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## Commentary on "The Familial Union between Caregivers and the Juvenile Justice System"

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The article entitled "The Familial Union between Caregivers and the Juvenile Justice System" is significant as it explores an area not thoroughly researched—the relationship between the family and the agents of the juvenile justice system. Specifically, this study explores perceived challenges faced by caregivers with a juvenile family member detained by the juvenile justice system. The authors note that most of the literature related to this area measures perceptions of specific juveniles who have been detained. This research was pursued to gain a perception of the process from the point of view of the family caregiver. This is essential, given the myriad of research that suggests the family is the most critical element in the life of a juvenile. However, as pointed out in this research, there is very little, if any, research that explores the effect of detention on caregivers and other family members.

Family Systems Theory closely resembles the criminological theory of Social Control. Social Control theory suggests that strong bonds to families and prosocial institutions decrease the likelihood of delinquency or juvenile recidivism (Hirschi, 1977; Hirschi, 2002). The theory purports that commitment, attachment, involvement and belief are the cornerstones to conformity. In this way, both Family Systems Theory and Social Control Theory offer the importance of healthy familial relationships. Interestingly, two authors in this area of research coauthored a paper that studied Social Control Theory to explain the importance of strong bonds and healthy family relationship between caregivers and juveniles in decreasing delinquency (Church, Wharton & Taylor, 2009).

Baldwin, Church and Wharton express many of the methodological concerns regarding qualitative research, specifically, the many issues related to interpreting body language, tone, and other nonverbal expressions. The authors cited two preeminent sources (Sandelowski, 1986; Creswell, 1999) to address limitations. Another point to note is the issue of transparency presented by the researchers: the researchers presented their own biases and preconceived thoughts regarding caregiver perception of the juvenile justice system and the juvenile justice process. Another valuable point is the issue of gathering specific sociodemographic variables to give the reader a "picture" of the interviewees and the challenges faced by most. This additional information supports the literature regarding many of the risk factors juveniles face including: minority status, single-headed family household membership, and low socioeconomic status.

The study suggests the interviewees viewed their children's detention by the juvenile justice system as a help to their families; the families asserted that much-needed resources and treatment options were

made available that may not have been accessible otherwise. In this way, juvenile justice intervention provided an avenue for rebuilding families and reducing recidivism. The study suggests many interviewees responded that there was a lack of communication from juvenile justice agents regarding the initial detention of their juveniles; however, many noted that services after the initial detention were a benefit to the juveniles involved in the juvenile justice system. The caregivers willingly supported many of the detentions, citing the much-needed services and “help” from the juvenile justice system.

This research crosses many disciplines, including social work, the juvenile justice system and sociology. It addresses familial dynamics and the social environment, including socioeconomic status, as well as involvement of agents in the juvenile justice system. This study takes the initial step of delving into parental reactions and perceptions of the juvenile justice system; the qualitative study builds on the existing body of knowledge of how families respond to their children’s involvement in the juvenile justice system. Further, it has been noted in the literature that positive parental reaction is critical to juvenile success; thus, a juvenile’s success or recidivism can be directly impacted by the response of the caregiver. More important, however, is the significance of strengthening the family as a whole. It is vitally important for parents whose children come in contact with the juvenile justice system to recognize the need to strengthen family relationships. Programs and services made available to juveniles and caregivers to strengthen families are beneficial to all—including the juvenile justice system and the community.

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