Chapter 3
The Impact of Mass Incarceration and Social Issues of Institutionalization on School Violence in Youths

Stephen C. Stanko  
Independent Researcher, USA

Gordon A. Crews  
Tiffin University, USA

ABSTRACT

In this chapter the authors examine the impact that mass incarceration has had upon children in the United States over the last several decades. Inherent in this examination is to discuss the impact of institutionalization on the propensity of committing violent acts by children. The authors also discuss the impact of these American phenomena on many aspects of juvenile delinquency and violence.

INTRODUCTION

While seemingly unrealized by most of the American public, 95% of all currently incarcerated individuals (Glaze and Kaeble, 2014) will eventually be released from their incarcerative sentences and one day return to their prior homes, jobs, and neighborhoods. With more than 2.2 million people incarcerated in the United States, the number of individuals returning daily to free society inherently will create a potentially heavy saturation of people (adults) bringing the behaviors that they learned and lived in prison back into their former lives (family and friends). Unfortunately, highlighted by intimidation and violence, the behaviors, habits, traits and activities learned by these individuals during incarceration are, in almost all cases, negative and unacceptable in any society. In regards to school violence and juvenile delinquency, these are often parents and guardians who may unintentionally create and/or increase violent
and anti-social tendencies in the children of which they have intimate relationships. Moreover, given the
natural inclination of children to emulate the actions of those they love and admire, the impact (positive
or negative) that these former convicts and inmates have cannot be overstated.

This chapter attempts to examine the following:

First, the connection between increase in mass incarceration rates in America and the increase in the
amount of school violence and disturbance. Second, the possible negative effects of incarceration on an
individual who serves time and their eventual impact upon those closest to them.

Third, the impact of the conduct, behaviors, life, and traits learned in prisons that are infused into
society upon release of inmates (specifically those having served sentences of length and in maximum/
high-security prisons). Fourth, the impact that all of this has on the children/youth who take these into
their personality development. More so, child development being subjected to these lesser standards on
larger and larger levels of saturation in the community is creating a society of intimidation and violence.

THE NUMBERS

Studies at year end 2013 (Glaze and Kaeble, 2014) found that an estimated 6,899,000 people were under
the supervision of adult correctional systems in the United States. Of that, 2.2 million were incarcerated.
Essentially this means that 910 in every 100,000 U.S. adults or 1 in every 110 Americans was incarcer-
crated at that time, these numbers are unprecedented throughout American history. While the greater
number of incarcerated (an estimated 2/3 of the U.S. prison population) are categorized/classified as
“non-violent,” they are routinely housed in medium/maximum-security prisons with violent offenders.
This mix of non-violent with violent offenders is one of the main reasons there is so much violence in
American prisons.

While many professionals and scholars blame the war-on-drugs for the high volume of incarcerated in
the United States, it is not the cause of conviction and incarceration but the social changes and behavioral
modifications during said sentence which will be relevant. With the violent traits being transferred to
non-violent offenders and then, again, into the youth of society via release, the saturation of moral and
ethical standards decline and the use of violence as a means to an end increases.

95% of all incarcerated felons are eventually released. In 2001, alone, more than 570,000 men and
women were released from prison. 15 years ago, a half million people were released into society after
serving incarcerative sentences, and the number has not decreased. As prison populations have increased
in almost every year since, it is difficult to say which is worse – the fact that roughly 600,000 people per
year continue to enter the prison population or that more than 500,000 are coming out. Either way, the
two figures factor into an ugly equation that starts with record numbers of prisoners in the United States
and ends with record numbers of ex-prisoners returning to communities and neighborhoods across the
country.

THE “BUSTIN-A-SAG” EXAMPLE

Before entering the discussion of prison life, there is an example of how prison can bleed its way into
society.