basis outlined below, this information is largely demographic and accessible with minimal assessment to individuals who live and work with youth with incarcerated parents.

With the exception of Nesmith and Ruhland's (2008) qualitative study with youth who had experienced parental incarceration, no investigations of youths' understanding of jail and inmates could be located. Given that exposure to parental involvement in the legal system is likely not limited to incarceration, but may include contact with the police and court proceedings, literature focusing on youths' knowledge of any aspect of the criminal justice system is reviewed.

### ***Developmental Gains in Knowledge, Understanding, and Cognition***

Research suggests that age and language abilities account for unique variance in youths' knowledge of the criminal justice system. Of note, age is positively related to the ability to accurately define legal terms (Maunsell, Smith, & Stevenson, 2000; Saywitz, Jaenicke, & Camparo, 1990); is a stronger correlate with accuracy (i.e., correctness) than factors such as exposure to court-related programs; and contributes unique variance to accuracy, over and above the contribution of general vocabulary abilities (Saywitz et al., 1990). Saywitz and colleagues (1990) also found the ability to define legal terms accurately correlated with raw scores on a vocabulary test ( $r = .41$ ). According to Maunsell and colleagues (2000), gender, socioeconomic status, and previous involvement in the legal system do not relate to greater accuracy in defining legal terms.

Developmental trends have also emerged in the content of youths' knowledge. Using a sample of 4 - 75 year old participants, Maunsell and colleagues (2000) found that

children had a basic understanding of the terms police, truth, and law, as early as four years of age. Before age nine, however, children did not understand key concepts such as what occurs during the trial or the jury processes, nor did they demonstrate a basic understanding of evidence, the oath, or prosecution. Similarly, Saywitz and colleagues (1990) discovered that the majority of legal terms were not defined accurately prior to the age of 10. These findings may indicate age nine to be a pivotal transition for most children, after which time youths' knowledge broadens and accuracy increases within the domain of legal terminology and courtroom proceedings, as well as potentially in knowledge of incarceration.

By the time youth reach early adolescence, their cognitive development progresses and influences their understanding of why people are incarcerated and the attributions they make about those who have been found to be in violation of the law. Prior to age seven, children primarily focus on one aspect of a situation (centration), but early adolescents are capable of de-centering or taking multiple dimensions into account simultaneously. For example, around age seven children begin to understand how actions may satisfy a person's current desires and motivation, but jeopardize his or her future. This more advanced type of thinking may be linked to a greater understanding of causality and the ability to consider if-then connections (Siegler & Alibali, 2005). These developments may relate to youths' understanding of why people engage in law-breaking behavior. For example, those more skilled at considering multiple perspectives in a situation may express more complex and nuanced responses when characterizing offenders. This pattern may differ, however, for those who have experienced parental incarceration because they may be more likely to consider external or environmental influences on law-breaking behavior (e.g., poverty, domestic violence).

Another developmental shift occurs around age eight regarding how children explain the behavior of others (Johnston & Lee, 2005; Rholes & Ruble, 1984). Before this point, children do not typically use stable, dispositional causal factors to understand and explain others' behavior (Rholes & Ruble, 1984); instead, they tend to provide more superficial descriptions based, for example, on appearance or possessions. Although children may use labels such as "kind" or "smart," these may simply be descriptions of behavior, rather than stable causal factors. Around age eight, youth advance in their ability to self-reflect with a more sophisticated understanding of emotions, to develop a more differentiated view of self, and to increase accuracy of self-perceptions (Chambers & Johnston, 2002; Harter, 1986; Stone & Lemanek, 1990). In addition, youth over eight tend to rely increasingly on internal or psychological attributes to explain behavior (Rholes & Ruble, 1984; Thompson, 1989). In a study of boys ages 5 - 11, older boys generally made more internal attributions than younger boys (Johnston & Lee, 2005) and made more internal attributions when describing the behavior of others than when describing their own behavior. This pattern of attributional change may emerge in youths' descriptions of criminal behavior and offenders in the current study, whereby older youth make more dispositional attributions than younger youth.

### *Life Experience*

In addition to chronological age and cognitive abilities, specific life experiences and exposure to violence and crime in one's neighborhood may exert a unique influence on youths' knowledge and understanding of incarceration. Having first-hand experience with parental incarceration may enable youth, particularly younger ones who may be challenged by reasoning about hypothetical situations, to develop a more sophisticated understanding of abstract concepts. Youth who have not had an incarcerated parent, visited a correctional facility, or witnessed an arrest or sentencing, may have more difficulty thinking hypothetically about these events and situations and may therefore provide less accurate responses.

Findings regarding the role of life experience in predicting youths' knowledge of related criminal justice constructs, however, suggest that life experience is not an influential variable. Of note, previous experience with the legal system did not significantly relate to accuracy in defining legal terms (Maunsell et al., 2000; Saywitz et al., 1990). Similar results have been found across diverse domains, including youths' concept of family (e.g., Borduin, Mann, Cone, & Borduin, 1990), adoption (e.g., Newman, Roberts, & Syre, 1989), and definitions of the word divorce (Newman et al., 1989). For example, youth who experienced their parents' divorce did not demonstrate a greater understanding of marriage, divorce, and remarriage than youth whose parents had not been separated (Mazur, 1993). It is possible that life experience is not as influential in knowledge about divorce because it is fairly common, with many youth exposed to divorce in the families of friends, relatives, or classmates, or their own family (Select Committee, 1987; Wallerstein, 1984). Just as the commonality of divorce may have diminished the salience of this life experience (Mazur, 1993), living in a violent, high-crime urban community may result in the current sample of youth having considerable exposure to parental incarceration in the families of friends, relatives, or classmates, even if not within their immediate family.

It is important to note that children who have had an incarcerated parent may be more likely to witness domestic violence (Greene, Haney, & Hurtado, 2000) or a family assault (Finkelhor, Omrod, Turner, & Holt, 2009) in addition to violence in the community. Exposure to violence for all youth regardless of parental incarceration status may increase the likelihood of witnessing interactions with law enforcement or alter youths' perceptions of individuals who engage in crime. As such, considering youths' exposure to violence may elucidate the unique impact of parental involvement in the criminal justice system on youths' understanding of incarceration and offenders.

Similarly, having experience with parental incarceration does not guarantee the youth knows his or her parent is incarcerated or has ever visited a correctional facility. Almost 57% of parents in state prisons and 44% of those in federal prisons report having no in-person visits with their children (Glaze & Marushak, 2008). Rather than categorizing youth into those who have and have not had experience with the criminal justice system, it may be the amount of exposure that moderates the influence of life experience on youths' knowledge of incarceration. Specifically, factors such as if the youth witnessed the parent's arrest or sentencing and how many times during the youth's life the parent has been incarcerated, as well as levels of violence in the community, are important aspects to consider.

### ***Current Study***

Using a cross-sectional design, we examined youths' understanding of incarceration in a sample of early adolescents, many of whom have experienced parental and/or familial incarceration, from an urban, low-socioeconomic status (SES) area. We utilized a qualitative examination to gain insight into youths' knowledge of incarceration and perceptions of offenders, as well as a quantitative approach to better understand factors that influence their knowledge and perceptions.

The main and interactive effects of youths' age and experience with parental incarceration were the focal points of the investigation. Specifically, we expect older youth will demonstrate higher levels of accuracy in their perceptions about offenders and correctional facilities and make more dispositional attributions in their understanding of the reasons why people are incarcerated. In addition, we expect that youth whose parents have greater involvement in the criminal justice system will demonstrate greater accuracy in their understanding of incarceration than youth with little or no experience with the criminal justice system. Interactive effects of youths' age and criminal justice experience are expected to predict the accuracy of youths' responses and the likelihood they make dispositional attributions about offenders. In addition, we explored the possibility that demographic factors such as gender and race could influence youths' knowledge and perceptions, although we had no specific hypotheses regarding these factors.

## **METHOD**

### ***Participants***

Participants were 106 early adolescents (56.6% boys, 78.3% Black) and their parent/guardian (referred to as caregiver;  $n = 97$ , 99.0% women, 85.9% mothers). Youth were on average 11.54 years old ( $SD = 1.19$ ; range = 8.93 – 14.17 years). Because siblings participated ( $n = 19$ ), there were fewer caregiver participants. Additional demographic characteristics (e.g., caregiver educational attainment) are presented in Table 1.

### ***Procedure***

Youth were recruited based on their participation in a prior school-based study at two schools in a southeastern city. The neighborhoods served by the schools are primarily comprised of low-income families, with as many as 35% of individuals in this area living below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). In addition, these areas have two of the highest crime rates in the city. Most students live in the neighborhoods surrounding the schools and have exposure to risk factors such as poverty and criminal activity. Recruitment occurred via mail, phone, and email over a three-month summer period using contact information provided during a previous study (Dallaire & Zeman, 2013).

After obtaining child assent and caregiver consent to participate, interviews were conducted primarily at local libraries (95.3% at libraries; 2.8% at homes; 1.9% over the phone) by the first author and four research assistants. The youth sat with a research assistant who read aloud all questions. The caregiver sat at a table within eyesight, but out of earshot, and completed his or her questionnaires independently. All participants were remunerated.

Table 1  
*Participant Demographic Characteristics*

Characteristics	<i>M (SD)</i>	Range
<b>Youth Participants (<i>n</i> = 106)</b>		
Age		
Years	11.54 (1.19)	8-14
Months	138.48 (14.25)	107.10-170.00
Race		
Black (%)	78.3	-
White (%)	8.5	-
Other (%)	13.2	-
<b>Parent/Guardian Participants (<i>n</i> = 97)</b>		
Relationship to Youth		
Mother (%)	85.9	-
Father (%)	0.9	-
Grandmother (%)	10.4	-
Aunt (%)	1.9	-
Legal Guardian (%)	0.9	-
Educational Attainment		
Some high school (%)	7.6	-
Completed high school (%)	17.1	-
Some education after high school (%)	41.0	-
Received bachelor's degree (%)	12.4	-
Beyond bachelor's degree (%)	21.9	-
Household		
Youths' Mother's age (in years)	37.15 (5.89)	26-54
Youths' Father's age (in years)	39.06 (6.76)	26-55
Number of Children	2.72 (1.14)	1-7
Age of youngest (in years)	7.21 (3.53)	0-13
Age of oldest (in years)	13.90 (3.36)	8-25
Adults Living in the Home		
Mother (%)	88.3	-
Father (%)	38.7	-
Stepfather (%)	6.7	-
Grandmother (%)	13.5	-
Grandfather (%)	5.8	-
Aunt (%)	7.7	-
Other (%)	15.4	-
Annual Income		
Less than \$10,000 (%)	14.4	-
\$10,000-\$20,000 (%)	16.3	-
\$20,000-\$30,000 (%)	20.2	-
\$30,000-\$40,000 (%)	10.6	-
\$40,000-\$50,000 (%)	8.7	-
Above \$50,000 (%)	29.8	-

### Measures

**Parental experience with the criminal justice system.** Caregivers reported the youth's family history of parental arrest, sentencing, and incarceration, including if either of the youth's parents had been incarcerated during the child's lifetime. About one-third of youth (34.0%) had experienced parental incarceration. Of these youth, five (13.9%) had experienced maternal incarceration, 25 (69.4%) had experienced paternal incarceration, and six (16.7%) had experienced both maternal and paternal incarceration. Twenty-six youth (72.2%) had experienced parental incarceration in the past, seven (19.4%) were currently experiencing parental incarceration, and the remainder could not be determined from the information provided (8.3%). An additional 8.0% of youth had parents who were arrested during their lifetime, 11 youth (10.2%) witnessed their parent's arrest, and one youth (0.9%) witnessed his or her parent's sentencing. Youth who had experienced parental arrest, parental sentencing, or parental incarceration were considered to have experience with the criminal justice system (CJE;  $n = 45$ ; 42.5%; 21 boys;  $M_{\text{age}} = 11.48$  years,  $SD = 1.12$  years).

A continuous variable was created to capture the amount of exposure youth had to the criminal justice system (DCJE = degree of criminal justice exposure) based on the caregiver's report on the information provided below. This variable included information concerning (a) whether the youth's parent (mother and/or father) had been arrested (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*); (b) if the youth had witnessed his or her parent's arrest (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*); (c) if the youth had witnessed his or her parent's sentencing (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*); (d) if the youth's parent had ever been incarcerated during the youth's life (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*); and (e) how many times the parent had been incarcerated during the youth's life (continuous scoring, based on actual number provided). This variable was computed for all youth ( $M = 1.12$ ,  $SD = 1.55$ , range = 0 – 6). One case was removed from analyses because it was an extreme outlier (DCJE = 13) [1].

**Violence exposure.** The Violence Exposure Scale for Children (VEX-R; Fox & Leavitt, 1995) was developed to assess children's exposure to minor and severe violence through victimization and witnessing. The VEX-R was administered to youth during their participation in the prior school-based research study, approximately two years prior to the current study (Dallaire & Zeman, 2013). The VEX-R consists of 12 items that address youths' exposure to acts of violence. Youth are asked how often they have witnessed each event in real life (0 = *never*, 1 = *one time*, 2 = *a few times*, and 3 = *lots of times*), with responses summed to create a total violence exposure score ( $M = 17.00$ ,  $SD = 7.09$ , Range: 1-34). Prior research has yielded reliability estimates ranging from  $\alpha = 0.72 - 0.86$  (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2014), as well as convergent and discriminant validity (Shahinfar, Fox, & Leavitt, 2000; Stein et al., 2001). The VEX-R demonstrated relatively high internal consistency in the current sample (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .82$ ).

**Understanding of incarceration interview.** *The Understanding of Incarceration Interview* (UII) is a 14-question interview developed for the purpose of the current study by the authors (see Appendix). Incarceration within jail is the focus of the UII because jails are locally operated and may be more familiar and geographically accessible to youth. Jails typically house offenders with sentences of less than one year (Minton, 2011), whereas

prisons hold individuals who have sentences longer than one year and tend to be located in remote areas. The interview primarily assessed youths' understanding of jail and arrest (e.g., Why do people go to jail?) and their sources of information (e.g., Have you ever learned about jail in school?).

Up to six additional questions were asked depending on youths' responses to the primary questions. For example, if a youth responded yes to "Can moms and dads go to jail?" he or she was asked, "If moms and dads go to jail, can they see their kids?" Half of the questions were open-ended (e.g., What kind of people go to jail?), and half used forced-choice responses such as yes, no, or sometimes (e.g., Are people safe while they are in jail?). Youth were allowed to elaborate on any question, including those with forced-choice response formats. The interview also contained two questions pertaining to arrest, including "What happens when people get arrested?" followed by a query of their experience regarding witnessing arrests in real life.

**Transcriptions of the UIIs.** The UIIs were recorded on a voice recorder with youths' and caregivers' permission. Two of the interviews were completed by phone, so recordings could not be obtained. As a result, the youths' responses were written verbatim. Interviews that were audio recorded were subsequently transcribed verbatim. Two undergraduate students unaware of the study's hypotheses completed transcriptions. To ensure reliability, two people transcribed 15% of the initial cases, yielding similar word counts and consistent content agreement (over 90% agreement). Discrepancies were resolved and corrected through discussion between the transcribers.

**Coding scheme.** The coding scheme was developed to capture youths' understanding of jail as an institution and of the persons who are incarcerated. In particular we sought to identify occasions when the youth: (a) expressed dispositional attributions for the offenders' behavior; (b) acknowledged the potential role of external forces in offenders' behavior; (c) provided knowledge about how people are treated in jail; and (d) described what changes occur, if any, following an offender's release. In addition, the coding scheme captured youths' knowledge of details about safety, arrest procedures, jail protocol, etc. We focused on 67 categories of statements thought to capture these elements (see Appendix for the full coding scheme).

Categories were pilot tested on 10 interviews using independent observations by the first author and six research assistants. Coders discussed any difficulties, clarified meanings, and created a codebook describing the final set of 67 categories. With the exception of one variable that included three response options (see Appendix A, question 7a), all variables were dichotomous (0 = *absent*, 1 = *present*).

The coding scheme consisted of codes for individual questions and for the overall interview. Categories were created to capture the question-specific content. For example, when coding the question of "Why do people go to jail?" coders rated the following categories: did the youth include a legal description (yes or no), list examples of things people do, provide a life context reason, and describe an aspect of their character. In contrast, coders rated youths' responses to the question of what kinds of people go to jail by noting



if the youth said “bad” people go to jail, if they listed different types of criminals, if they described a quality/personality trait, if they described adverse environmental circumstances, and if they selected anybody/I can go to jail. Categories were not mutually exclusive (e.g., in response to the question “Why do people go to jail?,” youth could list examples of crimes a person may have committed and provide a life context reason for why they may have committed the crimes and gone to jail).

Coders included six research assistants, trained by the first author, who were unaware of youths’ identity. During the training phase, over 90% agreement was achieved on 15% of the cases. Two independent raters coded each transcription, and any disagreements were discussed to achieve a final agreement code. An additional 20% of cases were coded by all of the coders throughout the coding process to ensure no drift occurred with over 90% agreement achieved on all of these cases.

**Aggregate variables.** Aggregate variables were created for overall accuracy and dispositional attributions by summing individual category codes from the coding scheme.

**Accuracy.** Ten questions from the UII were coded to compute the accuracy, or correctness, of children’s responses (see Appendix). Based on these questions, three variables were created to assess how accurate (i.e., factual) youth were in answering the questions in the UII. Each statement youth made was coded as accurate (e.g., “It depends on what they went for. Like for some people they go for child molestation and they um when they get out of jail they can’t be around kids”), inaccurate (e.g., “Prison, people let you go outside. Jail, you stay in forever”), or neither (e.g., “Jail is not cool”). Separate tallies were kept for accurate and inaccurate statements, in which each received a score of one, in contrast to statements that were neither accurate nor inaccurate (e.g., statements unrelated to the topic) that received a score of zero. Accurate statements within individual questions ranged from 0 – 5 and inaccurate statements within individual questions ranged from 0 – 4. The total number of accurate statements throughout the interview was counted to create a total accuracy score. The same was done for inaccurate statements. These totals were each divided by the number of questions the child answered. Youth could answer up to 10 questions, although 10.5% indicated that they did not know the answer to a question, and therefore only answered nine questions. As a result, it was necessary to create an average score. The final variables included an average of the total number of accurate statements ( $M = 0.77$ ,  $SD = 0.29$ ), and an average of the total number of inaccurate statements ( $M = 0.15$ ,  $SD = 0.12$ ). Lastly, we computed a difference score which reflected the youth’s overall accuracy score by subtracting the total number of inaccurate statements average score from the total number of accurate statements average score ( $M = 0.61$ ,  $SD = 0.31$ ).

**Attribution.** Two variables were created to assess the types of attributions youth made about offender behavior: dispositional and external forces. Dispositional attributions consisted of descriptions of the offenders’ behaviors as a result of some aspect internal to the person (e.g., personality characteristic). External forces consisted of describing offenders’ behaviors as the result of external factors (e.g., adverse life circumstances). Each of

these variables was the sum of select categories from the UII (see Appendix). Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 2.

***Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-(4th ed.) (WISC-IV, Wechsler, 2003).***

An estimate of youths' verbal ability was obtained in order to control for this variable given the high reliance on verbal responses to questions. Youth completed the vocabulary subtest of the WISC-IV. The WISC-IV is considered to be the gold standard of intellectual ability tests. The vocabulary test is widely used as a proxy for verbal ability. The test is normed on national samples for youth ages 6 to 16. The vocabulary subtest has the highest correlation with the overall IQ score of any of the subtests and is stable over time. This subtest contains four picture items and 31 verbal items. Responses to vocabulary items receive a score of zero, one, or two, depending on response content and quality. The first and third authors scored 50% of the cases and achieved over 90% agreement.

## RESULTS

### ***UII Descriptive Statistics and Qualitative Analyses***

The UIIs varied in the time of completion (range: 3-10 minutes) and how much each youth spoke. To determine how much youth spoke during their interview, a mean word count was calculated for each youth by dividing the total number of words they spoke by the number of questions they answered. Youth answered between 16 and 21 questions ( $M = 19.46$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ) and spoke an average of 13.40 words per question ( $SD = 9.75$ ).

Prior to testing our primary hypotheses, we conducted a qualitative examination of the interviews. We were interested in understanding where youth learn about jail, their perceptions of what jail is like, and their beliefs about offenders and why they commit crimes. Emergent themes are presented below. Group differences were examined using a series of univariate ANOVAS and Chi-Square analyses (e.g., CJE vs. no CJE).

### ***Sources of Information***

Almost all of the youth reported viewing jail related media (96.2%), with 57.1% reporting learning about jail in school and 28.6% reporting talking to someone about jail. Youth who watched jail related media often described shows such as *Cops*, where "They were trying to find people to get them arrested, like say they're doing murder." In contrast, youth who learned about jail in school tended to describe learning factual information such as "It was just mostly about how like if you break the law you'll go to prison or jail." When youth talked to someone about jail, it often involved warnings "not to ever get in there." Using source of information as the independent (grouping) variable, no significant differences in where youth obtained information emerged in relation to age ( $F(3, 101) = 6.64$ ,  $p = .59$ ), gender ( $\chi^2(3, N = 105) = 3.37$ ,  $p = .34$ ), or DCJE ( $F(3, 100) = 1.55$ ,  $p = .59$ ).

### ***Perceptions of Jail***

The majority of UII interviews contained statements of violence (64.8%) and drugs (32.4%). For example, one youth explained, "they jump, kill, and rape people in jail." Of note, youth who mentioned violence in their interview were less likely to believe that jail is

Table 2  
*Bivariate Correlations between Variables of Interest*

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	M	SD	Min-Max
1. Age in months	-.04	-.06	-.15	-.14	-.10	.19	-.04	.19	-.09	138.48	14.25	107.10-170.00
2. DCJE	-	-.05	.25*	.30**	.02	-.00	-.01	.00	.01	0.42	0.50	0.00-6.00
3. Vocabulary Scaled	-	-	.30**	-.09	.32**	.36*	-.13	.39**	.00	9.58	0.62	4.00-15.00
4. Mean Youth Word Count	-	-	-	.05	.24*	.55**	.24*	.42**	.10	13.40	9.75	3.35-61.76
5. Violence Exposure	-	-	-	-	-.14	-.01	.06	-.06	.18	17.00	7.09	1.00-34.00
Aggregate Variables from UII												
6. Correct # of Legal Terms	-	-	-	-	-	.53**	.14	.43**	-.08	3.52	2.63	0.00-11.00
7. Accurate Statements Average	-	-	-	-	-	-	.00	.92**	-.24*	0.77	0.29	0.20-1.70
8. Inaccurate Statements Average	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.39**	-.01	0.15	0.12	0.00-0.60
9. Overall Accuracy	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.18	0.62	0.31	-0.20-1.40
10. Dispositional Attributions	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.88	0.87	0.00-3.00

Note. DCJE = Degree of Criminal Justice Experience; Overall Accuracy = Accurate Statements Average – Inaccurate Statements Average; \*\* $p < .05$ ; \* $p < .01$

a safe place,  $X^2(2, N = 103) = 8.71, p = .01$ . Of the youth who mentioned violence in their interview ( $n = 66$ ), 39 stated that jail is not safe, 10 said it is safe, and 17 said it is safe only sometimes. One youth stated that jail is not safe because “people can have stuff in their jail cells and they can make and use weapons and when they’re outside cuz the police officers don’t keep weapons inside the jail.” Other youth had mixed opinions on whether jail is safe, for reasons such as “Yes because there’s usually guards, but no because people still have weapons or come in and kill you or kill you there or hurt you.”

Youth were also asked what the difference is between jail and prison. Some youth understood that jail and prison have important differences such as length of sentences (e.g., “Prison is like almost when you’re there for life, or, and jail you can easily be bailed out, or you have lesser time”) and that jail is where the accused are housed prior to being sent to prison (e.g., “Jail is where you go to and stay until, until you get judged by the judge”). But, 12.4% of youth believed “they are the same” and 32.4% expressed they did not know the difference between jail and prison.

### *Perceptions of Offenders*

Youth had mixed perceptions of individuals who go to jail. When asked what kinds of people go to jail, 33.7% of youth said that bad people go to jail. When directly asked if people who go to jail are good, bad, or something else, only 4.3% of youth said “good,” compared to 46.4% “bad,” 26.1% “both good and bad,” and 23.2% “something else” (e.g., “some of them just got mixed in with the wrong people”).

Almost all youth (98.1%) understood that parents can go to jail, but 12.4% stated that these parents could not see their children during this time. In discussing whether children could go to jail, 38.1% of youth mentioned “juvie” or a juvenile detention center. However, 4.2% of youth believed that children did go to the same jail as adults, at least sometimes.

Only 8.7% of youth described an external factor that could influence offenders’ behavior. For example, “some of them just get mixed in with the wrong people” or are “in the wrong place at the wrong time.” The use of external attributions for offenders’ behavior was significantly more common among female youth,  $X^2(1, n = 95) = 3.93, p = .05$ . Due to the small number of youth whose responses fit into the category, the variable was skewed (skew = 2.98) and will not be considered in further analyses.

### *Quantitative Analyses*

Preliminary analyses were conducted to examine the potential main effects of gender, race (independent samples t-tests), caregiver income, and language abilities (correlations) to determine whether these variables should be treated as covariates during subsequent analyses. A series of linear regressions were then conducted to test the study hypotheses.

**Gender, race, and income.** Examination of gender indicated no significant differences for age in months, vocabulary scaled score, mean word count, or the dispositional attribution variable. No gender,  $t(103) = 0.04, p = .97, d = .01$ , or age,  $r(105) = -.06, p = .57$ , differences emerged in DCJE. A marginally significant difference emerged for the accuracy difference score, in which girls tended to be more accurate than boys,  $t(103) =$

-1.89,  $p = .06$ ,  $d = .37$ . Based on these results, gender was only used as a covariate during hypothesis testing for accuracy analyses. No significant race differences were found on any outcomes of interest when comparing Black youth to non-Black youth. Although the large percentage of Black participants may have biased the results, race is not included in any subsequent analyses, and all youth are utilized in the analyses. Although caregiver-reported income was negatively correlated with age,  $r(104) = -.24$ ,  $p = .014$  and DCJE,  $r(103) = -.26$ ,  $p < .01$ , it was unrelated to gender,  $t(102) = 0.20$ ,  $p = .84$ , and all outcomes of interest. As such, income is not included in any subsequent analyses.

**Language abilities.** No significant differences were found in youths' language abilities (WISC-IV vocabulary scaled score) based on gender or DCJE, but it was significantly correlated with the overall accuracy variable (Table 2). Based on the significant pattern of bivariate correlations, the vocabulary scaled score was subsequently treated as a control variable during analyses involving correlated variables (i.e., accuracy), but not during analyses in which the bivariate correlation was not significant (i.e., dispositional attributions).

**Hypothesis testing.** Linear regression analyses were used to test for the main effects of age, gender, and DCJE. When significant interactions were found, graphical plots were used to assist in their interpretation. Results from the analyses are presented by outcome (Tables 3 and 4).

Table 3

Predicting Overall Accuracy from Age, Gender, and Degree of Criminal Justice Experience

	Overall Accuracy ( $n = 93$ )		
	$B$ (SE $B$ )	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$
Control Variables			.24***
Vocabulary scaled score	.05 (.01)	.37**	
Mean word count (t)	.49 (.12)	.35***	
Violence exposure	-.00 (.00)	-.02	
Main Effects			.08*
Age in months (s)	.07 (.03)	.21*	
Gender (s)	.03 (.03)	.11	
DCJE (s)	.00 (.03)	.01	
Interactions			.12**
Age in months x gender	.07 (.03)	.22*	
Age in months x DCJE	.07 (.03)	.24**	
DCJE x gender	-.02 (.03)	-.06	

Note. (t) = log10 transformed variable; (s) = standardized variable; Total  $R^2 = 1.00$ ;  $F(9, 84) = 7.39$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $^{\dagger}p < .10$ ;  $*p < .05$ ;  $**p < .01$ ;  $***p < .001$

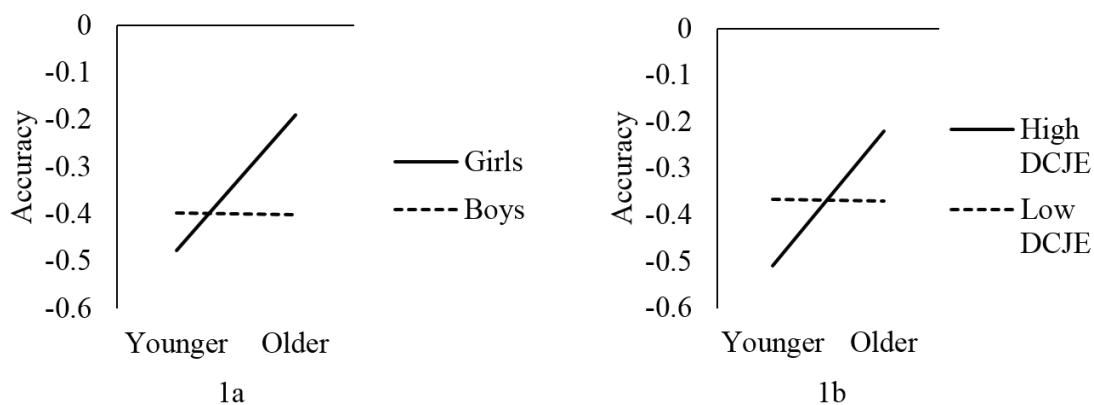
Table 4

*Predicting Dispositional Attributions from Age and DCJE*

	Dispositional Attributions ( $n = 95$ )		
	$B$ (SE $B$ )	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$
Control Variables			.03
Violence exposure	.02 (.01)	.18 <sup>†</sup>	
Main Effects			.01
Age in months (s)	-.05 (.09)	-.06	
DCJE (s)	-.06 (.09)	-.06	
Interaction			.06*
Age in months x DCJE	-.20 (.09)	-.24*	

Note. (s) = standardized term; DCJE = Degree of Criminal Justice Experience; Total  $R^2 = .158$ ;  $F(4, 91) = 2.39$ ,  $p = .07$ ; <sup>†</sup> $p < .10$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; Regression coefficients and errors shown for the final step.

**Overall accuracy.** Linear regressions predicting overall accuracy utilized the vocabulary scaled score, mean word count, and violence exposure total as control variables. Main effects of age, gender, and DCJE, as well as the interactions between the variables, were examined. Interaction terms were created using the products of each of the standardized variables (e.g., age x gender; Table 3). Control variables were entered in the first step of the regression, main effects in the second step, two-way interactions in the third step, and the three-way interaction in the fourth step. Results indicated that the three-way interaction was non-significant, so the fourth step of the regression will not be interpreted and presented. Results indicated the presence of two significant interactions (Table 3): age by gender (Figure 1a) and age by DCJE (Figure 1b). For girls, age was positively related to overall accuracy. For boys, in contrast, overall accuracy did not vary by age. In addition, for youth with high levels of DCJE, age was positively related to overall accuracy. For youth with low DCJE, in contrast, overall accuracy did not vary by age.



Figures 1a and 1b. Predicting overall accuracy from age, gender, and DCJE. DCJE = degree of criminal justice experience.

**Dispositional attributions.** A second linear regression analysis was conducted to determine whether DCJE moderated the relation between age and dispositional attributions (Table 4). In this analysis, vocabulary scaled score and mean child word count were not included as control variables because neither were significantly related with the outcome variable, dispositional attributions. Violence exposure was used as a control variable. Gender was not included in this analysis because no gender differences were found in dispositional attributions, and no hypotheses regarding gender differences were made. Results indicated that the interaction between youths' age and their DCJE significantly predicted how often they made dispositional attributions,  $\beta = -.24$ ,  $p = .021$ . Specifically (Figure 2), older youth with more DCJE made fewer dispositional attributions than all other youth. Younger youth with more DCJE, in contrast, made more dispositional attributions than all other youth.

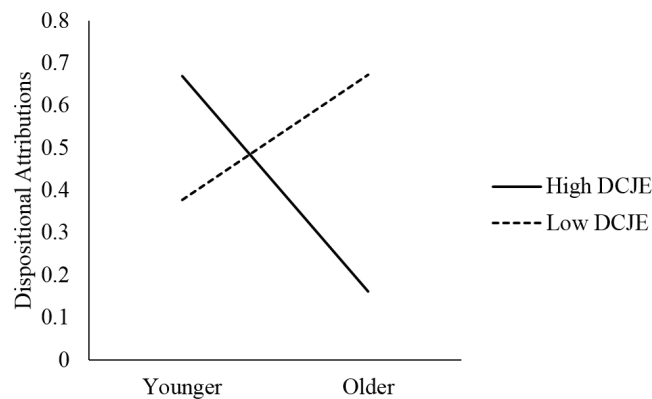


Figure 2. Predicting dispositional attributions from age and degree of criminal justice experience.

## DISCUSSION

The current study is, to our knowledge, the first to examine youths' understanding of jail and perceptions of offenders. The results provide insight into what youth understand about incarceration and offenders and highlight the need to consider multiple factors that may shape youths' understanding, including gender, age, and life experience. This is a particularly important issue to consider as many children, more now than ever, have personal experience with parental incarceration and caregivers may not know how to quell fears the child may have about the parent's safety or how to explain to the children where their parent is or why they are there.

### *Qualitative Findings*

Qualitative results indicate that youths' knowledge of incarceration and perceptions of offenders are highly variable, highlighting the importance of determining what factors contribute to this variability. Of note, many youth described jail as a violent place where offenders are not safe. Particularly for youth with incarcerated parents, these perceptions may provoke anxiety about the parent's well being during the separation. A subset of youth

indicated that incarcerated parents could not see their children during their incarceration. Although this is true in some situations (e.g., long distance between the youths' home and the facility), it may be disturbing for youth to believe they will not be able to see their parent if he or she is incarcerated.

Of additional concern is the belief that individuals who go to jail are "bad people," which was prevalent in the current sample. These perceptions, when held by the peers of youth with incarcerated parents, may lead to stigmatization of the youth, who might be regarded in a similar way (Hagen & Myers, 2003). Similarly, if youth with incarcerated parents believe their parent is a "bad" person, they may in turn internalize that belief about themselves, which may lead to psychological maladjustment.

Youths' understanding of incarceration and perceptions of offenders may be shaped by a variety of sources of information, including the media, school, and discussions with others. In the current sample, viewing jail-related media was the most common source of information, with youth watching shows such as *Cops*. Although the media has the opportunity to provide realistic depictions of incarceration and offenders, it more often portrays these subjects in a sensational light that likely leads to distorted perceptions, particularly among youth who may not be critical consumers. In contrast, youth described learning largely factual information about incarceration and offenders in school and receiving warnings (e.g., parents warning their child, "you really don't want to go there") when discussing these subjects with adults in their lives. Although about half of the youth reported learning about incarceration in school and a quarter had discussed it with someone, a large number only received information from the media. This finding in particular highlights a gap in the communication of knowledge about incarceration.

### ***Quantitative Findings***

Overall, findings indicated that the joint effects of age, gender, and DCJE played important roles in predicting the accuracy of youths' knowledge and the attributions they made about offenders. It appears that having experience with parental arrest and/or incarceration may moderate the relation between age and youths' understanding of incarceration, as indicated by the accuracy of their statements and the attributions they make about offenders. Exposure to violence about two years prior to the interview did not significantly predict either outcome.

Specifically, DCJE significantly moderated the relation between youths' age and accuracy of understanding. Being older and having higher DCJE resulted in more accurate responding. In contrast, youth who had lower DCJE did not increase in accuracy with age. These findings support our hypothesis and suggest that youth whose parents have more interactions with the criminal justice system possess greater knowledge of incarceration. It appears there may be a cumulative effect such that with more experience, youth become more accurate in providing information about incarceration. Similarity-based learning models assert that when events are repeated, they become part of a script, whereas events that are not repeated operate as individual, independent variables (Schank & Abelson, 1977). It would be useful to understand if certain types of exposure to incarceration might



increase knowledge more than others, indicating the presence of a specificity effect. For example, if youth have lived through multiple incarcerations of a parent or other relatives, it might increase their knowledge of a certain aspect of incarceration, whereas witnessing a parent's arrest might influence this particular area of knowledge. A specificity effect based on the type of event could have important implications for how caregivers discuss incarceration-related topics with youth, as well as for studies of youths' knowledge of incarceration and arrest.

Although dispositional attributions were not positively related to age in the overall sample, as previous research has shown in other areas of knowledge (Johnston & Lee, 2005), an interaction between age and DCJE was found. Older youth with higher DCJE tended to make fewer dispositional attributions about offenders than all other youth. In contrast, older youth with lower DCJE tended to make more dispositional attributions about offenders than all other youth. Youth who have experienced parental arrest or incarceration, particularly multiple times, may be more likely to consider alternative explanations for why a person offends rather than assuming it is something inherent to the person's character. However, younger participants who have higher DCJE make more dispositional attributions. This may be indicative of their inability to consider multiple perspectives (Selman, 1971), or that they do not understand why an individual has offended and cannot produce an alternative explanation. In addition, younger youth tend to think more in concrete (Piaget, 1954), black-or-white terms, which may lead them to conclude that people are either good or bad. If youth believe their parent is offending because he or she is a "bad" person, they may feel guilt or shame about judging their parent in this way, or may hold a more negative view of themselves by thinking they are similar to their parent. These questions are beyond the scope of the current study, but would be useful starting points for future research.

Lastly, age and gender interactively predicted youths' accuracy. That is, although age was positively related to accuracy in girls, this was not the case for boys. It is unclear why the overall accuracy of girls' but not boys' responses increased with age, particularly because there were no gender differences in language abilities, which may have otherwise been a moderating factor. This finding has implications for adults discussing incarceration with youth, as these results would indicate that older girls have a more accurate understanding of what incarceration means and perhaps boys are more influenced by media messages that make it more difficult to help them consider what is and is not accurate.

### ***Strengths and Limitations***

A major strength and innovation of the current study was its investigation of a neglected area in the field, youths' perceptions and understanding of incarceration, using a high-risk sample of early adolescents. The use of open-ended questions provides a rich base of information that can be used to guide future research endeavors. When using open-ended questions and a sample that had a wide range of socioeconomic disadvantage, as in the current study, verbal abilities may influence youths' ability to formulate responses to the questions. Thus, our use of a commonly used measure (i.e., WISC-IV vocabulary subtest) to control for differences in youths' expressive language abilities provided more

validity to the findings because we were able to examine the amount of variance accounted for by the alternate predictors (e.g., age).

In conjunction with the strength of using open-ended questions, however, comes the limitation of creating a coding system to quantify qualitative data in a reliable and relevant fashion. Although high inter-rater reliability was established, the coding scheme did not encompass all potential indicators of youths' understanding of incarceration. Future research might consider using multiple methods of inquiry such as a combination of self-report and observed conversations with others about incarceration. Similarly, the majority of the interview focused on jail rather than prison or incarceration in general. Although many youth understood some of the distinctions between jail and prison, there were also many youth who believed there were no differences between the two types of facilities. As such, responses may have been different, particularly for the youth who did understand the difference, had we asked about prison instead of jail. Future research should consider this distinction when conducting research in this area and formulate methodology to accommodate it.

Second, the study utilized a cross-sectional design and therefore could not track age-related changes within the same individuals over time or establish causality. The use of a longitudinal design would allow for the ability to record transitions in youths' understanding of incarceration based on their cognitive adaptations and DCJE. This design would allow researchers to determine whether certain experiences with the criminal justice system prompt shifts in youths' understanding, how exposure to different sources of information about incarceration may influence youths' knowledge at different developmental stages, and when cognitive changes in youths' thinking about incarceration and offenders occur. In addition, our measure of exposure to violence was collected about two years prior to the current study. Although it provided useful information about youths' exposure to violence, particularly because they continued to reside within the same communities at the time of the current study, they may have been exposed to additional violence between the two data collection periods. Since no violence exposure measure was included at the time of the UII interview, we were not able to consider this in analyses.

Third, our sample was fairly homogenous in regards to the youths' race and age. The majority of our sample was Black and between 10 - 11 years old. These similarities are useful in ruling out some extraneous variable influences (e.g., race), but do reduce the generalizability of the current findings. Future research should utilize a sample of youth of different racial backgrounds, from a wider age range, and from different neighborhoods, to increase the variability within the sample.

### ***Implications and Conclusion***

Images of jails and prisons, and arrests and police officers, abound in the media. Adults and children alike are exposed to these images, yet we rarely question the veracity of the information presented. Over time these images begin to form a mental model of what it means to be incarcerated. The U.S. incarcerates more people than any other country in the world (Walmsley, 2011) and, as such, millions of children are impacted by their parent's incarceration (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Previous research has shown that these

children feel stigmatized (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008), and this may be especially problematic in a school setting (Dallaire, Ciccone, & Wilson, 2010). The results of the current study offer guidance in how caregivers and professionals may want to initiate a conversation with youth about the incarceration of a loved one. It is important to not assume what a child does and does not know about incarceration but to carefully discuss their belief and reason for their belief. Boys especially may be impacted by inaccurate portrayals of incarceration in the media. Our interview questions can be used as a starting point for caregivers and practitioners to better understand what a youth believe about incarceration and begin to address the youth's concerns.

The results of the current study shed light on youths' knowledge of incarceration as well as factors that influence it. The results also highlight the importance of considering interactive effects and potential group differences (e.g., gender). Particularly for youth with incarcerated parents, what is understood about incarceration may be a more salient issue than for youth who have not experienced this form of parental separation. It may be useful for the youths' caregivers to know youths' perceptions about incarceration and their incarcerated parent so they can address the subject in the most beneficial manner. This may be particularly important when preparing youth to visit their incarcerated parent so they know what to expect, but also for youth who will not visit their parent and may be overwhelmed by imagination-based beliefs about incarceration. Although it is not clear from these findings whether youths' understanding of incarceration has implications for their psychological adjustment, this is an area worth exploring in future research, as it could be a target for intervention within this population. Though further research into youths' understanding of incarceration is needed to determine the generalizability of the results and additional facets of comprehension, the current study suggests that the interaction of both personal (i.e., age, gender) and experiential factors may provide the most parsimonious explanation.

## REFERENCES

- Borduin, C. M., Mann, B. J., Cone, L., & Borduin, B. J. (1990). Development of the concept of family in elementary school children. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology, 151*, 33-43.
- Chambers, C. T., & Johnston, C. (2002). Developmental differences in children's use of rating scales. *Journal of Pediatric Psychology, 27*(1), 27-36. doi:10.1093/jpepsy/27.1.27
- Dallaire, D. H. (2007). Incarcerated mothers and fathers: A comparison of risks for children and families. *Family Relations, 56*(5), 440-453.
- Dallaire, D. H., & Zeman, J. (2013). Empathy as a protective factor for children with incarcerated parents. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development, 78*, 7-25.
- Dallaire, D. H., Ciccone, A., & Wilson, L. C. (2010). Teachers' experiences with and expectations of children with incarcerated parents. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 31*(4), 281-290. doi:10.1016/j.appdev.2010.04.001
- Fabes, R. A., Carlo, G., Kupanoff, K., & Laible, D. (1999). Early adolescence and prosocial/moral behavior I: The role of individual processes. *The Journal of Early Adolescence, 19*(1), 5-16. doi:10.1177/0272431699019001001
- Finkelhor, D., Omrod, R., Turner, H., & Holt, M. (2009). Pathways to poly-victimization. *Child Maltreatment, 14*, 316-329.
- Fox, N. A., & Leavitt, L. A. (1995). *The Violence Exposure Scale for Children-VEEX*. College Park, Maryland: Department of Human Development, University of Maryland.

- Glaze, L. E., & Maruschak, L. M. (2008). Parents in prison and their minor children. *Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- Greene, S., Haney, C., & Hurtado, A. (2000). Cycles of pain: Risk factors in the lives of incarceration mothers and their children. *The Prison Journal*, *80*, 2-23.
- Hagen, K. A., & Myers, B. J. (2003). The effect of secrecy and social support on behavioral problems in children of incarcerated women. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, *12*(2), 229-242. doi:10.1023/A:1022866917415
- Harter, S. (1986). Cognitive-developmental processes in the integration of concepts about emotions and the self. *Social Cognition*, *4*(2), 119-151. doi:10.1521/soco.1986.4.2.119
- Johnston, C., & Lee, C. M. (2005). Children's attributions for their own versus others behavior: Influence of actor versus observer differences. *Applied Developmental Psychology*, *26*, 314-328. doi:10.1016/j.appdev.2005.02.005
- Kampfner, C. J. (1995). Post-traumatic stress reactions in children of imprisoned mothers. In K. Gabel & D. Johnston (Eds.), *Children of incarcerated parents* (pp. 89-100). New York, NY: Lexington Books.
- Maunsell, C., Smith, H. V., & Stevenson, C. (2000). What happens in court? The development of understanding of the legal system in a sample of Irish children and adults. *Irish Journal of Psychology*, *21*(3-4), 215-226.
- Mazur, E. (1993). Developmental differences in children's understanding of marriage, divorce, and remarriage. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, *14*, 191-212. doi:10.1016/0193-3973(93)90032-Q
- McShane, J. (Director). (2011). *Mothers of Bedford* [Motion picture]. Available from mothersofbedfordoutreach@gmail.com
- Minton, T. D. (2011). *Jail inmates at midyear 2011-statistical tables*. Bureau of Justice Statistics. Washington D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- Mumola, C. J. (2000). *Incarcerated parents and their children*. Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network (2014). *Violence exposure scale for children-revised*. Retrieved May 29, 2014, from <http://www.nctsn.org/content/violence-exposure-scale-children-revised>.
- Nesmith, A., & Ruhland, E. (2008). Children of incarcerated parents: Challenges and resiliency, in their own words. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *30*(10), 1119-1130. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2008.02.006
- Newman, J. L., Roberts, L. R., & Syre, C. R. (1989, June). *A child's-eye view of "family": Theoretical and practical implications*. Paper presented at the meetings of the Jean Piaget Society, Philadelphia, PA.
- Piaget, J. (1954). *Intelligence and affectivity: Their relation during child development*. Palo Alto, CA: Annual Reviews.
- Rholes, W. S., & Ruble, D. N. (1984). Children's understanding of dispositional characteristics of others. *Child Development*, *55*, 550-560. doi:10.1111/1467-8624.ep7304560
- Saywitz, K., Jaenicke, C., & Camparo, L. (1990). Children's knowledge of legal terminology. *Law and Human Behavior*, *14*(6), 523-535. doi:10.1007/BF01044879
- Select Committee of Children, Youth, & Families. (1987). *Divorce: The impact on children and families* (No. 63-820). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Selman, R. L. (1971). Taking another's perspective: Role-taking development in early childhood. *Child Development*, *42*(6), 1721-1734.
- Schank, R.C., & Abelson, R. (1977). *Scripts, plans, goals, and understanding*. Hillsdale, NJ: Earlbaum Association.
- Shahinfar, A., Fox, N. A., & Leavitt, L. A. (2000). Preschool children's exposure to violence: Relation of behavior problems to parent and child reports. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, *70*, 115-125.
- Siegler, R. S., & Alibali, M. W. (2005). *Children's thinking* (4th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Stein, B. D., Zima, B. T., Elliott, M. N., Burnam, M., Shahinfar, A., Fox, N. A., & Leavitt, L. A. (2001). Violence exposure among school-age children in foster care: Relationship to distress symptoms. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, *40*, 588-594.

- Stone, W. L., & Lemanek, K. L. (1990). Developmental issues in children's self-reports. In A. La Greca (Ed.), *Through the eyes of the child: Obtaining self-reports from children and adolescents* (pp. 18-56). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Thompson, R. A. (1989). Causal attributions and children's emotional understanding. In C. Saarni, & P. L. Harris (Eds.), *Children's understanding of emotion* (pp. 117-150). New York, Cambridge University Press.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2007) *State & County Quickfacts: Newport News, V.A.* Retrieved July 25, 2012, from <http://quickfacts.census.gov>.
- Wallerstein, J. (1984). Children of divorce: Preliminary report of a ten-year follow-up of young children. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 54, 444-458. doi:10.1111/j.1939-0025.1984.tb01510.x
- Walmsley, R. (2011). *World prison population list* (ninth edition). International Centre for Prison Studies. London, England: Home Office.
- Wechsler, D. (2003). *Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children Administration and Scoring Manual (4th ed.)*. San Antonio, TX: Harcourt Assessment, Inc.

Received: 2/2014

Accepted: 9/2014

- Folk, J. B., Dallaire, D. H., & Zeman, J. L. (2014). High-risk early adolescents' perceptions of jail and offender experiences [Electronic Version]. *Applied Psychology in Criminal Justice*, 10(2), 106-128.

## APPENDIX

## Understanding of Incarceration Interview and Coding Scheme

	<u>Yes=1</u>	<u>No=0</u>
1. What do you know about jail? <sup>c</sup>		
-Describe why people go to jail <sup>a</sup>	Yes	No
-Describe what kind of people go to jail	Yes	No
-Describe how people are treated in jail	Yes	No
-Describe jail as a bad place (simple answer)	Yes	No
2. Have you seen anything about jail on TV, in the movies, the newspaper	Yes	No
2a. What did you see?	Yes	No
-Causes for people going into jail	Yes	No
-People in/going to jail	Yes	No
-Violence	Yes	No
-Physical appearance of jail/prisoners	Yes	No
-Using jail to scare kids	Yes	No
-Media figure (i.e., Casey Anthony)	Yes	No
3. Have you learned about jail in school	Yes	No
3a. What did you learn?	Yes	No
-What not to do/making good decisions	Yes	No
-Self-esteem	Yes	No
-Inmates/jail are scary/undesirable	Yes	No
4. Have you talked to anyone about jail?	Yes	No
4a. Who? What did they say?	Yes	No
-No real information (i.e., you don't want to go there)	Yes	No
-Other	Yes	No
5. Why do people go to jail? <sup>c</sup>		
-Include a legal description	Yes	No
-List examples of things people do	Yes	No
-Provide a life context reason <sup>b</sup>	Yes	No
-Describe an aspect of their character <sup>a</sup>	Yes	No
6. What kinds of people go to jail? <sup>c</sup>		
-Bad people <sup>a</sup>	Yes	No
-List types of criminals	Yes	No
-Describe a quality/personality trait <sup>a</sup>	Yes	No
-Describe adverse environmental circumstances <sup>b</sup>	Yes	No
-Anybody can go to jail/I can go to jail	Yes	No

7. Can moms and dads go to jail? <sup>c</sup>	Yes	No
7a. Can they see their kids? <sup>c</sup>	Yes	No Sometimes
8. Can kids go to jail? <sup>c</sup>	Yes	No
8a. Do they go to the same jail as adults? <sup>c</sup>	Yes	No
9. Are people safe while they are in jail?	Yes	No
-Use of weapons/making weapons	Yes	No
-Person-on-person violence	Yes	No
-Sexual assault	Yes	No
-Guards being protectors	Yes	No
-Guards not helping	Yes	No
10. How long do people stay in jail? <sup>c</sup>		
-Different based on what they did	Yes	No
-Mention a legal aspect of decision-making	Yes	No
11. What happens after people get out of jail? <sup>c</sup>		
-Change their behavior	Yes	No
-Don't change their behavior	Yes	No
-Change the type of person they are <sup>a</sup>	Yes	No
-Don't change the type of person they are <sup>a</sup>	Yes	No
-Describe a legal aspect of post-release	Yes	No
-Describe practical concerns	Yes	No
12. What is the difference between jail and prison? <sup>c</sup>		
-Treatment of people there/conditions	Yes	No
-Length of stay	Yes	No
-Causes for entry	Yes	No
-Location	Yes	No
13. What happens when people get arrested? <sup>c</sup>		
-Description of events	Yes	No
-Describe things after arrest	Yes	No
-Different arrest procedure if they did it or not	Yes	No

*Note.* <sup>a</sup>Included in the dispositional attribution variable; <sup>b</sup>Included in the external forces variable; <sup>c</sup>Coded for accuracy

## ENDNOTES

1. Patterns of significance remained for hypothesis tests when the outlier was included in analyses. Results can be furnished upon request.