Delivering Services to Incarcerated Teen Fathers: A Pilot Intervention to Increase the Quality of Father-Infant Interactions during Visitation

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Abstract

The absence of a father figure has been linked to very poor developmental outcomes for the child. During incarceration, there are limited opportunities for visitation between fathers and their children. The Baby Elmo Program provides incarcerated teen fathers with parenting training and visitation with their children with the stated goal of enhancing father-child interactional quality. Forty incarcerated teen fathers and their infants ranging from 1 to 15 months of age participated in the present study. A trained facilitator prepared fathers for visits with their children by introducing key concepts, such as following the child’s lead, and used developmentally appropriate media to illustrate those concepts. After each training session, the father interacted with his infant and the visit was video recorded. Analysis focused on father’s use of time on different activities during the visit, father’s use of target skills, and the quality of father-infant interactions. The time use analysis revealed that time use changed as a function of infant age. Growth linear modeling indicated that there were significant positive increases in the amount of parent support and infant engagement as a function of the number of sessions. Follow-up analyses indicated that changes between specific sessions mapped onto the target skills discussed during specific training sessions. This study’s preliminary findings suggest that an intervention integrating visitation and appropriate media may be effective for incarcerated teen fathers. Due to the lack of a randomized control group, the present findings are exploratory and are discussed with a focus on further program development.