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The six articles in this issue examine the topic of incarceration, and how it affects prisoners and their families, both during and after imprisonment. The first article summarizes a seminar given by Christopher Uggen at the University of Wisconsin–Madison on crime, punishment, and American inequality, where he argued that basing criminal justice policy on the view that all people can be classified either as “bad actors” or “good citizens” is untenable and may lead to over-punishment. Michael Massoglia, Glenn Firebaugh, and Cody Warner look at the quality of neighborhoods that former prisoners call “home” after release, and whether that varies by race. They conclude that incarceration tends to harm whites more than blacks with respect to neighborhood attainment. Julie Poehlmann-Tynan summarizes recent research on children’s contact with incarcerated parents. She offers a number of policy recommendations intended to improve the experience of parent-child contact during parental incarceration and child and parent well-being in the context of parental incarceration. Anna R. Haskins uses newly available longitudinal data to look at the effects of a father’s incarceration on school-age children’s mental health, socioemotional development, and cognitive skills. She finds negative effects of paternal incarceration on both noncognitive and cognitive outcomes for children, and argues that these findings provide additional evidence that having an incarcerated father is an important avenue through which educational inequality is produced and reproduced among U.S. children. Signe Hald Andersen and Christopher Wildeman evaluate whether and how paternal incarceration may increase children’s foster care placement. They identify potential pathways through which this increase could occur, and, using data from Denmark, conclude that for Danish children having an incarcerated father results in large increases in the risk of children being placed in foster care. Finally, Madeleine Solan and Charles J. Homer, from the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, offer an approach to first reduce incarceration and then, in the event it occurs, to mitigate its negative effects. They provide some examples of the Obama administration’s related efforts.

Crime, punishment, and American inequality

Christopher Uggen

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When it comes to crime, there is a large gap between what the science of criminology shows to be true and public perception and policy. A generation of research demonstrates that over time, nearly all those who have broken the law eventually desist from crime.¹ Public policy, however, continues to be based on the perception that there are two kinds of people in the world: bad actors and good citizens. There is a persistent belief that if we can just lock up the bad

actors and throw away the key, then the rest of us will be safe. This gulf between research findings and public perception has recently widened as the label of “criminal” can now remain with an individual for much longer than in the past. If individuals are indeed being punished long after the point they would have left a criminal path, then there is a need to identify where there might be excess punishment, and find less coercive solutions to keeping order.

In this article, I contrast the fluidity of an individual’s participation in criminal activities with the stickiness of labels placed on those who have ever had any contact with the criminal justice system. The spillover effects of incarceration reach a variety of other areas; I focus on two of them: disenfranchisement for current and former felons, and welfare bans for those convicted of drug-related crimes. I describe some reintegrative approaches to justice in the United

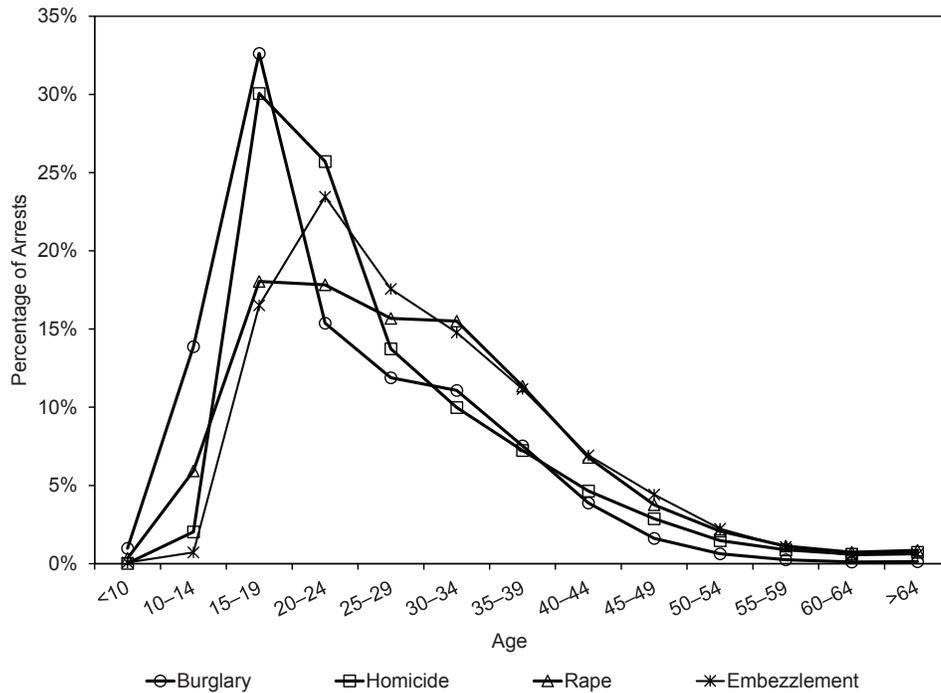


Figure 1. The U.S. age distribution of arrest, by type of crime.

States, which offer an alternative to stigmatizing approaches. Finally, I describe an analysis of the outcomes of a traditional community-based justice system in Rwanda, dating back to before colonization, that was adapted to address crimes of genocide. Rwanda provides an example of a large-scale attempt to successfully reintegrate former prisoners into their communities. The number of Rwandan perpetrators, combined with the very limited prison infrastructure, made such reintegration imperative. While the situation in the United States is clearly very different, we are approaching a point where it will be infeasible to simply exclude from society every person convicted of a felony. While reintegration efforts have been tried in the United States on a small scale, there is great potential to expand this approach.

Fluidity versus stickiness

It is well established that commission of crime rises with age, peaks in the late teenage years and early 20s, then declines, as illustrated in Figure 1. While this age-crime curve appears to be fairly smooth, patterns for individuals are much more “fluid,” as they cycle in and out of criminal life for some time until eventually leaving it behind. Ideally, policy should provide punishment when warranted, but then provide support when an individual is making the transition to being a law-abiding member of society; however, determining how to

find the balance between punishment and encouragement in practice is complicated. One key to answering this question is determining whether institutions ease or disrupt the transition out of a criminal life. This is an increasingly important policy issue, particularly in light of the aging U.S. population, and the costs associated with paying for incarceration and the lost productivity of incarcerated people who could otherwise be contributing members of society.

One of the challenges to promoting public safety and supporting an individual’s efforts to leave behind a life of crime is that criminal records are increasingly “sticky.” In the past, having a criminal record in one’s youth would not necessarily affect one’s adult education and career options. Now, that may no longer be the case, for two reasons. First, there has been an explosion of records as arrest has become increasingly commonplace, with 30 percent of all Americans (and 49 percent of African American males) experiencing an arrest by age 23. Overall, there are about 14 million arrests in the United States each year. While these arrests often do not lead to prosecution, and are much more likely to be for misdemeanor than felony charges, they still appear on the formal record. Second, there has been an expansion of access to these records. Since obtaining these records electronically is now quick and inexpensive, a large majority of employers check criminal records, even for entry-level minimum wage positions.

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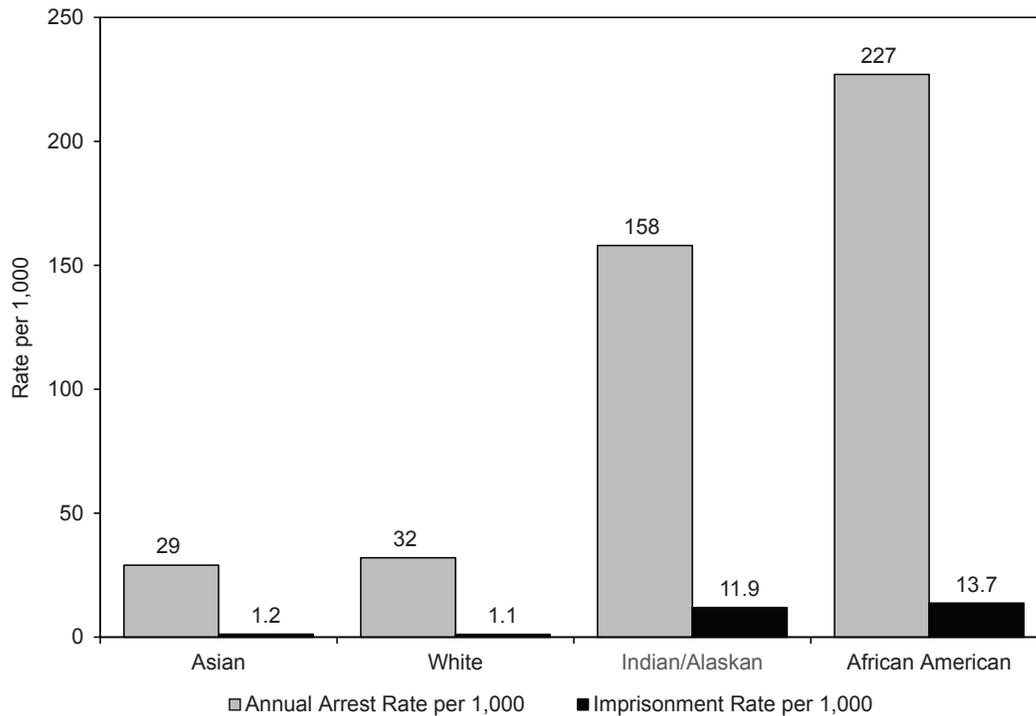


Figure 2. Comparison by race of annual arrest and imprisonment rates per 1,000 men, Minnesota 2007.

There are stark differences in arrest rates by race, as illustrated by Figure 2. When I began data collection in Minnesota in 2007, the average annual arrest rate for African Americans was 227 per 1000, compared to about 30 per 1000 for whites or Asians.² Further, while arrest rates are substantially higher than incarceration rates for all races, incarceration rates for African American and Native American men are still notably high, at 12–14 per 1000 per year, compared to just over 1 per 1000 for white and Asian men.

My colleagues and I looked at whether and how employers considered low-level arrests in hiring decisions.³ Young African American and white men were sent to apply for entry level jobs, with half reporting a disorderly conduct arrest that did not lead to conviction. We found that employer callback rates were about 4 percentage points lower for those reporting an arrest than for an identically matched applicant who applied for the same job but did not report an arrest. So, even a low-level arrest had some stigma attached as demonstrated by the employer response. Racial differences were even larger; in both the arrest group and the control group, blacks had callback rates that were about 10 percentage points lower than whites, though the difference attributable to arrest was similar for blacks and whites. We also found that personal contact, such as handing in an application in person, dramatically improved the job prospects of our applicants. On January 1, 2014, Minnesota law was changed so that employers may now consider criminal records only at the interview stage, ensuring an opportunity for contact. As of January 2016, a total of 19 states and over 100 cities now “ban the box,” meaning employers are not permitted to ask about a felony conviction on a job application. Whether this

change will make a meaningful difference for people with criminal records is not yet known, but evaluations of the policy change are currently underway in several cities.

Rise of the criminal class

Between 1980 and 2010, the number of people in the United States who were on parole, in prison, in jail, or on probation rose from under 2 million to over 7 million, although there was a slight drop near the end of that period.⁴ In 2010 there were around 20 million current or former felons in the United States; that number will continue to grow, even as the rate of incarceration levels off.⁵ While even arrests and misdemeanors can cast a shadow on an individual’s future, as described above, felony records can negatively affect that future in numerous and profound ways, including restricting an individual’s access to public assistance, right to vote, and ability to find employment. For blacks this is especially true because they have long been overrepresented in U.S. correctional populations. In 1980, for example, 5.5 percent of blacks had a history of felony conviction, compared to 2.1 percent of the adult population overall. By 2010, the U.S. felony conviction rate for blacks had risen to 18.3 percent, with rates over 20 percent in many states, compared to 6.4 percent for the overall adult population.⁶ This large increase in the number of people with a felony conviction is not just a story about incarceration, but also reflects large increases in the number of people on probation. In a recent Pew Foundation report, for example, Minnesota ranked forty-ninth among the states on incarceration rates, but fourth in terms of community supervision and seventh in terms of total correctional control.⁷



Figure 3. Total number of arrests for female drug offenders, before and after welfare ban.

Spillover effects

The effects of a past felony conviction vary by state. In Alabama, Iowa, Kentucky, and Mississippi, for example, neither felons nor ex-felons are permitted to vote, even after their sentence (including probation and parole) is complete. In Maine and Vermont, in contrast, prisoners, parolees, and probationers are all permitted to vote. In most states, felons in prison, on probation, or on parole are excluded from voting. Overall, only about one-quarter of those not permitted to vote are currently incarcerated. Even though only a minority of states disenfranchise for life, the number of ex-felons banned from voting accumulates rapidly, because young ex-felons generally have decades of life and civic participation ahead of them. Policy on this issue is not in line with public sentiment, as the great majority of U.S. adults favor allowing former felons to vote, and most also approve of voting rights for probationers and parolees.⁸ Public support, however, does drop off for prisoners; only about a third support permitting currently incarcerated felons to vote.

Another spillover effect of incarceration, in this case for those with felony convictions for drug-related crimes, is the lifetime ban on receipt of welfare (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families or TANF) and food stamps (now known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP), implemented as part of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996.⁹ Although states may choose to opt out of or modify this ban, most abide by either the original or a modified version of it. In 2013, the Sentencing Project reported that 37 states either fully or partially enforce the TANF ban, and 34 states either

fully or partially enforce the SNAP ban.¹⁰ Since the great majority of welfare recipients are women, the welfare ban for drug offenders disproportionately affects women and their children. Targeting drug-involved women may in fact lead to increased crime. This is illustrated in Figure 3, which shows that over time, states that partially or fully implement the welfare ban have higher overall female arrest rates.¹¹ This pattern is apparent for both property and violent crimes; the only type of offense that appears unaffected by the welfare ban is drug crime.

Reintegrating versus stigmatizing approaches to justice

While the policies described above constitute stigmatizing approaches that make it very difficult for former prisoners to shed the label of “criminal” and rejoin society, there are other approaches that emphasize reintegration. One of these is supported employment, helping hard-to-employ populations find and keep jobs. Using data on former drug users from the National Supported Work Demonstration, we found that 18 months after entering Supported Work, 26 percent of those in the treatment group had been arrested, compared to 32 percent of those in a control group.¹² This represents a statistically significant 19 percent reduction in recidivism. We also looked separately at arrests for robbery or burglary, an outcome of interest because these are predatory economic crimes that inflict harm on individuals and communities. Again, we found statistically significant lower arrest rates for those in the treatment group; at 18 months, 7 percent of those in the treatment group had been arrested for robbery

or burglary compared to 13 percent of those in the control group, a 46 percent reduction in recidivism.

Unfortunately, this notable result—that jobs help people avoid recidivism—was overshadowed by the finding that Supported Work did not reduce drug use. Since many viewed the goal of this and other social programs of the 1970s as to turn the most disadvantaged U.S. citizens into stable middle-class workers, the continued drug use contributed to perceptions that these programs were failures. This raises the broader policy question of whether post-release programs should insist on abstinence from drugs and alcohol. The answer to this question is still unclear, and depends greatly on the ultimate policy goals of the intervention. The fact remains, however, that supported employment represents a policy lever that has been shown to reduce crime.

Rwanda: Rescaling from crime to genocide

Few nations punish at rates comparable to the United States in this age of mass incarceration. Nevertheless, looking at criminal justice cross-nationally can provide a helpful perspective on the American system. We look at the example of post-genocide Rwanda. Although estimates vary, as many as one million people were killed in the 1994 Rwandan genocide, approximately 14 percent of Rwanda's population.¹³ In total, Rwandan courts have since tried more than 1.96 million genocide cases (which include property offenses, as well as killing, and planning violence). As new government leaders worked to rebuild the country and hold offenders accountable, the large number of people involved meant that they had no choice but to determine how to reintegrate perpetrators into society. With Hollie Nyseth Brehm, I am particularly interested in the steps that were taken in Rwanda once reintegration became an imperative, since the United States is also reaching a tipping point where it is infeasible to simply exclude from society every person convicted of a felony. In Rwanda, with the legal system decimated by the genocide, and prison facilities intended to hold only a small fraction of the perpetrators, the government in 2001 turned to a system that combined retributive and restorative justice, based on traditional community-based *gacaca* courts. The *gacaca* courts did use incarceration, including life sentences and long-term imprisonment, for some more serious crimes against people, such as killing, rape, and torture; however, the average sentence was much shorter than the average for similar crimes in the United States. The *gacaca* courts also made extensive use of community service as a form of retribution.

In an analysis of data from 10,000 *gacaca* courts, we noted that, similar to the relationship between age and arrest in the United States illustrated in Figure 1, there is an age-crime curve for the genocide-related crimes perpetrated in Rwanda as well.¹⁴ The age-genocide curve is more symmetrical than that shown in Figure 1, and peaks in the early thirties rather than around 20, but it is clear and consistent whether looking at looting, murder, or planning the genocide.

Given the extremely limited incarceration capacity in Rwanda relative to the number of perpetrators, the *gacaca* courts necessarily had to turn to culturally specific alternative sanctions, including a mix of fines and restorative justice alternatives. Many looting cases were settled through a negotiated agreement between the perpetrators and families who lost property. If the perpetrator admitted his crime and asked for forgiveness, the two parties could make an agreement on acceptable restitution. Such a process has been used on a very small scale in the United States with juvenile offenders, particularly with low-level property crimes. These methods have not been used in U.S. community courts with more serious offenses, but there may be some potential in that setting.

Further research on the restorative efforts used in Rwanda could explore the possibilities for their adaptation to disadvantaged communities in the United States. Such approaches could provide justice while also alleviating prison overcrowding.

Possibilities for reform

In light of this research, the idea that the world can be divided into bad actors and good citizens seems untenable. While it is admittedly difficult to figure out how many people need to be incarcerated, and how many are being punished unnecessarily, it appears very likely that we are over-punishing. Criminology as a science has evolved from identifying offenders to figuring out how to effect transitions out of crime, and identifying the factors that help explain transitions into and out of crime. While the stigmatizing approach of coercing people through fear of punishment is the current practice, there are alternatives, including making a real societal promise that being good will result in doing well, as in supported employment programs; and an appeal to common values and standing shoulder-to-shoulder with fellow citizens, as is being attempted in Rwanda. I do believe that it is possible to achieve the dual policy goals of dramatically reducing mass incarceration, while at the same time keeping crime rates low. In fact, the success of such an approach is illustrated by Rwanda, where, over the past 20 years since the genocide, they have cut their incarceration rate dramatically and reintegrated a massive number of returning prisoners with some degree of success. ■

¹³For example, see J. Laub and R. J. Sampson, *Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives: Delinquent Boys to Age 70* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

¹⁴People may be arrested multiple times per year, so this does not mean that 22.7 percent of all African Americans were arrested in 2007. C. Uggen, M. Vuolo, S. Lageson, E. Ruhland, and H. Whitham, "The Edge of Stigma: An Experimental Audit of the Effects of Low-Level Criminal Records on Employment," *Criminology* 52 (2014): 627–654.

¹⁵C. Uggen et al., "The Edge of Stigma"

¹⁶See, for example, T. P. Bonczar, D. Kaeble, and L. Maruschak, *Probation and Parole in the United States, 2014*, U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau

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¹⁰M. Mauer and V. McClamont, "A Lifetime of Punishment: The Impact of the Felony Drug Ban on Welfare Benefits," The Sentencing Project, Washington, DC, 2013. Available at http://sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/cc_A%20Lifetime%20of%20Punishment.pdf

¹¹M. Thompson and C. Uggen, "How Welfare Reform Drove Up Female Arrest Rates," Paper presented at Institute for Research on Poverty Summer Research Workshop, in Madison, WI, June 26, 2013.

¹²C. Uggen and S. Shannon, "Productive Addicts and Harm Reduction: How Work Reduces Crime—But Not Drug Use," *Social Problems* 61, No. 1 (February 2014): 105–130.

¹³Center for Conflict Management of the National University of Rwanda, *Evaluation of Gacaca Process: Achieved Results per Objective*, study commissioned by National Service of Gacaca Courts, Kigali, Rwanda, 2012.

¹⁴H. N. Brehm, C. Uggen, and J.-D. Gasanabo, "Genocide, Justice, and Rwanda's Gacaca Courts," *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 30, No. 3 (2014): 333–352.

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How does incarceration affect where people live after prison, and does it vary by race?

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The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world.¹ Since the mid-1970s the U.S. prison population has quadrupled, reflecting one of the largest policy experiments of the twentieth century.² Researchers and policymakers are just beginning to understand the effect that this dramatic expansion has had on U.S. society. Because African Americans and Hispanics are incarcerated at a higher rate than whites, it is reasonable to assume that rising imprisonment has contributed to existing racial inequalities in U.S. society.³ Earlier work has generally corroborated this assumption, concluding that imprisonment has in fact disproportionately disadvantaged nonwhite ex-inmates, their families, and their communities. For one, the incarceration rate for blacks is over six times that of whites, and incarceration has become an increasingly common fact of life, especially for black males with low levels of education.⁴ Disproportionate incarceration has been identified as a factor in racial variation in earnings, and in certain aspects of health.⁵ Additionally, felon disenfranchisement, or the restriction of voting rights among ex-offenders, disproportionately affects blacks, which has had major implications for state and federal elections.⁶ Finally, although fathers account for over 90 percent of all incarcerated parents, large racial discrepancies in incarceration rates mean that black children are actually more likely to have an incarcerated mother than white children are to have an incarcerated father.⁷

Where is “home” after prison?

Recent research finds that racial and ethnic minority ex-inmates may also be disadvantaged in another critical life domain—residential attainment—as many of them live in poorer and more disadvantaged neighborhoods after prison as compared to white ex-inmates.⁸ However, these studies were not able to account for neighborhood of origin; this is a key piece of information because the neighborhood of origin for the typical prisoner of color is likely much worse socioeconomically than the neighborhood of origin for the typical white prisoner. For example, in 1980 (the year after our longitudinal data set began), 9 of 10 whites lived in

neighborhoods with lower poverty than the neighborhood resided in by the typical (median) person of color.⁹

Given the magnitude of the neighborhood racial divide, it is reasonable to assume that whites will generally have more to lose than minorities from being imprisoned. It is also the case that incarceration is much more unusual in white communities than in black communities. Because neighborhoods where incarceration is unusual are less likely to welcome their straying members, whites might be less inclined than blacks to return to their pre-imprisonment neighborhood. Whether this disinclination will typically result in a move to a poorer neighborhood is unknown. Although it is clear that blacks reside in the poorest neighborhoods after prison, we do not know whether this reflects an incarceration effect or existing racial residential inequalities.¹⁰ So the time is ripe for a study of the effect of incarceration on residential attainment that controls for these important preexisting differences in neighborhood quality. Specifically, we ask: After accounting for neighborhood of origin, what is the effect of incarceration on residential attainment, and does it vary by race? To answer these questions, we use a unique nationally representative longitudinal data set that allows us to track individuals as they transition between prisons and communities across roughly 30 years.¹¹

Our examination of incarceration’s residential consequences focuses on neighborhood disadvantage as an indicator of neighborhood quality. As a group, individuals with a history of incarceration live in less desirable neighborhoods than do individuals without a history of incarceration. The best evidence of this comes from the Returning Home Project, in which researchers tracked released offenders across several metropolitan areas.¹² For example, more than half of the released inmates followed in Chicago settled in just seven of 77 total neighborhoods; these seven neighborhoods were typified by high rates of poverty and disadvantage.¹³

Little is known, however, about the processes that channel ex-inmates into these disadvantaged neighborhoods. Do inmates come from and simply return to the same disadvantaged neighborhoods upon release? Or do prisons push released offenders into more disadvantaged areas? This gap in our knowledge is notable for several reasons. First, the sheer magnitude of mass incarceration is hard to ignore, with approximately 700,000 people now being released from prison each year. Successful reentry of a stigmatized population of this size depends largely on where ex-inmates settle. There is evidence, for example, that post-prison neighborhood environment affects recidivism.¹⁴ This evidence, combined with more general evidence that life

is shaped by one's residence, suggests the importance of knowing ex-inmates' residential destinations.¹⁵ Indeed, given the large racial disparities in confinement, it is possible that growth in the prison population has important implications for racial inequalities across a number of dimensions tied to neighborhood context, such as health and labor market outcomes, as an outgrowth of its presumed effect on neighborhood attainment itself.

Note that the observed association between incarceration and neighborhood attainment does not necessarily reflect a causal relationship. Ex-inmates are not a random sample of U.S. adults. Compared to the rest of the U.S. adult population, a prisoner is more likely to be male, young, poor, unemployed, a racial or ethnic minority, and have a low level of education.¹⁶ Many of these characteristics, especially socioeconomic characteristics and race and ethnicity, are also correlated with residence in disadvantaged neighborhoods.¹⁷ Quite possibly, then, any association between incarceration and neighborhood quality would disappear if we controlled for such individual-level characteristics.

Ex-inmates are more likely to reside in disadvantaged neighborhoods before prison.¹⁸ We need to know where convicted offenders resided prior to prison in order to determine if the post-release residential conditions they face represent the causal effect of incarceration or simply a reproduction of the neighborhood disadvantage they faced prior to prison. Controlling for individual characteristics alone is thus insufficient to determine incarceration's effect on neighborhood attainment.

Prior studies of incarceration effects have focused on disentangling causal effects of incarceration from causal effects of individual characteristics, but have largely ignored the effect of neighborhood context prior to incarceration. We depart from prior studies on incarceration and neighborhood outcomes by employing a modeling strategy that accounts for both individual traits and neighborhood of origin prior to prison. By utilizing a combination of individual data from the 1979 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY79) and tract-level data from the U.S. Census, our results provide more reliable estimates of the causal effect of incarceration on neighborhood attainment than previously available.

Neighborhood attainment patterns

Residential location is an established marker of social standing, so it is not surprising that Americans are willing to pay more for residence in more desirable neighborhoods. The question of how households sort themselves (or are sorted) into neighborhoods of varying quality is the subject of a longstanding and extensive research literature.¹⁹

Although incarceration is rarely considered in studies of neighborhood attainment, there are a number of reasons to expect that incarceration affects neighborhood attainment patterns. For example, incarceration, at least temporarily,

forcibly removes individuals from their communities.²⁰ Upon release, ex-inmates might experience constrained residential options stemming either directly or indirectly from their spell of incarceration. Inmates suffer from fractured social ties and an increased likelihood of divorce, meaning residences prior to prison may not be available upon release.²¹ Incarceration can also limit employment opportunities and depress wages, which means ex-inmates often lack the socioeconomic resources necessary for residence in desirable neighborhoods.²² Finally, their status as a socially marginalized group suggests that ex-inmates might be explicitly targeted and excluded from some neighborhoods or communities.²³

Nearly 80 percent of prisoners are released on parole supervision.²⁴ Thus, the close monitoring of ex-inmate living arrangements may create additional barriers to finding adequate and stable housing.²⁵ Correctional agencies often require preapproval of housing choices, and in many respects housing discrimination against former inmates is now legally sanctioned. For example, some ex-inmates—notably sex offenders, but increasingly other offenders as well—are restricted from living in certain places. Individuals convicted of drug crimes can be banned from public housing, which, ironically, is specifically intended to provide assistance to those most in need of housing. Ex-inmates may also encounter commercial rental agencies that simply refuse to rent to them. Faced with such overt discrimination and increasing legal restrictions, many ex-inmates may have few options outside the most disadvantaged neighborhoods. We expect the combined effects of legal, financial, and institutional barriers to securing housing will restrict ex-inmates' residential options more than if they had not gone to prison. Thus, we would expect that controlling for neighborhood of origin and other determinants of residential location, ex-inmates will tend to reside in more disadvantaged neighborhoods following release from prison. However, racial disparities in patterns of residential attainment and rates of incarceration may complicate this general expectation. In particular, blacks traditionally do not achieve residence in the same quality neighborhoods as comparable whites, with high-socioeconomic status blacks typically falling short of even low-socioeconomic status whites.²⁶ Furthermore, incarceration is becoming so commonplace among black males that it now often constitutes a distinct phase in the life course. At current rates, approximately 60 percent of black males without a high school degree will experience a spell of imprisonment at some point in their lives.²⁷ Coupled with high rates of racial residential segregation, the male incarceration rate in some inner-city areas approaches 25 percent.²⁸

Given these racial disparities in neighborhood attainment and exposure to incarceration, it is reasonable to ask if the consequences of imprisonment will be greater for individual whites or for individual minorities. It may be that incarceration does little to actually change the neighborhood trajectories of minority ex-inmates. Whites, on the other hand, have more to lose given their advantaged

starting points, so the effect of incarceration might be more pronounced for them.

Racial variation in post-prison neighborhoods

We use descriptive statistics for a preliminary examination of ex-inmate neighborhood conditions; Figure 1 plots disadvantage scores broken down by ex-inmate status and race and ethnicity. Because we use a standardized index, the zero point on the *x*-axis reflects the sample mean, with scores above zero reflecting higher-than-average levels of disadvantage. Two findings stand out. First, there are striking racial disparities in neighborhood attainment, with blacks and Hispanics who have never served time in prison living, on average, in more disadvantaged neighborhoods than whites who have been in prison. Second, there appears to be a detrimental effect of incarceration; that is, whites, blacks, and Hispanics who have served time in prison generally live in more disadvantaged neighborhood environments than do individuals who have not (the differences are statistically significant in each case). To determine if these observed relationships between incarceration and neighborhood disadvantage are driven by the incarceration experience—rather than individual characteristics or pre-prison neighborhood conditions—we turn to results from our fixed-effects models.

First, looking at effects of ex-inmate status and time out of prison on neighborhood disadvantage for all ex-inmates collectively, we find insufficient evidence to conclude that ex-inmates on the whole reside in more disadvantaged neighborhoods following prison, compared with the types of neighborhoods they resided in before prison. These results are noteworthy because we controlled for effects

of ex-inmates' prior neighborhood environment. Previous research, by failing to measure pre-prison neighborhood conditions, may have overestimated incarceration's impact on neighborhood disadvantage. Because these results are for all respondents, they may still mask important racial variation in the relationship between incarceration and neighborhood disadvantage. From Figure 1 we know that, in each of the three groups, ex-inmates live in more disadvantaged neighborhoods than their never-incarcerated counterparts. To determine if this association reflects a causal effect of incarceration for any subgroup, we estimate race-specific fixed-effects regression models.

Taking into account race, we do find significant racial variation in the effect of incarceration on neighborhood attainment. Specifically, results indicate that incarceration has a significant impact on neighborhood disadvantage only for white ex-inmates, and is unrelated to neighborhood attainment for either blacks or Hispanics. This is notable for at least two reasons. First, it suggests that the association between incarceration and neighborhood disadvantage observed in Figure 1 is—for blacks and Hispanics but not for whites—attributable to the individual traits or pre-prison neighborhood histories of the ex-inmates themselves. Second, it suggests that the nonsignificant effect of incarceration on neighborhood disadvantage for all ex-inmates collectively masks the significant effect of incarceration for whites.

The NLSY79 data show that incarceration's effect on neighborhood disadvantage does vary by race, but not necessarily in the way one might expect from the results of prior studies. Our results show that, after accounting for neighborhood of origin, it is whites, not blacks or Hispanics, whose neighborhood environments are most affected by a prison spell. Based on our estimates, a prison sentence boosts the neighborhood disadvantage index score by more than one-fourth of a standard deviation for whites, but has no statistically significant effect on the index score for blacks or Hispanics. Also noteworthy, for whites, the magnitude of the effect of incarceration on neighborhood disadvantage is more than five times larger than the effect of employment, four times larger than the effect of marital status, three times larger than the effect of homeownership, and more than twice the size of the family poverty effect.

We used various sensitivity analyses to test these results, and consistently found: (1) for whites, the effect of incarceration is always adverse, and the coefficient is always statistically significant; and (2) for blacks and Hispanics, effects never reach statistical significance. By employing a research design that accounts for neighborhood of origin, we find that incarceration's causal impact on neighborhood disadvantage is realized entirely for whites.

A "more to lose" explanation

Incarceration likely results in downward residential mobility for whites and no downward mobility for blacks because, in terms of neighborhood quality, whites have the most

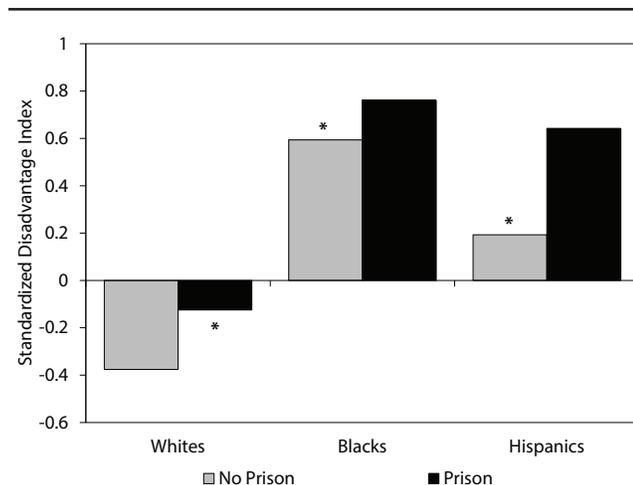


Figure 1. Neighborhood disadvantage by race and ex-inmate status, OLS specification.

Source: M. Massoglia, G. Firebaugh, and C. Warner, "Racial Variation in the Effect of Incarceration on Neighborhood Attainment," *American Sociological Review* 78, No. 1 (2012): 142–165.

Notes: Ordinary least squares specification. * indicates probability value at or below the 0.05 level.

to lose, and blacks the least to lose. This explanation is plausible because disparities in pre-prison neighborhood environments for whites, Hispanics, and blacks are massive: on average, blacks are 0.82 standard deviations above the mean on the standardized disadvantage scale, Hispanics are 0.62 standard deviations above the mean, and whites are 0.27 standard deviations below the mean, so whites and blacks differ by more than one standard deviation.

Indeed, if we replicate Figure 1, but this time use a fixed-effects specification to remove the effect of pre-prison neighborhood context, we see in Figure 2 that incarceration does not create significant within-person change in neighborhood attainment for either blacks or Hispanics. Note that this figure is based on a model that does not control for marital status, poverty, homeownership, education, and other individual characteristics that are predictive of neighborhood disadvantage. Even without taking important time-varying predictors of neighborhood attainment into account, we can effectively rule out incarceration as a predictor of neighborhood quality for minorities. White ex-inmates, on the other hand, live in significantly more disadvantaged neighborhoods following prison, over and above pre-prison neighborhood disadvantage.

Our finding that whites have more to lose from a spell of incarceration than do blacks raises an important question: Why is the incarceration penalty not more severe for whites than for blacks in other domains where whites are also more advantaged, such as wages? The answer, we suspect, is that blacks and whites differ much more with regard to neighborhood environment than they do with regard to wages or employment. In 2008, for example, the difference in the average hourly wage for blacks and whites in the NLSY79 data was less than one-third of the overall standard

deviation in wages. Contrast this with the racial difference in neighborhood disadvantage: as we noted earlier, the average black lives in a neighborhood that is more than one standard deviation higher on the disadvantage scale than the neighborhood where the average white lives. In short, the more there is to lose, the more the “more to lose” hypothesis pertains.

Discussion and conclusions

Given the dramatic swelling of the ex-inmate population in the United States in recent decades, understanding the lasting effects of incarceration on ex-inmates, their families, and their communities is critical. Most research on collateral consequences of incarceration focuses on individual and family outcomes. We know much less about incarceration’s effect on residential outcomes such as neighborhood quality. In particular, we do not even know whether ex-inmates tend to reside in more disadvantaged neighborhoods after prison than they did before prison.

By using nationally representative longitudinal data to examine within-person change in neighborhood attainment across time, we discovered that white ex-inmates live in significantly more disadvantaged neighborhoods after a prison spell than they did before the spell. We found no effect for neighborhood characteristics of ex-inmates as a group, or for black or Hispanic ex-inmates.

What remains to be determined is whether the pre- and post-prison disparity for whites is a pure incarceration effect. The NLSY79 data are relatively limited in terms of measures of arrests and criminal convictions, so we cannot separate out effects of a criminal history from effects of incarceration, at least not directly. Would we see the same downward neighborhood trajectory for whites who are convicted of the same offenses but do not spend time in prison? The weight of the evidence suggests that the pre- and post-prison difference we observed for whites reflects primarily (although perhaps not entirely) the effect of a prison spell, not the effect of criminal offending or a criminal record. Incarceration automatically removes individuals from their neighborhoods; a criminal record does not. In our sample, among individuals uprooted from their neighborhoods by a prison spell, only one in five return to and remain in their pre-prison neighborhoods, and our sensitivity analyses suggest it is those who do not return to their former neighborhoods after leaving prison who account for the downward residential mobility among whites. In other words, the causal chain appears to operate as illustrated in Figure 3.

What if conviction does not lead to a prison spell? The chain of events would be different. Because conviction itself does not necessarily, or even likely, uproot an individual from his neighborhood, rates of mobility will be dramatically lower. Among individuals who do choose to move, such a decision is more likely to be voluntary, and thus more likely to result in lateral or upward residential mobility. There is reason to

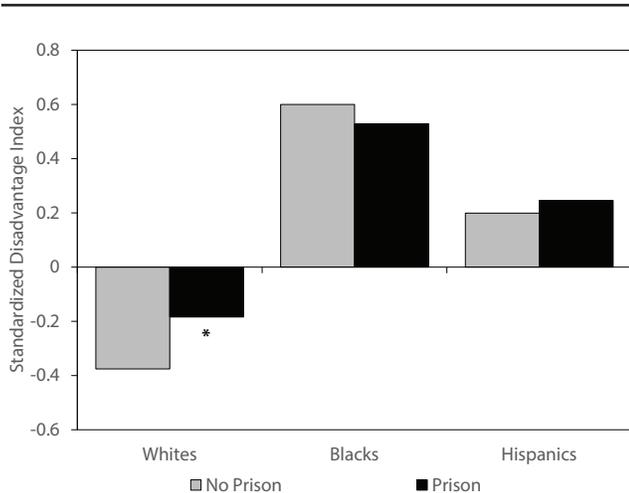


Figure 2. Neighborhood disadvantage by race and ex-inmate status, fixed-effects specification.

Source: M. Massoglia, G. Firebaugh, and C. Warner, “Racial Variation in the Effect of Incarceration on Neighborhood Attainment,” *American Sociological Review* 78, No. 1 (2012): 142–165.

Notes: Fixed-effects specification. * indicates probability value at or below the 0.05 level.

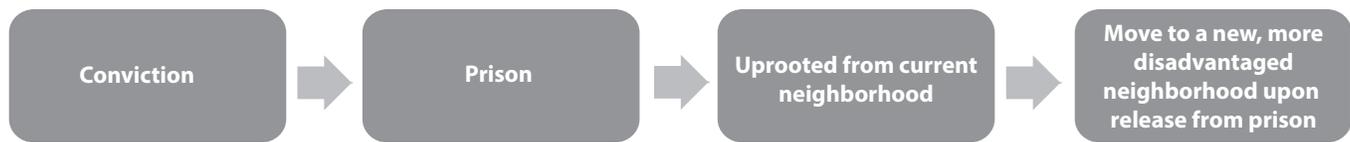


Figure 3. Apparent chain of events from conviction to downward residential mobility.

believe, then, that conviction without incarceration will not lead to the downward residential mobility that we observe for formerly incarcerated whites in this study. It remains for future research to verify our findings, and to collect data on offending and convictions as well, to determine how much (if any) of the pre- and post-prison difference is attributable to the effect of a criminal history independent of the effect of incarceration.

In addition to setting an agenda for future research, our results demonstrate the importance of accounting for neighborhood of origin when studying incarceration's effect on neighborhood attainment. Some research in other substantive areas has accounted for pre-prison conditions, but our study clearly demonstrates the empirical pitfalls of not accounting adequately for pre-prison context when investigating incarceration's effects generally. In addition, our finding of racial variation in incarceration's impact on neighborhood attainment provides further evidence that a spell of incarceration does not have universal effects across different demographic groups. Finally, given that recidivism rates are higher in disadvantaged areas, our results illuminate a process—incarceration leading to downward mobility, at least for whites—that likely bears on the high rates of recidivism among ex-inmates.

By including the U.S. felon class—an expanding population that currently constitutes about 7 percent of the U.S. adult population—in the analysis of neighborhood attainment, this study also contributes to the literature on neighborhood sorting and attainment. Virtually all inmates are eventually released from prison, and each year more than 700,000 released offenders join more than 16 million current or former felons already residing in neighborhoods across the country. The penal system's stratifying effects are now well recognized in other areas, but they have not been fully incorporated into the literature on neighborhood attainment. Our findings here, along with those in recent related analyses, provide a starting point for an earnest investigation of incarceration's enduring effects on imprisoned felons and on the neighborhoods where they reside after exiting the prison gates.

Policy implications

Our findings also have a number of policy implications. To say that incarceration tends to harm whites more than blacks with respect to neighborhood attainment is not to say that incarceration's effects always tend to be greater for whites or are always inconsequential for blacks. Rather, we emphasize

that there is substantial and meaningful racial variation in incarceration's effects across different life domains. In some cases incarceration apparently contributes to racial and ethnic inequalities. In other cases, such as the results presented here, the incarceration effect is more pronounced for whites. There is evidence that this is also the case for mortality and labeling effects on recidivism. Policymakers should be attentive to these differences in fashioning policies to temper the societal costs of mass incarceration.

We noted earlier that the steep rise in the prison population is largely policy-driven, rather than being tied to any dramatic increase in criminal activity. Therefore it follows that reductions in the use of incarceration must also be driven by policy. Clearly a balance needs to be struck between public safety and the costs of incarceration. In a time when federal and state budgets are strained, many observers have started to question the current balance, noting that increased public funds directed to the correctional system come at the expense of funds for education, health, or any number of other public goods and services. Even if the prison boom has peaked, the consequences of that boom will be felt for decades to come, as large numbers of prisoners are reintegrated into U.S. society. Results presented in this article provide a strong reminder of the need for effective policies concerning that reintegration process. ■

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⁸See, for example, J. R. Hipp, S. Turner, and J. Jannetta, "Are Sex Offenders Moving into Social Disorganization? Analyzing the Residential Mobility of California Parolees," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 47 (2010): 558–590.

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Children's contact with incarcerated parents

Julie Poehlmann-Tynan

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The United States incarcerates more people than any other country in the world, and over half of the 2.3 million inmates are parents of children under age 18.¹ One in 28 children in the United States has a parent behind bars, and even more will have an incarcerated parent at some time during their childhood.² Children with incarcerated parents are more likely to exhibit trauma symptoms than other children, and they are at an increased risk of developing problematic outcomes including behavior problems, substance abuse, academic difficulties, criminal activity, and physical and mental health conditions. Having contact with incarcerated parents through visits, phone calls, and letters has long been considered important for family well-being during and following incarceration, yet few researchers, practitioners, or policymakers have considered this issue from the child's perspective. Recent research has shown that the link between parental incarceration and trauma symptoms can be mediated through the quality of parental-visitation experiences.³

Parent-child contact in the context of parental incarceration

Corrections facilities operate from a "safety and security" position, often with little attention paid to visitors and their needs. How to accommodate the presence of family members, and children in particular, is not usually considered. There are differences in visits between jails (designed for short-term incarceration of individuals awaiting trial or sentencing or serving short sentences) and prisons (designed for longer-term incarceration of individuals convicted of crimes). Prisons are more likely than jails to offer face-to-face visits, although they increasingly rely on video visits. Jails are more likely than prisons to offer visits behind a Plexiglas barrier or via video. Corrections facilities offer phone calls that are more affordable to inmates and their families now than in the past, when per-minute rates ran as high as \$14, driven by the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) actions in October 2015; the FCC reduced rate caps for local and long distance calls from incarcerated individuals, closed loopholes, and barred most add-on fees imposed by inmate calling service providers.⁴ Mailing letters is an option as well. However, few correction facilities offer visits that are specifically designed to be child-friendly, which includes providing safe and friendly environments for visits; fostering open communication about contact among caregivers,

children, incarcerated parents, and professionals; adequately preparing both children and adults for visits, including providing support to incarcerated parents; and facilitating parent-child communication between visits.⁵

Recent research

A new monograph presents novel work done by myself and colleagues, including Danielle Dallaire and Heather McClure, on the issue of children's contact with incarcerated parents, and includes policy and research recommendations.⁶ Although contact between parents and children during incarceration may be important for the well-being of both children and parents in a majority of cases, findings concerning this important issue have not been entirely consistent across studies. In addition, most studies of parent-child contact in the context of parental incarceration have been conducted using data from one point in time, and have relied on reports of frequency or type rather than quality of contact. Although personal visits have been occasionally studied separately from letter writing and telephone calls, many studies have combined these types of contact. Prison and jail samples are often combined, and family, relational, and physiological dynamics that may connect the experience of parental incarceration with children's and incarcerated parents' outcomes have rarely been examined.

The three studies presented in this monograph address some, but not all, of these limitations. Two of the studies focused on jail samples and one focused on a prison sample. Children's age ranges were specified and narrower than in some previous studies and measures of child functioning were developmentally appropriate. The studies employed innovative approaches, including reliance on multiple reporters of children's behaviors, observational methods, and analysis of physiological stress processes. The first, by Danielle Dallaire, Janice Zeman, and Todd Thrash, analyzed letter writing and telephone calls separately from personal visits.⁷ A second study, done by myself and colleagues, used observational methods in the jail setting to examine the processes that occur during barrier visits and other non-contact visitation procedures.⁸ Finally, Heather McClure and colleagues used longitudinal data, following families into the reunification period.⁹

Effects of different types of parent-child contact

Dallaire and colleagues found that the relationship between parent-child contact and child behavior problems varied as a function of type of contact, which is not surprising since children's experiences of in-person barrier visits vastly differ from their experiences talking with a parent on the telephone

or reading and writing letters. The researchers found that for children who had more frequent barrier visits with their jailed mothers, problems such as anxiety, withdrawal, or depression were reported more often. In contrast, frequent letter writing and telephone contact were associated with fewer behavior problems. These results suggest that in-person visits with their mother behind a Plexiglas barrier may make it harder for children to maintain their own, gentler version of reality about their incarcerated parent. Such visits may generate strong negative emotions that are less likely to arise, and easier to assuage, when communication with their mother takes place in the comfort of their own home.

Children's reactions to Plexiglas and video visits

My study with colleagues highlighted the importance of child-caregiver relationships and supports for young children during the visit process, as well as the tendency for children to exhibit more behavior problems during non-contact visits compared to their typical behavior in their home environments. We observed both positive and negative aspects of young children's experience with video and barrier jail visits. Because video visits were conducted in a nonsecure part of the corrections facility, fewer security procedures were required for video visits, and families had shorter waits compared to barrier visits. However, the length of video visits was shorter, and these visits often ended abruptly, with the screen turning off without any warning to children. Barrier visits resulted in more time in the corrections facility, a combination of longer visit time, longer wait time, and more intense security procedures. We noted that the longer children were in the facility, the more clingy and distressed they became, possibly reflecting increased stress levels. Use of observational methods in corrections settings is unique and can help us understand how children react to aspects of visitation, including security and screening procedures, waiting in the corrections setting, and visiting with parents. Although some authors have suggested that certain experiences that occur during visits with parents in corrections facilities may be difficult or even traumatizing for children, little data have been available to verify or refute these speculations. Yet because the study relied on a small sample and used innovative, newly developed methods, replication is needed, especially for a wider range of age groups.¹⁰

Mother-child contact, parenting stress, and long-term adjustment

McClure and colleagues used longitudinal data on contact and maternal adjustment at three time points, including after the mother's release from prison. Following families during the reunification period is a rarity in the literature focusing on parental incarceration, and an important step in documenting the longer-term implications of parent-child contact for maternal and family functioning. The researchers found positive outcomes for mothers who had more contact with their children, including lower recidivism rates six months after release from prison. However, more contact through visits, phone calls, or both, was also associated with higher

rates of symptoms reflecting anxiety and depression among children. Longer periods of incarceration, and thus more limited contact between mother and child, were associated with children's difficulty regulating their emotions, poorer social skills, and behavior problems. These negative effects for children suggest the need for careful consideration by both families and corrections systems of whether and how children should have contact with their incarcerated parents.

Recommendations

Implementation of the recommendations detailed below may result in improvements in the experience of parent-child contact during parental incarceration, or even improvements in child and parent well-being in the context of parental incarceration. These include suggestions related to: (1) parenting interventions; (2) policies and procedures focusing on parent-child contact in corrections facilities; (3) systematic collection of data by corrections systems and more rigorous research in general; (4) and consideration of alternatives to incarceration. Note that when implementing recommendations about children's contact with incarcerated parents, it is critical to consider the type of corrections facility, type of contact available, children's ages, and the quality and availability of preparation and supports for children, incarcerated individuals, and caregivers around contact issues.

Parenting interventions

Several parenting interventions are available that have shown positive effects on parent-child contact, recidivism, and other indices of well-being.¹¹ Some interventions may be adopted by entire state corrections systems, such as parenting classes offered to inmates or information about visits provided to families, while other interventions may be tailored to be implemented locally depending on resources available and perceived needs. An advantage of systemwide interventions is that inmates and families will better know what to expect if an inmate moves to a different facility; however, it may be more challenging to provide interventions that are uniquely focused on the culture of or resources available in local communities where families live. Because jails are locally operated and located, they may be more accessible for community-intervention efforts than prisons, although administrators' openness and ability to change may vary widely and depend on multiple factors across settings.

The findings by McClure and colleagues on mother-child contact during and after incarceration are in line with past findings, and support the idea that corrections facilities should identify ways to facilitate positive parent-child contact.¹² There is an accruing literature on how this might be done but the field is still in its infancy.¹³ To date, what appears to be most promising for incarcerated parents is helping them develop specific cognitive and behavioral skills relevant to emotional regulation and positive parent-child interactions, both inside and outside of the corrections setting. In addition, the findings presented by McClure and

colleagues suggest that more generalized stress management programs for incarcerated parents could have positive effects on inmate health and functioning, and result in more successful adjustment to life after incarceration. This may be particularly true for parents with longer sentences, although this requires further study for incarcerated fathers.

These recommendations are consistent with the growing body of literature on programs for incarcerated adults. Parenting interventions such as behavioral and cognitive skills training have been shown to be effective in reducing recidivism.¹⁴ These interventions are most effective when programs are matched to prisoner risks and needs, well-managed, and supported through post-release supervision. Despite modest reductions in rates of recidivism among participants, these small declines can have significant aggregate effects on criminal behavior in communities with high concentrations of returning prisoners.¹⁵ Children clearly benefit when formerly incarcerated parents avoid returning to prison or jail and remain positively engaged in children's lives.

Child-friendly visitation

Child-friendly visitation can be defined as providing positive, safe, friendly environments for visits; fostering open communication among caregivers, children, incarcerated parents, and supportive professionals; adequately preparing children for visits; facilitating parent-child contact between visits; and supporting incarcerated parents during the process.¹⁶ Some parenting interventions in corrections settings offer child-friendly visitation experiences as a component of the intervention (for example, Parenting Inside Out, a skills-training program for incarcerated parents).¹⁷ Some prisons offer child-friendly visits as part of their rehabilitation or parenting programs. For example, the Allegheny County Jail in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, has a family activity center in the jail lobby designed to reduce child stress and provide information to caregivers. It includes a craft area for children, videos, books, and miniature mock visiting booths to help prepare children for non-contact visits with jailed parents.¹⁸ The jail also has a family-support center, and inmates with children may have the opportunity to work with professionals on parenting issues. Given the large number of children in the United States with incarcerated parents, it will be important to increase the number of child-friendly visit opportunities available over time in both prisons and jails.

Preparation for visits and providing ample support for children, inmates, and family members during and after visits may also be important. It would be helpful if child-friendly materials were available, even something as simple as having a corrections officer give a sticker to a child who has just passed through a metal detector, to make the experience less scary and establish positive associations with the visit. Corrections staff could be trained more thoroughly to interact positively with families, including interacting with visiting children in a developmentally appropriate

manner. Information about visitation could be written or visually depicted in a simple, child-friendly way and posted at the entry to the jail as well as on the jail's or prison's website. Visual descriptions could include drawings showing the visiting area and how the handheld listening device works. Five-minute warnings could be given to remind families when the end of the visit is near so children would not be as surprised or distressed by a video monitor suddenly turning off, or by the end of a Plexiglas or face-to-face visit. For non-contact visits, barriers between video or Plexiglas booths could be erected to provide privacy.

Additional interventions could focus on better preparing caregivers, children, and incarcerated parents for the visit experience, suggesting additional ways for families to stay in touch with an incarcerated parent, and attempting to reduce social stigma associated with parental incarceration, which has recently been identified as a key mechanism for lasting negative effects of parental incarceration on children.¹⁹ For example, Sesame Street recently developed materials for young children and their families including an animated depiction of a child's visit to a corrections facility, a story book, videos, and a caregiver guide.²⁰ A new Muppet character named Alex was designed for the project. In one of the available videos, Alex, who has an incarcerated father, discusses his feelings and experiences in relation to his father's incarceration from a child's point of view, and receives support from an adult and other Muppet characters. The caregiver guide offers suggestions on how families can stay connected with children's incarcerated parents in positive ways, such as writing letters or cards or talking on the phone between visits. The guide also covers topics such as how to talk to very young children about parental incarceration and how to handle some of the common emotional reactions that children may have when their parents go to jail or prison. Sesame Workshop is in the process of evaluating these materials for their efficacy with families affected by parental incarceration, a critical step in the intervention process. Because hard copies of these materials are free and digital copies are widely available on the website and as a free app for smart phones and tablets, corrections facilities could easily access them to promote healthy child development in the context of parental incarceration.

Policies and procedures in corrections facilities

Dallaire and colleagues' work corroborated earlier findings that, in certain contexts, non-contact visits can be stressful for children.²¹ These visits may activate a child's attachment system and trigger anxiety that cannot be easily assuaged since the parent-child separation continues following the visit. In our study, we find that caregivers play a powerful role during children's non-contact visits with incarcerated parents.²² More can be done to maximize the positive effects of the caregiver-child relationship within the corrections setting. Policies and procedures that can help reduce children's anxiety, such as preparing them for visits, maintaining contact between visits, and providing ample support from caregivers and other loved ones before,

during, and after visits are also important for facilitating children's well-being. The research should not be interpreted to suggest, however, that in-person visitation in noncontact cases should not be allowed for children. Overall, visitation is important for parents and children, and it can be encouraged if supplemented by the supports recommended.

In our study, out of 20 children observed, only one child showed overt signs of fear during security procedures at the jail, although many children exhibited periods of serious or somber observation of what was happening around them at the jail. To ameliorate any stress that might be experienced by children during a visit, caregivers can be encouraged to hold children's hands and talk with their children about what they are seeing and hearing in the corrections settings. Corrections systems can provide more information on their websites about policies and procedures relating to security procedures used with children without compromising the safety of the facility, so that caregivers know what to expect when they arrive, and can prepare children for what they will encounter.

Systematic collection of data by corrections systems and rigorous intervention research

In addition to the importance of supporting children, caregivers, and incarcerated parents, our research suggests a need for systematic tracking of the number of children affected by parental incarceration and change over time, which could be completed in jail and prison settings as part of the inmate-intake or risk assessment process. At intake, inmates could be asked to indicate if they have children and if so, the age of each child. Although some inmates may be reluctant to provide such information because they may fear repercussions from child protective services, child support enforcement, or intrusion in their private lives by "the system," or because they are under the influence of alcohol or drugs at the time of arrest and intake, many inmates indicate that they are willing to provide such information. Many incarcerated parents are eager to receive parenting support as part of their incarceration and many of them enjoy talking about and finding ways to connect with their children. Such tracking would allow society to more accurately gauge the effects of incarceration on families in communities, and help identify affected families' needs and an appropriate allocation of resources to meet those needs.

Rigorous, focused, practical research is also needed on children of incarcerated parents and their families. A key question is how to accomplish such research when funding is tight and such a research agenda does not fit neatly into any one federal agency's domain. In recognition of this fact, the federal government has assembled an interagency working subgroup on children with incarcerated parents, which comprises diverse departments including the Federal Bureau of Prisons, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the Department of Health and Human Services, and disseminates information on the topic.²³ However, even when there is a match between a research

agenda and interested agencies, much of the available funding goes to programs rather than research, with programs often requiring only a minimal evaluation component. One solution is to form partnerships with state corrections systems to start collecting high-quality data on variables of interest to the corrections system. This could start with inmate risk status, mental health, and contact between inmates and family members, including children, and then expand to conducting low-cost randomized controlled trials. It would be even more promising if several states could agree to collect similar data, and test family contact interventions on a systematic basis. Jails could collaborate and follow this model as well.

Consideration of alternatives to incarceration

The implications of mass incarceration for children and families are well-documented.²⁴ Through short-sighted overreliance on crime policies to address challenging social problems, the United States has created a significant and growing public health crisis for its children and has increased racial disparities in health and well-being of children.²⁵ Many children who experience the incarceration of a parent are vulnerable and need substantial help now and in the future. These children are at risk for a host of negative outcomes, including the development of antisocial behavior and long-term health and mental health problems.²⁶ Consideration of alternatives to incarceration may help ease the social and economic burden of corrections on families and society and free up resources that could be used for implementation of preventive interventions to help children with corrections-involved parents become more resilient. ■

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³J. A. Arditti and J. Savla, "Parental Incarceration and Child Trauma Symptoms in Single Caregiver Homes," *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 24, No. 3 (2015): 551–561.

⁴<https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/inmate-telephone-service>

⁵D. H. Dallaire, J. Poehlmann, and A. Loper, *Issues and Recommendations Related to Children's Visitation and Contact with Incarcerated Parents*, United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, Submission to the Day of General Discussion 2011, Children of Incarcerated Parents.

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⁷D. Dallaire, J. Zeman, and T. Thrash, "Differential Effects of Type of Children's Contact with Their Jailed Mothers and Children's Behavior Problems," in *Children's Contact with Incarcerated Parents*.

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⁹H. H. McClure, J. W. Shortt, J. M. Eddy, A. Holmes, S. van Uum, E. Russell, G. Koren, L. Sheeber, B. Davis, J. J. Snodgrass, and C. R. Martinez Jr., "Associations Among Mother–Child Contact, Parenting Stress, and

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¹¹See, for example, J. M. Eddy, C. R. Martinez, and B. Burraston, “A Randomized Controlled Trial of a Parent Management Training Program for Incarcerated Parents: Proximal Impacts,” *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development* 78, No. 3 (2013): 75–93; and J. W. Shortt, J. M. Eddy, L. Sheeber, and B. Davis, “Project Home: A Pilot Evaluation of an Emotion-Focused Intervention for Mothers Reuniting with Children After Prison,” *Psychological Services* 11, No. 1 (2014): 1–9.

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¹³For research on how to facilitate positive contact between children and their incarcerated parents, see: Eddy et al., “Parent Management Training Program for Incarcerated Parents;” A. B. Loper and C. Novero “Parenting Programs for Prisoners,” In *Children of Incarcerated Parents: A Handbook for Researchers and Practitioners*, eds. J. M. Eddy and J. Poehlmann (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press, 2010); and Shortt et al., “Project Home.”

¹⁴J. Travis and M. Waul, eds., *Prisoners Once Removed: The Effect of Incarceration and Reentry on Children, Families, and Communities* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press, 2003).

¹⁵Travis and Waul, *Prisoners Once Removed*.

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¹⁷For more information on Parenting Inside Out, see <http://www.parentinginsideout.org/>

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²¹J. Poehlmann et al., “Children’s Contact with Their Incarcerated Parents.”

²²Poehlmann-Tynan et al., “Young Children’s Behavioral and Emotional Reactions to Plexiglas and Video Visits with Jailed Parents.”

²³<http://youth.gov/youth-topics/children-of-incarcerated-parents>

²⁴For example, see Murray et al., *Effects of Parental Incarceration on Children*.

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²⁶J. Murray, D. P. Farrington, and I. Sekol, “Children’s Antisocial Behavior, Mental Health, Drug Use, and Educational Performance after Parental Incarceration: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis,” *Psychological Bulletin* 138, No. 2 (2012): 175–210. doi: 10.1037/a0026407; and E. S. Ford, R. F. Anda, V. J. Edwards, G. S. Perry, G. Zhao, C. Li, and J. B. Croft, “Adverse Childhood Experiences and Smoking Status in Five States,” *Preventive Medicine* 53, No. 3 (2011): 188–193.

How does paternal incarceration affect children's cognitive and noncognitive development?

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Nearly one in every 100 adults in the United States is in prison or jail, and an additional one in 50 is under probation or on parole.¹ Extensive research has documented the long- and short-term, direct and indirect consequences of this mass incarceration for the imprisoned individual or former inmate, and a quickly growing literature examines potential extended effects of incarceration on families and communities.² The number of school-age children in the United States with incarcerated or formerly incarcerated parents was recently estimated at over 32 million, or about one in every 28 schoolchildren.³ The work summarized in this article adds to previous work on the effects of paternal incarceration on school-age children using newly available longitudinal data to assess the negative effects of a father's incarceration on child mental health, socioemotional development, and cognitive skills, focusing especially on 9-year-olds.⁴

What we know about mass incarceration's effects on children

There is mounting evidence that the effects of mass incarceration extend beyond the imprisoned individual to his family, community and especially his children. Given data availability and the high cumulative risk of paternal incarceration, the majority of work in this area has focused on fathers. Men are incarcerated at far higher rates than women. In fact, fathers account for 91 percent of all incarcerated parents.⁵ The pathways through which parental incarceration may affect children's well-being include: trauma resulting from parent-child separation; a sense of social isolation and shame brought on by the stigma associated with having an incarcerated family member; and stress and strain caused by family disruption, dissolution, or the prolonged financial hardship experienced due to the loss of the incarcerated parent's income.⁶ Recent work on paternal incarceration has also shown that harmful effects on child well-being can occur regardless of the resident status of the father at the time of his imprisonment, suggesting that there is something about incarceration that affects children beyond mere paternal absence.⁷

Paternal incarceration and child outcomes

The trauma, stigma, and strain theories allow for parental incarceration to affect both boys and girls, and to have consequences on child outcomes beyond behavior; however, evidence of these connections from empirical studies has

been limited. Within the past decade, there has been an explosion of research investigating whether and in what ways a parent's (usually the father) incarceration affects his children.⁸ Most consistently, studies have shown that paternal incarceration results in behavioral problems for children, concentrated primarily among boys. For example, paternal incarceration has been found to increase aggression, depression, anxiety, attention problems, and delinquency in young boys and adolescent men. These negative effects on behavioral functioning and mental health have been identified throughout boys' and young men's lives, from age 5 into early adulthood.⁹ The studies producing these findings focused mainly on antisocial behaviors. Few studies of parental incarceration on children in middle childhood have looked beyond these negative behaviors to measures of prosocial noncognitive skills, such as task completion or self-discipline, which are critical to future socioeconomic success.

The extremely consistent findings for boys and their behavioral outcomes have been pivotal in establishing the existence of harmful intergenerational consequences of paternal incarceration. However, the findings also may have narrowed the focus of policy interventions, the majority of which have revolved around addressing intergenerational transmissions of criminality in early childhood or adolescence.¹⁰ Could the effects of paternal incarceration extend beyond boys' antisocial behaviors to have broader intergenerational implications?

Effects of paternal incarceration on direct measures of children's cognitive skills have yet to surface. In fact, some previous studies have found no effect of paternal incarceration on preschool children's receptive vocabulary, an often-used but incomplete measure of early cognitive ability.¹¹ Findings like these have led scholars to conclude that while paternal incarceration has strong negative impacts on children's socio-behavioral outcomes, its association with cognitive development is weak to nonexistent. However, few studies have yet to fully investigate the impact paternal incarceration has on the broad range of cognitive skills beyond receptive vocabulary that children possess and develop. Such skills may evolve or surface over time, calling for a need to assess the impact of paternal incarceration throughout childhood and across a larger range of child cognitive outcomes.

Two new studies of paternal incarceration's effects

The studies summarized here use data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFS), a longitudinal

birth-cohort study that follows nearly 5,000 children and their parents. The FFS data set is one of the few broadly representative data sources currently available to explore contemporary questions related to the effect of paternal incarceration on child outcomes. Not only does it follow both parents over time as their child develops, it also allows sufficient variation by race and paternal incarceration experiences to assess the effects of a father's incarceration on his children.

Effects on noncognitive skills

Children's noncognitive skills can include dimensions of physical health or motor functioning as well as social and emotional behaviors, personality traits, or abilities linked to self-discipline and effortful control. In my analysis, I look specifically at the attention, social, and behavioral components of learning, which correspond to a child's ability to concentrate, stay on task, cooperate, interact appropriately with peers, and exercise emotional self-regulation.¹² Noncognitive skill development is cumulative, begins during the earliest years of life, and is powerfully shaped—both negatively and positively—by experiences and environments in early childhood.¹³ During early childhood (approximately birth to age 5) the foundation for one's skill capacities is laid, while in middle childhood (approximately ages 5 to 10) these skills crystalize, establishing a trajectory for future development.¹⁴ Thus, negative experiences—whether social, environmental, or physical—occurring during the first 10 years of a child's life have the potential to influence a range of later outcomes, such as schooling, employment, and earnings.¹⁵

I consider how paternal incarceration may affect children's behavioral functioning and socioemotional skill development by age 9, relying for the first time on children's self-reports of prosocial and antisocial behaviors recorded in FFS data.¹⁶ My findings suggest that experiencing first-time paternal incarceration between the ages of 1 and 9 is associated with higher child-reported antisocial behaviors, including internalizing, externalizing, and early delinquency problems. The overall effect of paternal incarceration on these antisocial behaviors suggests a schooling setback in the range of 1 to 2 months.

However, no detrimental effects of paternal incarceration are found for one particular measure of children's prosocial skills—task completion—suggesting that there may be types of noncognitive skills that paternal incarceration affects less than others. While promising, this finding is far from conclusive, as there is potential for measurement concerns.¹⁷ Very few studies to date have explored the impact of parental incarceration on children's prosocial skill development, so these early findings may stimulate more work in this area.¹⁸ Prosocial skills are important to future socioeconomic success, so efforts made toward fine-tuning our understanding of the ways in which paternal incarceration is most detrimental to children's development can help us better develop targeted policy interventions.

Just as previous work has documented the deleterious effects of paternal incarceration for parent reports of preschool-age boys' behavior, analyses by gender subgroup across this diverse set of child-reported noncognitive outcomes demonstrates that among 9-year-old boys in the FFS sample, the negative impacts of paternal incarceration persist into middle childhood. Among girls, associations are in the expected direction—increasing self-reports of antisocial behaviors—but the magnitude of the effect is much weaker than that for boys and does not reach statistical significance. While a growing literature shows that compared to girls, young boys are more sensitive to family disruptions across a range of outcomes, some recent research suggests that paternal incarceration is negatively associated with cognitive skills and likelihood for early grade retention at age 9 among both boys and girls.¹⁹ Thus, while evidence is mounting for the vulnerability of young boys to paternal incarceration, future work should continue to explore effects for girls across a range of outcomes and developmental stages.

Lastly, comparisons across parent and child reports of externalizing and internalizing behaviors illuminate differences in both the perceived magnitude of overall effects of paternal incarceration and how effects by respondent perceptions might vary depending on the gender of the child. Parent reports of behavioral outcomes produced the largest impacts of paternal incarceration, while child self-reports of their own behaviors showed fewer significant differences and were of smaller magnitude (often nearly half the size). If this study relied only on reporting by parents, slightly different conclusions by gender would have been made, since parent reports of both externalizing and internalizing problem behaviors for girls with incarcerated fathers reached significance while child self-reports did not. These findings suggest a more nuanced understanding is needed. If we believe children are the most accurate reporters of their own behavior and skills, and social desirability bias is not a major concern, then it is possible that studies relying solely on parent perceptions of children's behaviors may be overestimating impacts of paternal incarceration. Future work comparing agreement of child and parent reports across a range of outcomes would better inform our understanding of both the lived experiences of children of the incarcerated and how non-incarcerated parents, educators, and other interested adults perceive the well-being and skill capacities of this growing group of children.

Effects on cognitive skills

Of the nearly two million minor children in the United States with currently incarcerated fathers, the majority are under age 12.²⁰ For children, the developmental stages of early and middle childhood are marked by time in primary school and are often when children build their academic competencies, learn to understand societal roles, begin to interact with peers, and develop intimate relationships with friends, family, and other significant adults. It is also a time when socioemotional behaviors and academic competencies begin to crystalize into relatively consistent patterns of behavior

and skill trajectories that persist into adolescence and early adulthood. Therefore, this is a time in young children's lives when they are especially vulnerable to disruption and instability.

The incarceration of a parent could certainly be seen as an event capable of producing trauma, stigma, and strain, all of which might negatively affect elementary-age children's sense of academic competence. Moreover, earlier impacts on behavior and attentional capacities may have lagged impacts on cognitive skill acquisition via mechanisms such as grade retention and special education placement (Haskins 2014, Turney and Haskins 2014) or decreased connection to school, as evidenced in work by Dallaire (2007) and Dallaire and Aaron (2010), which finds that parental incarceration for school-age children produces unique risk factors related to the stable development of strong school ties and healthy academic environments. Lastly, a fairly extensive literature indicates there are benefits of paternal involvement for children's cognitive ability; consequently, through inhibited involvement, a father's incarceration has the potential to have damaging consequences.²¹ Thus, the social and emotional volatility along with inhibited involvement produced by paternal incarceration can place school-age children at a heightened risk for academic difficulties.

Previous work has consistently documented the negative influence of paternal incarceration on boys' behavioral capacities across the life course. This study's finding of detrimental effects on cognitive outcomes for both boys and girls in middle childhood contributes new knowledge and an expanding accounting of the negative effects of paternal incarceration on school-age children in the United States.²² Girls with incarcerated fathers have statistically significant lower reading comprehension and math problem-solving skills compared to same-gender matched peers, while boys have reduced attentional capacities. The differences I find in cognitive skills between various groups of children with incarcerated fathers and their matched controls are equivalent to a loss within the range of 1 to 3 months of schooling. The surfacing of effects on cognitive skill acquisition may be attributed to a number of factors. First, this study investigated a much larger range of cognitive outcomes than previously studied. In addition, the majority of prior studies have focused on either preschoolers or adolescents, missing the developmental age of middle childhood, an important stage for the growth of academic skill competencies. The novelty of these findings, however, should not lead one to conclude that children of incarcerated parents have a lack of intellectual capacity. Rather, as noted in a recent report by the National Research Council (2014), paternal incarceration's role in school failure, and in this case, decreases in scores on cognitive assessments, may arise initially from socioemotional problems that then produce lagged impacts on cognitive skill acquisition via mechanisms such as stress, teacher stigma leading to grade retention, or placement in special education.

Conclusions

Early to middle childhood is a critical period in young children's lives for the healthy development of both noncognitive and cognitive skills. During the first 10 years of life, children's cognitive, social, and behavioral skills begin to solidify into relatively consistent patterns that persist into adulthood. Paternal incarceration during this critical childhood period can cause disruptions, stress, and instability that may have not only short-term implications for children's development, but also long-term ramifications for future academic attainment and labor market experiences.

My findings on noncognitive skills corroborate recent work suggesting that the incarceration of a father presents a significant hindrance to a child's healthy socio-emotional development, especially among boys, and consequently to the child's future prospects. I also present findings on paternal incarceration's impact on a large range of cognitive skills that contribute new knowledge, and offer a nuanced account of the effects of paternal incarceration on child well-being and development.

Together, these findings of negative effects on both noncognitive and cognitive outcomes for children provide additional evidence that paternal incarceration is likely an important avenue through which educational inequality is produced and reproduced among children in the United States.

Some reassurance can be found in work that shows that socioemotional and behavioral capacities appear to be quite responsive to social policy, so it may be possible to develop interventions that would restrict transmission of disadvantage attributable to paternal incarceration.²³ The finding that paternal incarceration does not appear to be detrimental for a measure of children's prosocial development suggests that more research is needed on the potential protective functions of prosocial behaviors for children of the incarcerated. Future empirical work on the intergenerational effects of paternal incarceration is also necessary, and qualitative work should be done in order to better understand the mechanisms through which these effects operate.

The two studies summarized here contribute to a growing body of literature on the implications of mass incarceration for inequality among children in the United States, suggesting consequences may be more expansive than previously documented. ■

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If dad is in prison, will his children end up in foster care?

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Past research has shown numerous adverse effects of parental imprisonment on children. In the United States, studies have found that paternal imprisonment is associated with children's poor school performance; behavioral and mental health problems; crime, delinquency, and criminal justice contact; and worse health, including higher rates of obesity for girls and greater infant mortality, than children without an incarcerated parent.¹ One possible consequence that has received relatively little research attention to date is how parental incarceration affects children's risks of foster care placement. Foster care is an important experience, for children because it is a form of instability, and for society because of the costs associated with administering out-of-home care. Prior research on the relationship between parental incarceration and foster care has focused solely on maternal incarceration, and has generally not considered whether parental incarceration is a causal factor in foster care placement.

This article describes new research that addresses these gaps by: (1) providing an explanation for how paternal incarceration may increase placement of children in foster care; (2) conducting strong causal tests of this relationship; and (3) investigating possible mechanisms by which it might work.² This study uses data from Denmark.

Parental incarceration and children's foster care placement

Past research on the relationship between parental imprisonment and children's foster care placement in the United States has focused on mothers and shown that incarceration of mothers, often the primary or only caregiver, results in a higher likelihood of their children being placed in foster care.³ This has been especially true following the implementation of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, which requires that states terminate parental rights when children have been in foster care for 15 out of the past 22 months. Because these children cannot be reunited with their parents and are also unlikely to be adopted, they tend to remain in foster care until they reach the age of majority, increasing caseloads.

How could paternal incarceration affect foster care placement?

Since fathers are much less likely than mothers to be their children's primary (or only) caregiver prior to incarceration, it is unlikely that their imprisonment would have a direct effect on children's foster care placement. Indeed, studies have shown this to be the case.⁴ However, there are a number of indirect pathways through which paternal incarceration could raise the future risk of children's foster care placement, even years after the original conviction, by increasing household instability. We focus on four such mechanisms: (1) changes in family finances and resulting material hardships for households; (2) changes in maternal well-being and support from friends and family; (3) new maternal romantic relationships; and (4) consequences of incarceration that negatively affect paternal parenting skills.

Financial instability

The financial instability and related problems faced by a mother as a result of her children's father's incarceration seem particularly likely to increase the risk of children's foster care placement. While the negative consequences of a criminal record on employment are well documented, it is only recently that researchers have demonstrated that this decrease in earnings, when combined with the increased risk of a romantic relationship ending, dramatically decreases fathers' financial household contributions.⁵ This decrease in turn increases the likelihood of welfare receipt, material hardship, and housing instability, including homelessness.⁶ These factors could increase the risk of foster care placement by, for example, putting families in contact with official institutions such as with welfare receipt, or by greatly disrupting family stability such as with homelessness.

Maternal well-being

Women whose partners are incarcerated are likely to experience elevated levels of mental health problems.⁷ Incarceration of a partner also often decreases the level of in-kind and financial support received from friends and family.⁸ Since issues such as maternal depression have negative consequences for parenting behaviors, this combination of mental health problems and declines in social support may well lead to worse parenting behaviors, and in turn to a higher risk of foster care placement.

Changes in romantic relationships

Incarceration of a father has been found not only to increase the likelihood of a romantic relationship ending, but also to increase the probability that the mother will find a new romantic partner.⁹ Although there are increasing signs

that women who have had a nonmarital birth may in fact “move up” in terms of partner quality when they find a new romantic partner, the presence of a social father in the household after incarceration of the biological father has been linked with higher risk of child abuse.¹⁰ This suggests that a new relationship could also increase the probability of children’s foster care placement.

Diminished ability of fathers to parent

Beyond changes affecting the mother and her household as a result of paternal incarceration, imprisonment has also been found to have a number of relevant negative effects on incarcerated fathers. For example, recently incarcerated fathers are less likely to be positively involved with their children.¹¹ These fathers are also more likely to use violence against their children’s mothers, and to experience problems with both mental and physical health. Since these factors decrease formerly incarcerated fathers’ ability to positively contribute to the lives of their children, they could well increase children’s risk of foster care placement.

Need for more research on causality

Even given these four plausible mechanisms by which paternal incarceration could result in an increased risk for children’s foster care placement, there are many observed and unobserved differences between those families that have experienced paternal imprisonment and those that have not, and these differences could explain any observed changes in foster care placement. To assess whether paternal incarceration causes an increase in children’s foster care placement, it is necessary to control for these differences.

Community service in Denmark

An expansion of courts’ use of community service in Denmark provides us with the opportunity to test the causal effect on foster care placement of being sentenced to between 30 and 240 hours of work that a judge determines contributes to society rather than prison. In 2000, changes in Danish law resulted in a large increase in the use of community service, particularly for misdemeanors, simple violence (such as bar fights resulting in only minimal injuries), and drunk driving and other traffic offenses. By comparing offenders sentenced immediately before and after the community service reform, we are able to isolate the effects of incarceration compared to community service.¹²

Did paternal incarceration in Denmark cause higher foster care placement?

We find strong evidence that paternal incarceration caused higher rates of foster care placement among Danish children in the three years after conviction. The differences between those with incarcerated fathers and those with fathers sentenced to community service is statistically significant, and the effect size is large. The results suggest

that incarceration increases foster care placement risks by between 4 and 6 percentage points; since the risk of placement for children of fathers in the sample sentenced to community service is six percentage points, this difference represents a dramatic increase.

Our findings suggest that the risk of foster care placement is just as high for children in the period immediately following their father’s release from prison as it was while he was imprisoned. They also suggest that interventions designed to reduce foster care placement by providing support to these families during fathers’ incarceration could be effective if the support is provided during the immediate imprisonment and post-release periods.

Our findings also suggest that community service reduces foster care placement compared to incarceration only when the father was not living with the children before conviction. This may mean that parents who were living together prior to the father’s incarceration are better able to withstand the negative effects of that incarceration.

Of the four possible mechanisms that we explore by which the relationship between paternal incarceration and risk of children’s foster care placement could operate, we were able to test only two of them, given the available data. These were family finances, and maternal romantic relationships. Our results suggest that, at least in Denmark, the effect of paternal imprisonment on children’s foster care placement is not driven by changes in family finances or changes in family structure. This may be because Denmark offers generous public benefits that help protect children and families from the effects of either of these types of changes, an issue discussed in more detail below.

Discussion

Our results show that for Danish children, having an incarcerated father is associated with large and statistically significant increases in the risk of children being placed in foster care in the three years following conviction. We find an effect only for children who do not live with their father at the time of conviction, suggesting that families with both parents living together prior to the father’s incarceration are more resilient to the negative effects of paternal incarceration, while children with nonresident fathers who become imprisoned may be doubly disadvantaged. We also find effects only for those children whose fathers were convicted for crimes for which they would have been eligible for community supervision if sentenced after the 2000 reform, providing strong evidence that paternal incarceration causes higher rates of foster care placement among children. Finally, our analyses suggest that at least for Danish families, neither changes in family finances nor changes in romantic relationships for mothers significantly affect the relationship between paternal incarceration and the probability of children’s foster care placement. We identified two other factors that may mediate this relationship, though we were

not able to assess them in this study: maternal well-being and paternal parenting skills.

Although the change in the use of community service in Denmark provides a unique opportunity to assess the causal relationship between paternal incarceration and placement of children in foster care, and the results of our assessment are extremely consistent, nonetheless our study does have a number of limitations.

First, because few mothers are incarcerated in Denmark, we were unable to estimate the effects of maternal incarceration on foster care placement, which would provide a more complete picture of the risks of parental incarceration on children's placement in foster care. Second, because the crimes for which community service can be applied are relatively minor, our results may not be generalizable to families experiencing paternal incarceration for more serious offenses. Third, we were able to test only two of our four potential mediators of the relationship between paternal imprisonment and the risk of foster care placement for children.

Two final limitations of our study concern some perplexing results regarding mediation and whether paternal residence prior to incarceration matters, and the generalizability of our findings to the United States. These concerns are related, as our thoughts on confounding results inform our assessment of generalizability.

We tested two of our four proposed mechanisms, and found that neither mediated the relationship between paternal incarceration and foster care placement. Although this finding was initially perplexing, we concluded that in Denmark, where generous public benefits help keep households in a stable financial position, neither of the mechanisms we tested should have substantially increased foster care placement.

A second odd finding, that the effects of paternal incarceration on children's foster care placement is concentrated among families where children are not living with their fathers prior to sentencing, is initially harder to explain. There is, however, one explanation that appears plausible and again highlights differences between Denmark and the United States. Although Denmark provides generous public benefits, we would still expect that mothers raising children without a resident father would be in a more precarious financial position compared to mothers raising children whose father was temporarily away from the home due to imprisonment (none of the fathers in our sample were given sentences longer than one year).¹³ In Denmark, foster care carries much less stigma than it does in the United States, and most placements occur with parental permission. This is in striking contrast to the United States, where few if any foster care placements happen with the consent of the parents. It is plausible that in Denmark, a mother who is more marginalized than her peers might choose to have

her child temporarily placed in foster care during a time of particular stress.

Of course, there is no way of knowing with certainty how to explain these unexpected findings. The combination of this uncertainty with known differences between the United States and Denmark in the criminal justice, foster care, and welfare systems casts doubt on the generalizability of these Danish findings to families in the United States.

Despite these limitations, our study does make key contributions to the body of research on the consequences of parental incarceration for children. We identify potential pathways by which paternal incarceration could increase children's likelihood of foster care placement, even years after the original conviction. Although the more direct mechanisms for the effects of maternal imprisonment may be easier to observe than those for paternal incarceration, it still seems plausible that paternal imprisonment may harm children. Our use of Danish data allows us to apply rigorous methods and illustrate that paternal incarceration does indeed have an independent effect on children. Future research should continue in this area, to determine whether the causal effects of paternal incarceration are limited to foster care placement, or have other detrimental effects on children. ■

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¹³This logic would likely not apply in the United States, where sentences tend to be longer.

Using a public health approach to address the incarceration crisis

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Incarceration as a public health crisis

Over the past four decades, the rate of incarceration in the United States has quadrupled.¹ With 2.2 million people currently incarcerated and 4 million people under probation or parole, the rate of incarceration in the United States is far beyond the rate of almost every other country, including countries like China, Russia, and Iran.² The rates of incarceration are disproportionately high in communities of color, especially among African American men, who are twice as likely as Hispanic men and six times more likely than white men to be admitted to prison during their lifetime.³ Evidence across a broad array of disciplines convincingly demonstrates that the incarceration rate has exacted a toll on those individuals who are incarcerated, their families (including their children), and their communities.

Incarceration and poverty. As this issue of *Focus* demonstrates, poverty is both a contributing factor and a consequence of incarceration. Having a criminal record limits employment and educational opportunities while simultaneously limiting access to safety net programs.⁴ Research shows that serving time in prison reduces hourly wages for men by approximately 11 percent, annual employment by 9 weeks, and annual earnings by 40 percent.⁵ Incarceration also contributes to family poverty; over half of incarcerated parents report being the primary source of financial support to their children prior to their incarceration.⁶ Research also shows that even after accounting for material hardships occurring before imprisonment, paternal incarceration strongly increases material hardships for the incarcerated father's family, defined as experiencing things like having the electricity turned off or not having enough money to make rent.⁷

Incarceration and health. Incarcerated individuals have disproportionately high rates of chronic conditions and infectious disease.⁸ Twenty-one percent of prisoners and 14 percent of jail inmates report ever having an infectious disease, including tuberculosis, hepatitis B and C, and other sexually transmitted diseases, compared with 4.8 percent

of the general population.⁹ Most incarcerated individuals will eventually return to the community, making access to quality health care post-release a key public health issue.¹⁰ There are also disproportionately high rates of mental illness and substance use disorders among jail inmates and state and federal prisoners.¹¹ Forty-nine percent of state prisoners, 40 percent of federal prisoners, and 60 percent of jail inmates report symptoms of a mental health disorder, compared to roughly 25 percent of the adult general population ages 18 to 64.¹² Sixty-nine percent of state prisoners and 64 percent of federal prisoners report regular drug use.¹³

Incarceration and community well-being. The rise of incarceration rates has not been evenly distributed, with certain communities facing greater numbers of absent working-age men. For example, the Justice Mapping Center found that in Wichita, Kansas, one quarter of all people on probation or parole live in only 8 percent of the city's neighborhoods.¹⁴ These high rates influence community health. Recent estimates indicate that 7 percent of all U.S. children have ever had a parent who lived with them go to jail or prison.¹⁵ Even when controlling for demographic, socioeconomic, and familial characteristics, parental incarceration is independently linked to a number of poor health outcomes for children, including learning disabilities, behavioral or conduct problems, and developmental delays.¹⁶ For mothers, having a child's father incarcerated is linked with mental health problems, including an increased risk of a major depressive episode, and a higher level of life dissatisfaction.¹⁷

The public health approach to addressing the harmful effects of incarceration

Addressing the scope and depth of harm that high incarceration rates impose on society requires a concerted strategic approach that addresses the full spectrum of causes and consequences of the incarceration crisis. Public health provides a useful frame in shaping this strategic approach, particularly in its conceptualization of primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention. Primary prevention entails actions to prevent a condition or disease from occurring (for example, a low sodium diet to prevent high blood pressure). Secondary prevention includes interventions that occur after the onset of a condition to mitigate its impact (for example, treating high blood pressure to prevent a stroke). Tertiary prevention encompasses rehabilitation effort, after a disease or condition has run its course to enable the individual to return to the greatest possible function (e.g., physical therapy to restore function after a stroke occurs). A comprehensive

approach to address the harms of incarceration must include all three elements and, indeed, this frame is evident in the current Administration's efforts to tackle this issue. Although a detailed review of Administration activities and proposals is beyond the scope of this commentary, below we include a number of examples of Administration policies and programs, Congressional initiatives, and other examples from the field that illustrate how such a framing can help ensure a comprehensive response.

Primary prevention: Avoiding initial justice system involvement

Reduce conditions of poverty, disadvantage, and harm. Given the damaging effects justice system involvement can have on individuals, families, and communities, the primary goal should be prevention of initial criminal justice system involvement whenever possible.

The risk of incarceration is much higher in low-income communities and communities of color.¹⁸ Pre-incarceration income is 41 percent less for individuals who are incarcerated compared to individuals who have never been incarcerated but are of a similar age, even when controlling for the overrepresentation of individuals of color in the justice system.¹⁹ Addressing these conditions of poverty has been a central focus of Administration efforts. Efforts include dramatic expansion and strengthening of early childhood education (Head Start and pre-kindergarten) and child care; education reform resulting in substantial increases in high school graduation rates; joint Department of Education and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) policy guidance to reduce exclusion of at-risk children from preschool and K-12 education, linked to the broader "My Brother's Keeper" initiative; expansion of public benefits such as the Earned Income Tax Credit, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP, formerly known as food stamps, and school food programs; and the establishment of a series of "place-based" initiatives (Strong Cities, Strong Communities; Promise Neighborhoods; Promise Zones; and others) to bring coordinated federal engagement, expertise, and resources to address the needs of communities of concentrated poverty.

Increase access to behavioral health and substance abuse services. The Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 and the Affordable Care Act require group health plans, health insurance issuers, and individual health insurance plans to ensure that financial requirements (such as co-pays and deductibles) and treatment limitations (such as visit limits) are no more restrictive than the requirements and limitations applied to medical and surgical benefits, thereby improving the coverage of behavioral health treatment. Building on substantial investments throughout the Administration, the President's fiscal year 2017 budget includes a total of \$530 million for programs that expand access to behavioral health services by expanding service and workforce capacity and engaging individuals with serious mental illness in care.²⁰ Improving access to

behavioral health care can improve reentry outcomes, and may also prevent initial justice system contact.

Support problem-solving courts and other diversion strategies. Once a crime has occurred, alternative approaches exist to minimize the use of incarceration. Problem-solving courts, or courts that seek to address the underlying chronic behaviors of criminal defendants, offer promising strategies to divert individuals away from incarceration and toward needed behavioral health interventions. Drug courts integrate alcohol and other drug treatment services with justice system processing for nonviolent offenses, which supports early identification and placement in treatment as another alternative.²¹ Mental health courts similarly offer an opportunity for early identification and intervention for mental illnesses and emphasize access to appropriate treatment over incarceration.²²

Use evidence-based probation and parole practices. Smart probation and parole strategies can also be used to divert people away from incarceration. For example, the Project HOPE program in Hawaii uses drug testing and swift, certain sanctions to alter behavior while mandating treatment for those who need it. Probationers in Project HOPE have been found to be 55 percent less likely to be arrested for a new crime and 72 percent less likely to use drugs than those who don't participate.²³

Use more nuanced sentencing strategies. The Sentencing Reform Act of 1984 revised the criminal code and established the U.S. Sentencing Commission, which introduced mandatory minimum sentences for various crimes and eliminated the possibility of parole in some cases, causing an almost immediate increase in the prison population. Much has been done to revise these policy decisions. In 2010, the U.S. Congress passed the Fair Sentencing Act to reduce the sentencing disparity between possession of crack cocaine and powder cocaine. In 2014, the U.S. Sentencing Commission announced a reduction of the potential punishment for future drug offenders and then made that change retroactive, making thousands of prisoners eligible for early release.²⁴ In a separate effort, the Administration has commuted the sentences of 184 individuals as part of an initiative to grant clemency to certain nonviolent drug offenders in federal prison, many of whom would have received a substantially lower sentence if convicted of the same offense today.²⁵ Revising sentencing guidelines and overturning mandatory minimums will go a long way to ensuring that incarceration, with its associated costs, is employed prudently.

Secondary prevention: Providing evidence-based supports during incarceration to prepare for reentry

Encourage family strengthening policies and programs. Families often provide the needed housing, financial, and social support required for successful reentry, making strong family ties a predictive factor of successful reentry.²⁶ However, during incarceration, family members struggle

to navigate and maintain relationships when prisons are located far away from communities and the costs of visiting, phone calls, and other communication can be prohibitively expensive.²⁷ Family-friendly visitation policies and programs to support positive family communication and interaction can help strengthen family ties and potentially improve recidivism rates. Video visiting offers a low-cost, high-impact way to supplement in-person visitation. The Federal Communication Commission's recent caps on the cost of calls from prison also have the potential to improve family relationships as they are implemented and enforced.²⁸ Further research, such as the work described by Julie Poehlmann-Tynan in this issue, is needed to clarify what types of visits and contacts are most helpful for both the incarcerated individual and his or her family.

Expand parenting education. Many incarcerated individuals are able to use the time spent in prison to identify the mistakes they may have made, and qualitative research indicates that many incarcerated parents are eager to help their children avoid the same mistakes but struggle with how they can share these lessons when their credibility as a parent has been tarnished.²⁹ Evidence-based parenting programs such as Inside Out Dad or Parenting Inside Out offer needed strategies to incarcerated parents who struggle to maintain or revive relationships with their children.³⁰ Parenting education is often reserved for individuals who are close to release; however, offering these parenting strategies closer to entry may help to avoid broken ties that would later need to be rekindled. The Charles Colson Task Force, a bipartisan blue ribbon task force created by Congress, has recommended that the Federal Bureau of Prisons develop greater opportunities for family engagement, including expanding visitation programs and establishing a centralized visitation and family affairs office to provide a coordinated approach to supporting families.³¹

Prevent accumulation of child support debt. Individuals who enter prison with a child support order can leave prison with \$15,000 to \$30,000 in child support debt.³² This debt can be a significant barrier to reentry by interfering with criminal record expungements, receipt of public benefits, obtaining housing, and getting access to credit.³³ Helping incarcerated parents apply for and modify their child support orders early in their justice system involvement will help reduce the accumulation of debt. Such an approach has been adopted by many states, and is incorporated in a proposed rule from the Administration that, if implemented, would prohibit states from treating incarceration as “voluntary unemployment,” which effectively prevents incarcerated parents from applying for a modification to their orders.

Offer practical employment and education opportunities during incarceration. Employment opportunities offered during incarceration should build knowledge and skills in industries that are accessible to individuals with a criminal record. Increasing access to high-quality education programs has also proven to be a recidivism-reduction strategy. One recent study from the RAND Corporation found that

individuals who participated in correctional education were 43 percent less likely to return to prison than those who did not.³⁴ This past July, the U.S. Department of Education launched a Pell Pilot Program, to test new models to allow incarcerated Americans to receive Pell Grants and pursue postsecondary education.³⁵ The President's fiscal year 2017 budget includes a proposal to reinstate the Pell eligibility of incarcerated students.³⁶

Expand and encourage substance use and mental health treatment. Risk-reduction programming offered within prisons is an important avenue for setting incarcerated individuals up for success upon release. The Colson Task Force also recommends expanding eligibility for drug programs. The task force asks the Federal Bureau of Prisons to expand its intensive Residential Drug Abuse Program by allowing high- and medium-risk individuals to participate and offering time-off sentence incentives for completing the program.³⁷

Tertiary prevention: Addressing collateral consequences post-release

Remove barriers to employment for individuals with criminal records. Finding stable employment is one of the most significant challenges to overcome post release, a challenge made more difficult by criminal background checks and licensing restrictions. State and local “Ban the Box” initiatives have made significant headway in allowing formerly incarcerated individuals an equal chance at employment.³⁸ By preventing employers from having a box indicating a criminal record on the initial application and screening out all those required to check the box, employers are encouraged to meet with and evaluate candidates on a more personal level. Encouraging expungement of records is another promising strategy. The Department of Labor and the Department of Justice are working together to establish a National Clean Slate Clearinghouse to provide technical assistance to local legal aid programs, public defender offices, and reentry service providers to build capacity for legal services needed to help with record-cleaning, expungement, and related civil legal services.

Consider changes to state and local laws to improve access to safety net programs. Many states have taken action to overturn or reduce the lifetime ban on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and SNAP benefits for individuals with felony drug convictions, allowing more individuals access to these supports during the difficult reentry period.³⁹ The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has issued guidance instructing public housing authorities that arrest records may not be the basis for denying admission, terminating assistance, or evicting tenants.⁴⁰ States can also consider provisions allowing for geriatric release for elderly inmates in poor health.

Improve the continuity of health care upon release by connecting individuals to affordable health care coverage and services. Under the Affordable Care Act's Medicaid

expansion, adults with incomes under 138 percent of the Federal Poverty Level are now eligible for Medicaid in the states that have adopted the Medicaid expansion. Since incarcerated individuals have their Medicaid coverage suspended or terminated during incarceration (because correctional facilities are directly responsible for the provision of health services), special effort must be taken to connect individuals to health care coverage post-release. The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation at HHS currently has several studies underway to examine how improved access to health care may affect recidivism outcomes. One such study, “Evaluating Early Access to Medicaid as a Reentry Strategy,” conducted in partnership with the National Institute of Corrections, will work with correctional and Medicaid authorities to design a process to assist soon-to-be-released incarcerated individuals with their Medicaid applications. The study will track outcomes, including use of health care services, employment, and recidivism outcomes, post-release.

Conclusion

The articles in this issue of *Focus* summarize research that demonstrates how incarceration affects not only those who are imprisoned, but also their families and their communities. A comprehensive public health approach that both focuses on the underlying causes of incarceration and addresses the factors that contribute to cycles of incarceration and recidivism is necessary in order to fully address the challenges presented. ■

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³⁸Twenty-one states (including CA, NY, NJ, RI, VA, and WI) and over 100 cities and counties have adopted “ban the box” laws, which require employers to consider a job candidate’s qualifications first before knowing whether they have a criminal record. Seven of these states have also removed the conviction history question on job applications for private employers. To learn more, please see <http://www.nelp.org/publication/ban-the-box-fair-chance-hiring-state-and-local-guide/>

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