



Children of the Prison Boom: Mass Incarceration and the Future of American Inequality

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An unrelenting prison boom, marked by stark racial disparities, pulled a disproportionate number of young black men into prison in the last forty years. In *Children of the Prison Boom*, Professor Wildeman and his co-author Sara Wakefield draw upon broadly representative survey data and interviews to describe the devastating effects of America's experiment in mass incarceration on a generation of vulnerable children tied to these men. In so doing, they show that the effects of mass imprisonment may be even greater on the children left behind than on the men who were locked up.

Parental imprisonment has been transformed from an event affecting only the unluckiest of children—those with parents seriously involved in crime—to one that is remarkably common, especially for black children. The book documents how, even for children at high risk of problems, paternal incarceration makes a bad situation worse, increasing mental health and behavioral problems, infant mortality, and child homelessness. Pushing against prevailing understandings of and research on the consequences of mass incarceration for inequality among adult men, these harms to children translate into large-scale increases in racial inequalities. Parental imprisonment has become a distinctively American way of perpetuating intergenerational inequality—one that should be placed alongside a decaying public education system and concentrated disadvantage in urban centers as a factor that disproportionately touches, and disadvantages, poor black children.

More troubling, even if incarceration rates were reduced dramatically in the near future, the long-term harms of our national experiment in the mass incarceration of marginalized men are yet to be fully revealed. Optimism about current reductions in the imprisonment rate and the resilience of children must therefore be set against the backdrop of the children of the prison boom—a lost generation now coming of age.



Unintended Consequences? Explaining the Relationship between Paternal Incarceration and Food Insecurity

Kristin Turney

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In response to the rising incarceration rates in the United States, a growing literature documents the mostly deleterious intergenerational consequences of paternal incarceration. But little research considers the effects of paternal incarceration on food insecurity among children. Food insecurity, defined as having limited access to adequate food due to lacking economic or other resources, is an especially severe form of deprivation that is distinct from other indicators of economic deprivation or hardship. Professor Turney uses data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, a longitudinal birth cohort of children born to mostly unmarried mothers, to estimate the average and unequal effects of paternal incarceration on food insecurity among children. She finds that paternal incarceration has deleterious effects on food insecurity among children, especially among children who live in disadvantaged social contexts prior to experiencing paternal incarceration. Nearly all of the effects of paternal incarceration on food insecurity among children can be explained by changes in household economic instability and changes in the parental relationship. Given the substantial numbers of children who experience paternal incarceration, the unequal distribution of paternal incarceration across the population of children, and the importance of children's food insecurity for life course trajectories, disentangling the consequences of paternal incarceration for children's food insecurity adds a vital new dimension to our understanding of how incarceration exacerbates or ameliorates inequality among children.

Saturday, April 12 at 1:00 p.m.

Husted Hall, Room 106A

University at Albany Downtown Campus, 135 Western Avenue

This event is free and open to the public.

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