

# Does Verbal Abuse of Children Predict Incarceration?

## Research Question

- Is there a relationship between verbal abuse of children and later delinquency and incarceration?
- Does an individual's self-esteem moderate the association between verbal abuse and incarceration?

## Why Incarceration?

- According to the Children's Defense Fund approximately 76,000 children are placed within the adult criminal justice system each year.
- The combination of compromised social support, economic need, mental health, and substance abuse problems interact to compromise parents' abilities to effectively parent their children (Lopez 2009).
- In 2015, 48,043 children were incarcerated on an average night; and every 30 seconds a child was arrested (Children's Defense Fund 2019).

## Hypotheses

- Children who report being verbally abused will be more likely to be incarcerated as an adult.
- Self-esteem will moderate the relationship between verbal abuse as a child and incarceration in later life.

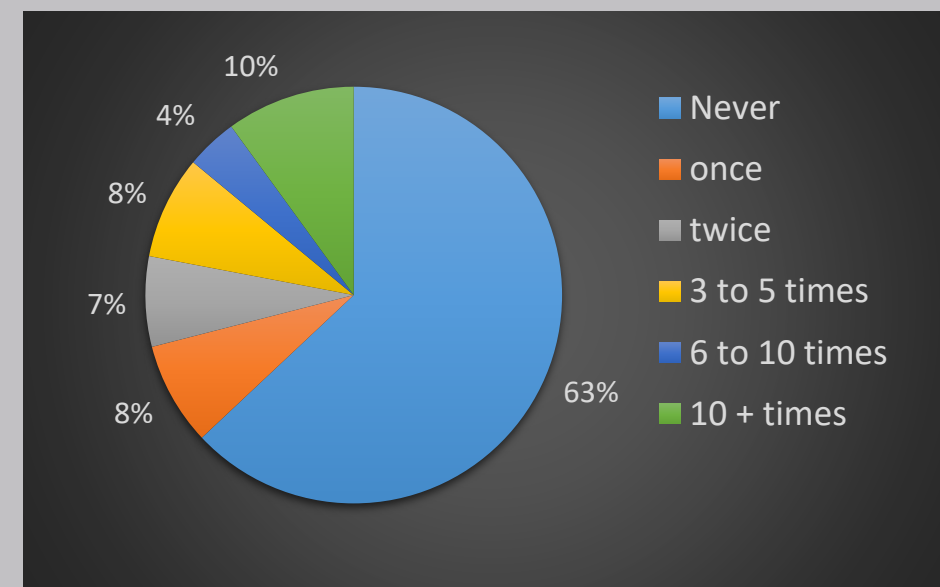
## Data Base

- The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health
- Waves 1 and 4
- In-home surveys of adolescents.
- Public-use data.

## Independent Variable

### Verbal Abuse

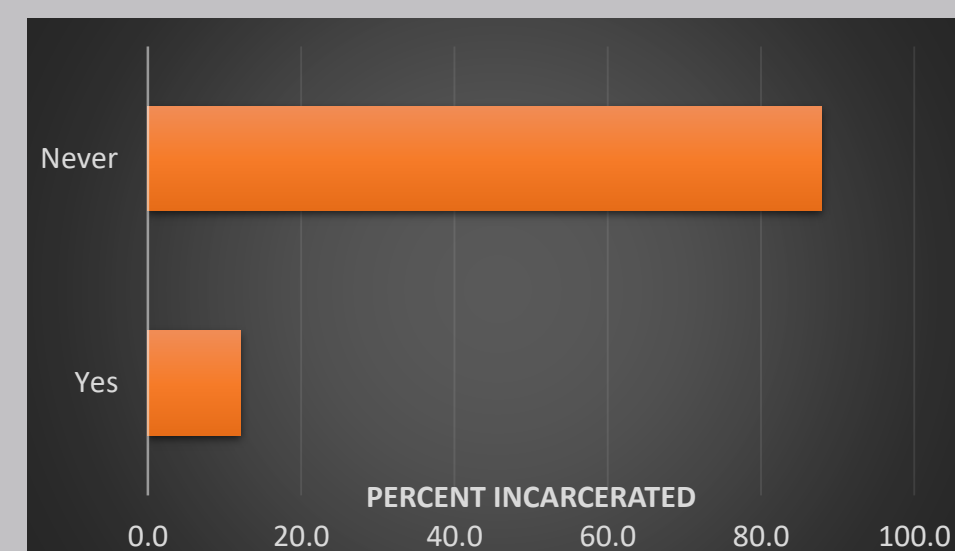
"Before your 18th birthday how often did a parent or other adult caregiver say things that really hurt your feelings or made you feel not wanted or loved?"



## Dependent Variable

### Incarceration

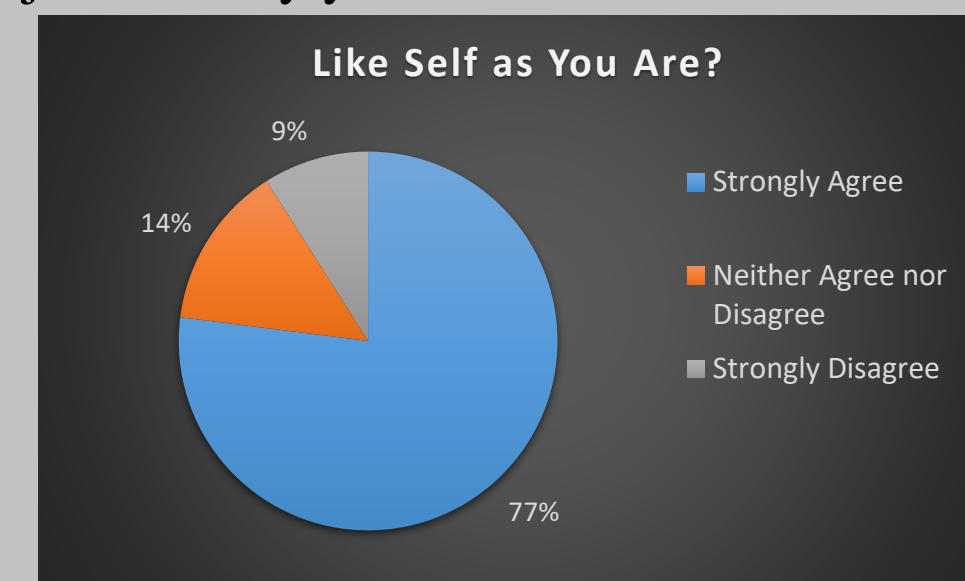
"Have you ever spent time in a jail, prison, juvenile detention center or other correctional facility?"



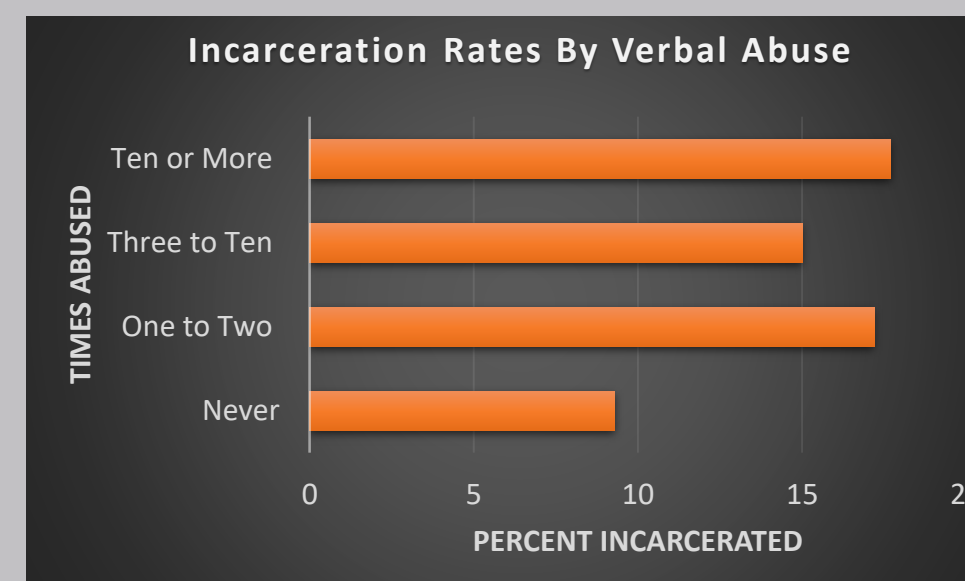
## Moderator Variable

### Self-esteem

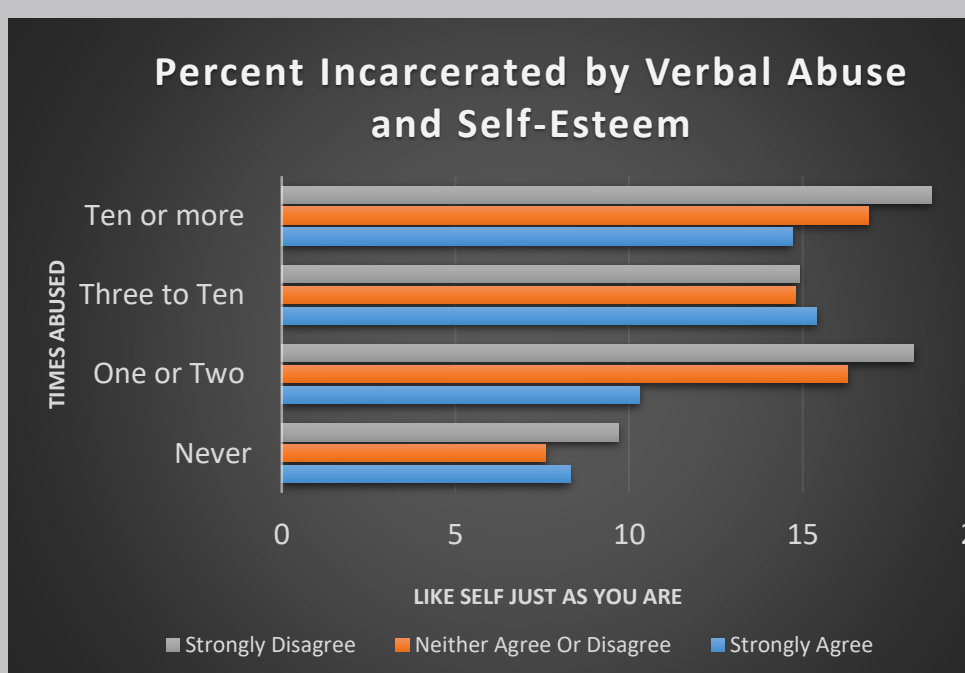
"Do you agree or disagree with the following statement... You like yourself just the way you are?"



## Bivariate Analysis



## Multivariate Analysis



## Summary of Findings

- There is a positive association between verbal abuse and later incarceration.
- Self-esteem happened to be a strong moderator for those who reported being abused 1-2 times and 10+ times.
- Self-esteem protected those individuals from incarceration.

## Limitations and Future Directions

- A limitation is that ADD Health is a school based sample and those who are most likely to be incarcerated may have already dropped out.
- Future research could examine whether verbal abuse is associated with incarceration in juvenile versus adult facilities.

## Resources

- Children's Defense Fund. (2019) The Problem. NP.
- Lopez, V., Katsulis, Y., & Robillard, A. (2009). "Drug Use with Parents as a Relational Strategy for Incarcerated Female Adolescents." *Family Relations*, 58(2), 135-147.