



Household incarceration in early adolescence and risk of premarital first birth



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ABSTRACT

In the second half of the 20th century, the United States experienced a massive increase in incarceration. In response to this growth, a burgeoning scholarship has sought to explore the collateral consequences of incarceration for young children. However, this scholarship has less frequently explored the impact of incarceration on long-term outcomes, how incarceration experienced in periods other than early childhood impacts children, and whether the incarceration of family members other than parents has negative implications for children. Using data from the children of the mothers in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, I explore whether household incarceration experienced in early adolescence is associated with a child's risk of growing up to have a premarital first birth. The results suggest that, even after including a rich set of covariates, children who experience household incarceration in early adolescence are at greater risk of having a premarital first birth, particularly when the father or an external household member is incarcerated.

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In the second half of the 20th century, the United States experienced a massive increase in incarceration unparalleled in its own history and among advanced democracies. In the last 35 years, the U.S. incarceration rate has roughly quintupled (Wildeman & Western, 2010). Since 2002, the United States has incarcerated people at a greater rate than any other country and at a much greater rate than any other industrialized democracy (Wakefield & Uggen, 2010; Wildeman & Western, 2010). Individuals who are already the most disadvantaged in society are the most likely to experience incarceration; black men who dropped out of high school have a cumulative risk of incarceration of 2 in 3 (Western & Wildeman, 2009). As incarceration rates have increased, so has the likelihood that a child will endure the incarceration of a parent, especially among populations that are most disadvantaged. Scholarship suggests that more than 50% of black children born to high school dropouts in 1990 had an incarcerated father by the time they reached age 14 (Wildeman, 2009).

In response to the growth in incarceration, a burgeoning scholarship has sought to explore the collateral consequences of incarceration for children. This scholarship has consistently found that incarceration has negatively impacted young children (Geller, Garfinkel, & Western, 2011; Turney & Haskins, 2014; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2013; Wildeman, 2010). However, scholars know much less about the impact of incarceration on long term outcomes, how incarceration experienced in periods other than early childhood impacts children, and whether the incarceration of family members other than parents has negative implications for children (Nichols & Loper, 2012; Wildeman & Muller, 2012).

In this paper, I begin to fill some of these gaps: using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 (NLSY79) and the children of the mothers from the NLSY79, I examine the influence of household incarceration experienced between the ages of 10 and 14 (during early adolescence) on the risk of having a premarital first birth. In the first set of analyses, I explore whether a variable capturing the incarceration of any household member is associated with the risk of having a premarital first birth. In the second set of analyses, I dig deeper into this association by exploring whether the association differs depending on who in the household is incarcerated (father, mother, sibling, or extended household member). Given the growth in nonmarital childbearing over time and its negative implications for the parent and the child (Bennett, Bloom, & Miller, 1995; McLanahan, Tach, & Schneider, 2013; Osborne & McLanahan, 2007), exploring these associations has the potential to shed light on one way mass incarceration has transmitted disadvantage across generations.

1. Background

1.1. The importance of nonmarital childbearing

Premarital childbearing is an important outcome to study for a number of reasons. First, the growth in nonmarital childbearing has been one of the most pronounced changes in family formation since the 1960s (McLanahan, 2004). More than 40% of all U.S. births now occur outside marriage, an all-time high, compared to 5% in 1960 (Martin et al., 2009). Importantly, the increase in nonmarital births has not occurred equally across groups and tends to be concentrated among disadvantaged portions of the population. Specifically, nonmarital fertility rates are

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particularly high among African Americans and Hispanics and among individuals with low levels of education (Lichter, 2012; Wildsmith, Berger, Manlove, Barry, & McCoy-Roth, 2012). These trends may be especially relevant in the context of incarceration since incarceration grew dramatically around the same time as nonmarital childbearing and is similarly concentrated among disadvantaged segments of society (Western & Wildeman, 2009; Wildeman, 2009; Wildeman & Western, 2010).

Second, nonmarital childbearing has negative implications for parents and their children above and beyond preexisting disadvantage. For parents, nonmarital childbearing is associated with worse health outcomes, an increased risk of welfare receipt and poverty, and a reduction in labor force participation and likelihood of getting married (Bennett et al., 1995; Bronars & Grogger, 1994; Williams, Sassler, Frech, Addo, & Cooksey, 2011; Williams, Sassler, Frech, Addo, & Cooksey, 2013). The consequences of nonmarital childbearing are also stark for children. Scholarship suggests that growing up in a single-parent household is associated with a reduction in a child's educational attainment, economic security, and physical and psychological well-being (McLanahan et al., 2013; Sigle-Rushton & McLanahan, 2004). Thus, since nonmarital childbearing is concentrated among disadvantaged segments of the population and has negative implications, it is contributing to inequality among both adults and children (McLanahan, 2004).

1.2. Moving beyond parental incarceration

Almost all of the literature exploring the consequences of incarceration has focused on parental incarceration (for exceptions, see Farrington, Joffiffe, Loeber, Stouthamer-Loeber, & Kalb, 2001; Gjelsvik, Dumont, Nunn, & Rosen, 2014; Nichols & Loper, 2012; Whalen & Loper, 2014). Parents play a crucial part in the lives of children, so the focus on parental incarceration is understandable. However, older siblings and extended household members also often play an important role in children's lives; thus, there is reason to believe that the incarceration of siblings and extended household members may have important implications.

Scholarship has demonstrated the importance of siblings in the lives of children. Older siblings often provide companionship and affection; they also often serve as confidants and role models (Davies, 1991; Hofferth & Goldscheider, 2010; Worden, 1999). It is therefore not surprising that studies have found that the death of a sibling often has a negative impact on children (Davies, 1991; Worden, 1999). In fact, Worden (1999) found that the death of a sibling was just as impactful as the loss of a parent. Like sibling death, the incarceration of a sibling leads to the removal of an important person in the child's life from the household. Thus, it is quite possible that the incarceration of an older sibling will have important implications for children.

As is the case with siblings, extended family members often play an important role in the everyday experience of children, particularly as the traditional nuclear family has become less common. Research has found that roughly 15% of children who live with a parent live with an extended household member (Kreider, 2008; Mollborn, Fomby, & Dennis, 2011). Living with an extended household member has been found to be especially common among ethnic minority and low-income families, the groups who are also at the greatest risk of experiencing incarceration (Kreider, 2008; Mollborn et al., 2011). In addition to shared living arrangements, research has found that extended family members provide a variety of important services that are likely to have a bearing on the child's context, including financial support (Angel & Tienda, 1982; Gottlieb, Pilkauskas, & Garfinkel, 2014) and childcare (SmithBattle, 1996). Importantly, extended family appears to matter for child outcomes, as close ties to extended family have been found to be associated with better academic outcomes for children (Pallock & Lamborn, 2006). Given their substantial influence on a child's environment, the incarceration of extended household members may have important implications for children.

1.3. Theoretical perspectives on household incarceration's consequences

A number of perspectives have been introduced to explain how parental incarceration may influence children (see Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999 for a thorough review). Although these perspectives were designed with parental incarceration in mind, for the reasons described above, I argue, like Nichols and Loper (2012), that they are also applicable to household member incarceration more generally. In this paper, I do not attempt to adjudicate between these perspectives, but present them to illustrate why incarceration may be associated with risk of premarital first birth.

Three of these perspectives suggest that household incarceration will increase a child's risk of premarital first birth. The economic strain perspective suggests that household incarceration leads to lower levels of and greater fluctuations in family income, both of which have been found to increase the risk of experiencing a premarital first birth (Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999; Wu, 1996). Prior research has found that incarceration reduces employment (Pager, 2003), educational opportunities (Arditti & Few, 2006), and wages (Western, 2002), suggesting that incarceration is likely to have direct implications for the level and stability of family income. Moreover, if the incarcerated household member provided childcare, the incarceration will likely influence family income either by forcing working members of the household to work fewer hours to provide care or by increasing child care costs.

The second perspective emphasizes the importance of social control and socialization. Prior research has demonstrated that close relationships with adults, positive role models, and effective discipline are important protective factors against growing up to have a nonmarital birth (Hofferth & Goldscheider, 2010). If the incarcerated individual made positive contributions to the household, this perspective suggests that the incarceration is likely to reduce effective parenting, eliminate an important source of support for the child, and take away an important role model both directly through the incarcerated household member's absence and indirectly by negatively impacting other caregivers (Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999; Nichols & Loper, 2012).

The third perspective emphasizes the stigma attached to incarceration. Qualitative research suggests that children are cognizant of the negative labels attributed to them because of their parent's incarceration (Murray, Loeber, & Pardini 2012; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). If children are aware of these negative labels, labeling has the potential to produce feelings of anger, rejection, shame, and low self-esteem (Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999; Scheff & Retzinger, 1991). Importantly, low self-esteem has been found to be associated with negative outcomes for young adults, such as an increased risk of engaging in criminal behavior (Trzesniewski et al., 2006). Given that having a premarital first birth is a behavioral outcome, it is quite possible that low self-esteem is a risk factor for this outcome as well.

Although these three perspectives suggest that household incarceration is likely to increase a child's risk of having a premarital first birth, two other perspectives suggest that there will be either no association or that household incarceration will be associated with a reduction in risk. The selection perspective suggests that any association between household incarceration and a child's risk of having a premarital first birth is spurious (Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999). From this perspective, children who experience household incarceration come from households that are disadvantaged prior to the incarceration spell, and these preexisting disadvantages explain any association between household incarceration and risk of a premarital first birth (Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999; Murray, Loeber, & Pardini 2012).

Lastly, the reduced strain perspective suggests that household incarceration actually reduces strain in the household. From this perspective, household members who become incarcerated are bad influences on children and families and produce great strain when they are present in the household, which in turn, has a negative impact on outcomes for children (Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999). Specifically, some research suggests that domestic violence is common among high offending

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