

Father Imprisonment and Children's School Outcomes

Research Question

- How does a father's imprisonment affect a child's behavior in school and high school completion?
- Does the association vary by race/ethnicity?

Significance

- The rates of parents with minor children held in the nations prisons increased by 79% between 1991 and 2007 (Glaze 2008).
- 63% of Federal prisoners reported having at least 1 child under the age of 18 (Glaze 2008).
- Black and Hispanic men are more disproportionately incarcerated than White men (Swisher & Waller 2008).

Background

- Forced separation can disrupt parent-child bonds, harming children's social and emotional well-being (Geller 2011).
- Children's interactions with incarcerated fathers are limited in both quantity and quality, which likely has negative consequences for development (Geller 2011).
- Fathers' incarceration may impact children through family economic circumstances (Geller 2011; Swisher & Waller 2008).

Hypotheses

- If a child's father has been imprisoned, the child is more likely to be expelled from school and less likely to complete high school education.
- The association is greater for Black and Hispanic children than white children.

Data and Sample

- National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health), public use data
- Wave 3 (2001-2002)
- Re-interviewed Adults ages 18 to 26 (N= 4,882)

Dependent Measures

- **High School Completion**
"What degrees or diplomas have you received?"
 - 0 = No Diploma 10.2%
 - 1 = GED 6.8%
 - 2 = High School Diploma 83.0%
- **Expulsion**
"Have you ever been expelled from school?"
 - 0 = No 92.3%
 - 1 = Yes 7.7%

Independent Measure

- **Fathers Imprisonment**
"Has your biological father ever served time in jail or prison?"
 - 0 = No 86.2%
 - 1 = Yes 13.8%

Control Measure

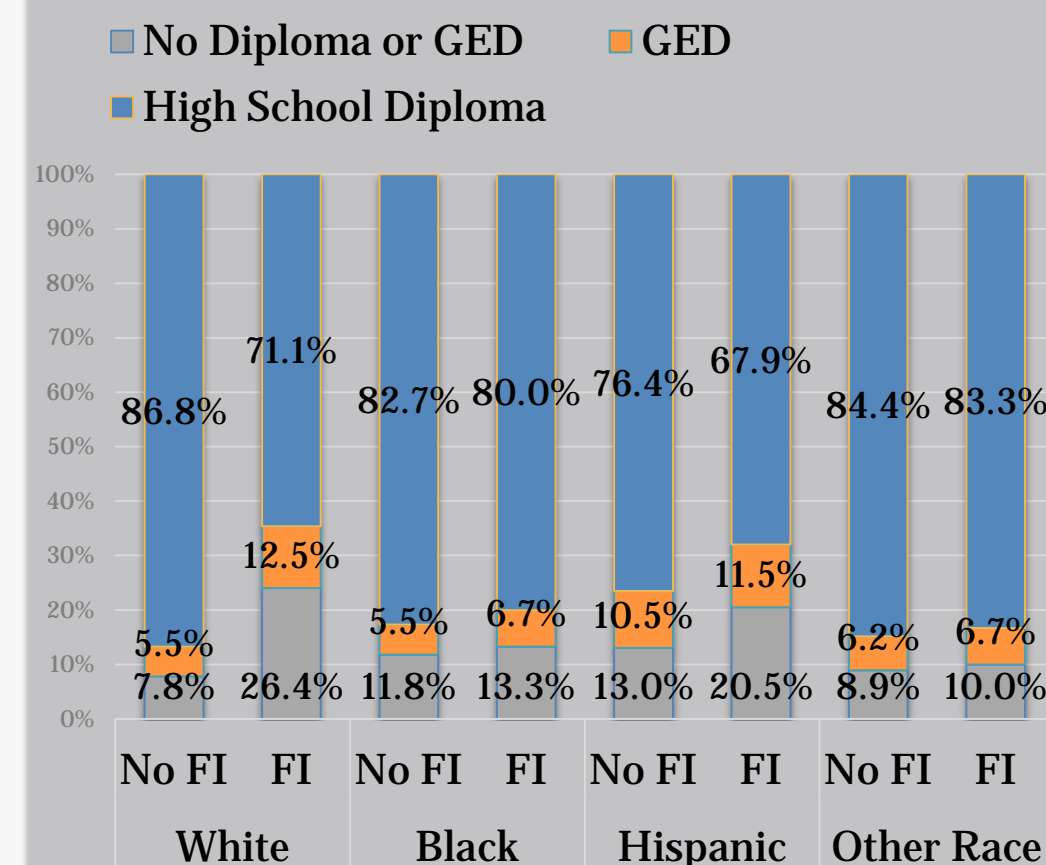
- **Race**
 - White 58.9%
 - Black 24.1%
 - Hispanic 10.7%
 - Other races 6.3%

Analytical Plan

- Cross tabulation and Chi-Square test using SPSS.

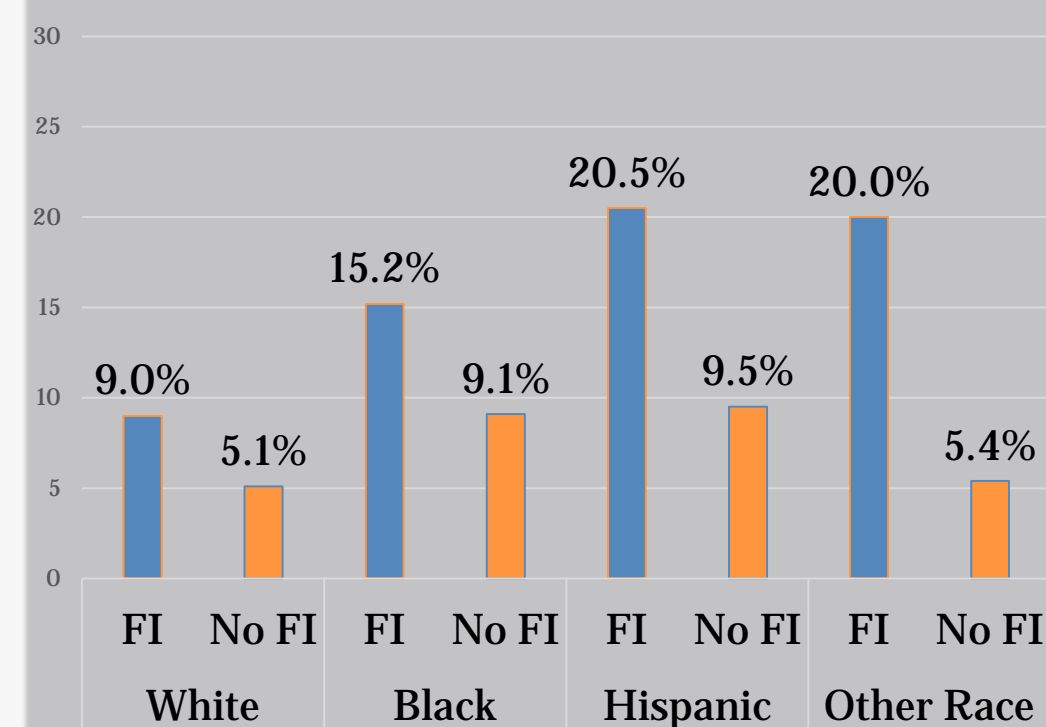
Results

Figure 1. % High School Completion by Father Incarceration (FI) and Race/Ethnicity



Chi-square tests show differences were significant at $p < .001$ for Whites only.

Figure 2. % Ever Expelled By Father Incarceration (FI) and Race/Ethnicity



Chi-square tests show differences by FI were significant at $p < .01$ for all racial/ethnic groups.

Summary of the Results

- Children with fathers in the prison system were more likely to be expelled across all four racial groups.
- Children with fathers in the prison system were significantly less likely to complete high school education for Whites only.

Discussion

- White men are less likely to be incarcerated than racial minority men. For this reason White families may be less resilient than racial/ethnic minority families to the effects of father incarceration (Swisher & Waller 2008).
- Incarceration within disadvantaged African American and Latino communities has become an almost expected stage in the life course, perhaps lessening its stigma (Swisher & Waller 2008).
- Prison systems should implicate more programs that encourage communication between children and their fathers and also help to improve parenting skills (Swisher & Waller 2008).

References

- Geller, Amanda, et al. 2011. "Beyond Absenteeism: Father Incarceration and Child Development." *Demography*, 49(1), 49-76.
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- Raeder, Myrna S. 2012. "Special Issue: Making A Better World For Children Of Incarcerated Parents." *Family Court Review*, 50 (1) 23-35.
- Swisher, Raymond R., and Maureen R. Waller. 2008. "Confining Fatherhood." *Journal of Family Issues* 29 (8) 1067-1088