

# 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

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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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# Nonresponse, Under-Enumeration, Attrition

- ▶ Population not stably connected to households
- ▶ High risk of attrition from panels and interview nonresponse
- ▶ What can we do? Ask proxies, ask about family members



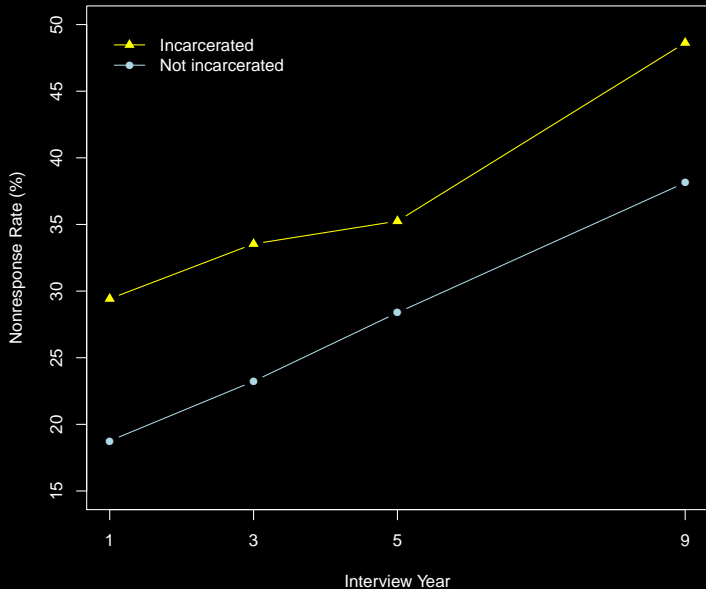
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## Interview Nonresponse Among Fragile Families Families



# 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

	Mean	Corr. with incarceration
Ever convicted	.20	.63
Ever arrested	.32	.55
Stopped by police	.49	.29
Impulsivity scale	.33	.20
Hits or slaps mother	.04	.08
WORDSUM	.44	.03

# Summary

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- ▶ Lots we could measure. Best has been to observe incarceration as it happens in panel surveys (NLSY79 and NLSY97)
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