



PARENTS BEHIND BARS

Parental Incarceration among U.S. Children

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About Child Trends

Child Trends is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research center that improves the lives and prospects of children and youth by **conducting high-quality research** and **sharing the resulting knowledge** with practitioners and policymakers.

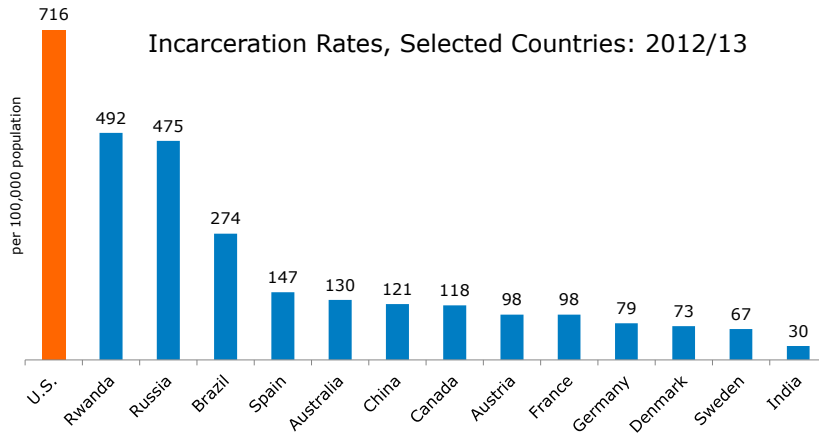
We . . .

1. take a whole child approach
2. study children in the real world
3. want children to flourish
4. value objectivity and rigor
5. pursue knowledge development *and* knowledge transfer

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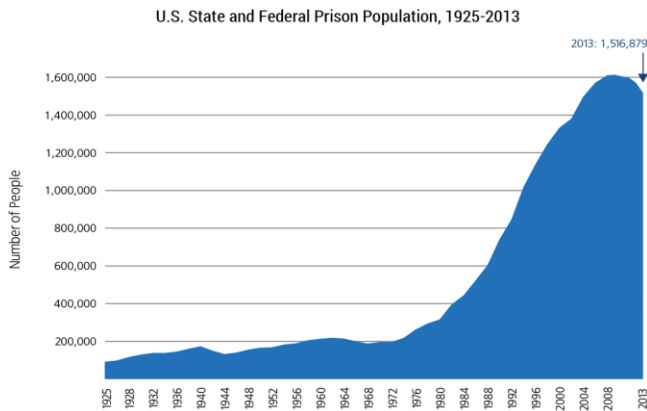


Among Developed Nations, U.S. Incarceration Rate is Highest



Source: Walmsley, R. (2013). World Population List, 10th Ed. Essex: International Centre

U.S. Incarceration Rose Steeply from 1980 to 2008



Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics Prisoners Series.

U.S. policy is being re-examined, due to evidence showing mass incarceration is

- Costly
- Ineffective as a crime deterrent
- Beset with inequities
- Damaging to communities.



Incarcerated Parents and Their Children

- In the U.S. a majority of incarcerated adults are parents of minor children.
- Most recent point-in-time estimate (2007): 1.7 million children with an incarcerated parent.

From the standpoint of the child,

Parental incarceration (PI) is generally(though not always) associated with worse well-being: health, behavior, school problems, and social stigma.

Analysis Challenge: Controlling for numerous other risk factors among children with PI

- Non-white race/ethnicity, poverty, single-parent status, violence, and so on are all more prevalent among incarcerated parents.
- Does incarceration, by itself, convey negative outcomes for children, net of these other disadvantages?

Data Set: National Survey of Children's Health (2011/12)

- Government-sponsored telephone survey designed to be representative of U.S. children (birth through 17), and of children in every state (plus DC). A total of 95,677 interviews were completed.
- Respondent is parent (or other knowledgeable adult), answering about a single focal child.
- Developmental timing of PI is unknown, though data suggest most occurred during children's early years.
- To partially address challenges related to absence of temporal data, we examined separately three age-groups: birth-5 yrs., 6-11 yrs., and 12-17 yrs.

Parental incarceration, and other adverse family experiences

"Has [the sample child] ever lived with a parent or guardian who was incarcerated?"

Additional adverse experiences included:

- Frequent economic hardship
- Parental divorce or separation
- Death of a parent
- Witnessing domestic violence or violence in the community
- Living with someone who had a mental health disorder or a substance abuse problem
- Racial discrimination



Outcome measures

- Number of additional adverse experiences

Under 6 yrs.

- Risk for developmental delay (ages 4 mos. – 5 yrs.)
- “Flourishing” composite
- Positive interactions between parent and child (composite)

6-17 yrs.

- School engagement (composite)
- School problems
- Participation in sports or clubs
- Parental aggravation (composite)
- Emotional difficulties (composite)
- Regular attendance at religious services
- Regular family meals
- Parental monitoring
- Parent-child conversation quality

Control variables

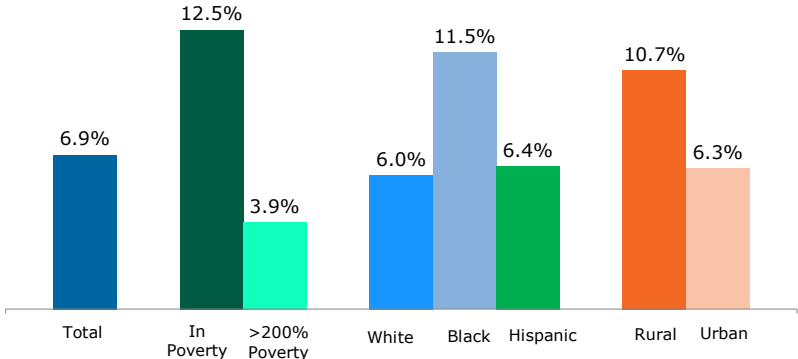
- Select other adverse experiences
- Child’s gender
- Child’s age
- Child’s race
- Family income
- Family structure

Results

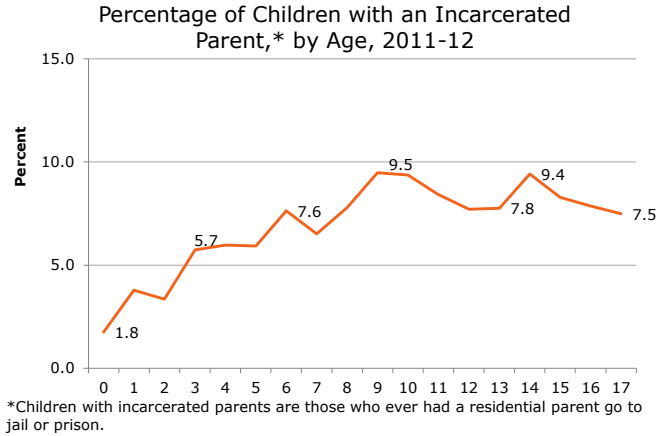


More than 5 million U.S. children have experienced parental incarceration

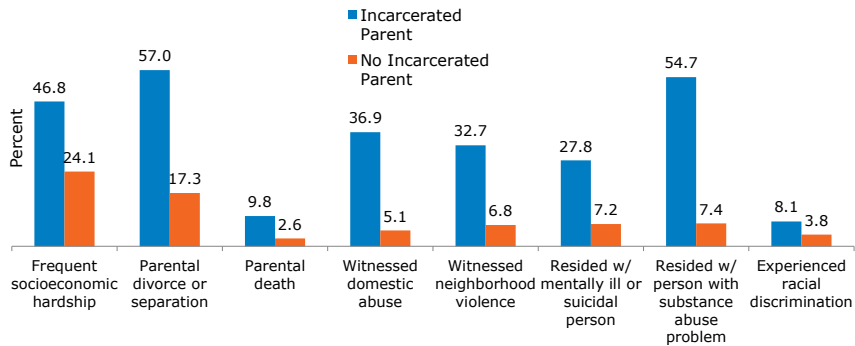
Likelihood of "Ever" Having had an Incarcerated Parent, by Selected Child Characteristics: U.S., 2011/12



Data suggest most PI occurred in child's early years

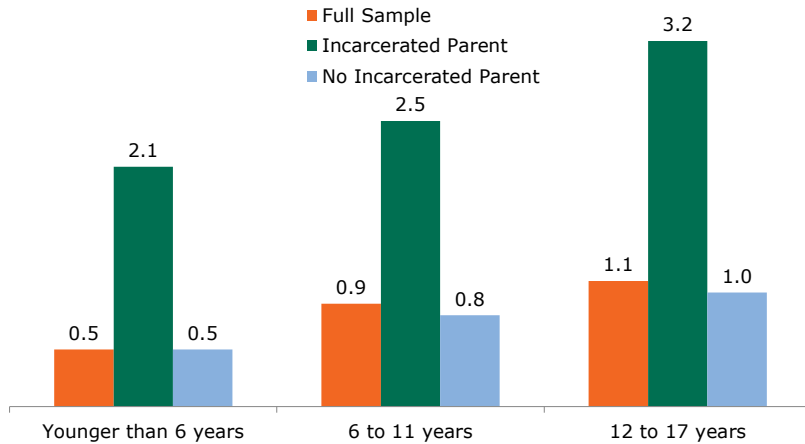


PI is Associated with Elevated Likelihood of Other Adverse Childhood Experiences



Source: Child Trends' analysis of the 2011/12 National Survey of Children's Health.

Children with PI have more (additional) adverse experiences



Results of adjusted models: Birth to 5



- Children with PI had, on average, *1.2 more adverse experiences* than children without PI.
- Differences on other outcome measures were non-significant.

Results of adjusted models: Ages 6 to 11



- Children with PI had, on average, *1.4 more adverse experiences* than children without PI.
- Children with PI were nine percent more likely to have *school problems*.
- Children with PI were five percent less likely to have high *engagement in school*.
- Children with PI were nine percent more likely to have *emotional difficulties*.

Results of adjusted models: Ages 12 to 17



- Children with PI had, on average, *1.7 more adverse experiences* than children without PI.
- Children with PI were eight percent more likely to have *school problems*.
- Children with PI were four percent less likely to have *parents say they had met none of the child's friends*.

Conclusions

- Five million+ U.S. children are affected by PI, though risk is highly skewed toward those who are poor and non-white.
- It is difficult to isolate the unique effects of PI, controlling for a number of confounding factors.
- However, our findings confirm that PI is associated with having multiple adverse experiences, and with school problems. For the youngest children, few negative effects were found.
- Few programs address PI from the child's perspective.

THANK YOU!

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