

# **Examining the Intergenerational Transmission of Disadvantage: The effect of Parental Incarceration among Young Adults in the US**

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Over the twentieth century, incarceration has dramatically increased in the United States. As recently as 2009 over 7.3 million men and women were under some form of correctional supervision (Glaze 2010). Moreover, incarceration is unevenly distributed throughout the population: African-American men are 7 times more likely to be incarcerated than white males and 3 times more likely than non-Hispanic males (Western and Petit 2010). Disparities in imprisonment by educational attainment are particularly notable. About 60% of African-Americans with less than a high school education and 30% of African-American high school graduates experience incarceration in their lifetime (Western and Petit 2010).

In response to the growing risk of imprisonment, a burgeoning academic literature has examined the patterns and implications of primarily male incarceration. However, there is a dearth of empirical research examining the intergenerational effects of imprisonment on families. Incarceration is associated with negative outcomes including illegal drug use, delinquency and criminal justice involvement, and externalizing behaviors in childhood (Giordano 2010; Murray et. al 2009; Wildeman 2010). Because of the challenges of parental incarceration, children from these families face a substantially greater risk of economic insecurity and family instability. Both economic insecurity and family instability causes children to demonstrate lower cognitive outcomes and behavioral problems, which are risk factors for incarceration later in life (Duncan et. al 1994).

The substantial increase in incarceration rates has led more children to be exposed to parental incarceration. Approximately 55 percent of men in state and federal prisons are fathers and 43 percent of these fathers report having lived with their children prior to incarceration (Glaze & Maruschak 2008). Minority children face a disproportionate risk of experiencing parental imprisonment. According to analysis by Wildeman (2009), for children born in 1990, 20% of African-American children had a parent imprisoned in comparison to about 4% of white children. Further, 13% of all young adults reported that their father was in prison at some point in the childhood (Foster and Hagan 2007).

Although literature has noted that there is a clear association between parental incarceration and child's delinquency, there are methodological challenges. Collecting large samples of families exposed to incarceration is difficult, and attrition often limits the generalizability of findings. This paper has three goals. First, we will conduct a descriptive analysis of the changing characteristics associated with incarceration among young adults. This will be an attempt to show how the characteristics that predict incarceration have changed over time. Second, we look at the relationship between parental incarceration and the young adult's experience of imprisonment. This portion of the paper will inform the final part of the paper when we examine how these associations is differentiated by race and ethnicity.

Data & Methodology

We use data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescents (Add Health). Add Health was designed to assess the health status of adolescents and explore the causes of their health-related behaviors. The Add Health in-home sample consists of about 12,000 respondents enrolled in grades 7-12 at Wave I. Follow-up interviews were conducted in 1996, 2001-2002, and 2007-2008. The primary sampling unit for the original survey was the school, and the study design ensured that the sample was representative of US schools with respect to region of the country, urbanism, school type, ethnicity, and school size. There was targeted oversampling to ensure substantial representation of non-Hispanic Blacks, Hispanics, Asian Americans, and Native Americans. Add Health is uniquely suited to study these empirical research questions because it provides a robust set of demographic and social characteristics associated with incarceration. This will allow us to distinguish between the effects of parental incarceration and other social characteristics associated with incarceration. We plan to use standard logistic regression to analyze the effect of the relationship of parental incarceration among these young adults. This will allow us to show how the odds of incarceration differ by race and ethnicity.

Our results can provide information about how incarceration impacts families and the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage. Further, we will elucidate the mechanisms through which parental incarceration impacts young adults. We will also discuss the implications of these findings for future research and public policy.

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