Father Imprisonment and Children's School Outcomes

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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 (Swish & 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