Incarceration in Household Surveys

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Researchers Want Incarceration Data

- Fragile Families: many recent papers, e.g., Corman et al. (2011), Bronte-Tinkew and Horowitz (2009), Geller et al. (2011), Lewis et al. (2007)
- NLSY79: includes Arum and Beattie (2006), Davies and Tanner (2005), Massoglia (2008), Saperstein and Penner (2010)
- Incarceration is often an outcome, studying the effects of schooling, family process, parental incarceration
- Incarceration also a predictor, in studies of wages, employment, marriage, health, homelessness, racial identification, multipartner fertility, child behavior
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The Key Questions

- Have the efforts of Fragile Families, NLSY, AdHealth, and PSID etc, been successful? (Clearly yes)
- How could they be improved?
- Key challenges:
  - Measurement
  - Selection:
    - Survey nonresponse, under-enumeration, attrition
    - Selectivity with observed incarceration
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What Should We Measure?

- Annual prison admissions number 700,000; jail admissions number 10 million. Is the distinction important? Should we measure both?

- Timing, time served, conditions of confinement. Are these important to understanding the effects of incarceration? Can respondents report them?

- Our major surveys provide only some of this detail, and researchers have not made great use of it.
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- High risk of attrition from panels and interview nonresponse
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Interview Nonresponse Among Fragile Families

Nonresponse Rate (%)

- Incarcerated
- Not incarcerated

Interview Year

1 3 5 9
Selection Bias

- Even in the sample of observed respondents, estimates of the effects of incarceration are threatened by nonrandom selection.
- Useful to collect additional data to help adjust for unobserved heterogeneity.
- Fixed effects in panel data, measures of criminality, personality, might be useful.
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Incarceration and Its Correlates in Fragile Families

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Corr. with incarceration</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ever convicted</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever arrested</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stopped by police</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impulsivity scale</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hits or slaps mother</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORDSUM</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

▶ Strong interest among researchers in survey data on incarceration
▶ Lots we could measure. Best has been to observe incarceration as it happens in panel surveys (NLSY79 and NLSY97)
▶ Need to understand the implications of under-enumeration (selection, unmeasured effects on families)
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