

ALCOHOL USE HISTORY OF INMATES WHOSE PARENTS WERE INCARCERATED

Prepared by: Jordan Layton, University of Michigan



INTRODUCTION

In the United States' record prison population, more than half of all incarcerated men and nearly two thirds of incarcerated women are parents, resulting in an unprecedented number of affected children.¹ The effects of parent incarceration on children have been thoroughly documented. Parent incarceration is associated with depression, anger, behavior problems through adolescence, poor academic performance, alcohol and drug abuse, involvement in the criminal justice system, sleep difficulties, concentration problems, and more.² Controlling for other factors, Wilbur et al. (2007) found that children with parental incarceration showed more depressive symptoms and externalizing behaviors than their peers without incarcerated parents.³

Despite the negative effects of parent incarceration on children, studies rarely discuss what happens when these children grow up. One might expect higher rates of alcohol use or abuse when children of incarcerated parents become adults. For example, incarcerated parents are more likely to have alcohol abuse histories than other parents,⁴ and studies often find that children are likely to repeat life experiences of their parents, including alcohol use, violence, or becoming incarcerated.⁵ Furthermore, because services for children of incarcerated parents are rare, one might expect the associated emotional and financial challenges to remain impactful.⁶ However, when the children of incarcerated parents grow up and become incarcerated themselves, did they actually end up using or abusing alcohol more than other inmates whose parents were never incarcerated?

FINDINGS

This data is based on the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics 2002 study, Survey of Inmates in Local Jails, which draws from thousands of interviews from a random sampling of jails and inmates across the country.

¹ Wilbur et al. 2007, p.679

² Mazza 2002, p.524; Wilbur 2007, p.679; Johnson & Waldfogel 2002, p.461; Arditti 2003, p.196.

³ Wilbur et al. 2007, p.678

⁴ Wilbur et al. 2007, p.679

⁵ Mazza 2002, p.525

⁶ Mazza 2002, p.521

PARENT INCARCERATION

- 22.7% of respondents had one or both parents who served time in jail or prison, usually just the father (15.7%).

<i>Inmates whose Parents had a History of Incarceration</i>		
	Frequency	Percent
Both parents	210	3.1
Mother only	267	3.9
Father only	1070	15.7
Neither	5258	77.3
Total	6805	100.0

ALCOHOL USE

- 83.2% of inmates used alcohol in the past.
- 62.7% of inmates reported using alcohol regularly, defined as *at least* once a week for at least a month. There is no significant relationship found between drinking regularly and parent incarceration history.⁷
- 28.5% of inmates said they grew up in a household with a parent or guardian who abused alcohol.
- 31.0% of inmates reported they used alcohol daily. When compared to parent incarceration there was no significant relationship.⁸
- **44.1% of inmates reported histories of either dependence on or abuse of alcohol. When compared to parent incarceration the relationship was found to be significant.⁹ Notice that about half of inmates whose father or mother (only) was incarcerated developed dependence on or abused alcohol, while the dependence and abuse rate is lower for those inmates who either had both parents incarcerated or neither parent incarcerated, and at about the exact same rates. The reason for this difference is not known and deserves further study.**

Abuse or Dependence on Alcohol	Both parents incarcerated	Mother only incarcerated	Father only incarcerated	Neither parent incarcerated	Total
Yes	90 (3.0%) 42.9%	131 (4.4%) 49.6%	530 (17.9%) 50.1%	2214 (74.7%) 42.6%	2965 (100.0%)
No	120 (3.2%) 57.1%	133 (3.5%) 50.4%	527 (14.0%) 49.9%	2985 (79.3%) 57.4%	3765 (100.0%)
Total	210 100.0%	264 100.0%	1057 100.0%	5199 100.0%	6730

⁷ Two-way cross-tabulation table used with chi-square test ($X^2=4.637$, $df=3$, $p=.2$)

⁸ Two-way cross-tabulation table used with chi-square test ($X^2=5.061$, $df=3$, $p=.167$)

⁹ Two-way cross-tabulation table used with chi-square test ($X^2=23.888$, $df=3$, $p=0.000$)

DISCUSSION

While one might expect inmates in jail to report higher alcohol use or abuse rates if they had parents with incarceration histories, the Survey of Inmates in Local Jails, 2002, does not show a significant difference in alcohol use between these inmates and those whose parents never served jail or prison sentences. In other words, while parent incarceration appears to negatively affect children in a variety of ways, possibly being influential in why many of these interviewed inmates also ended up in jail, the regular and daily alcohol use rates did not seem to be significantly higher than for other inmates.

It is unknown from this data if these inmates have higher usage rates than those who grew up with incarcerated parents but did not end up in jail, or if other life factors made all jail inmates equally likely to use alcohol. Furthermore, it seems that alcohol abuse and dependence rates are higher when only one parent was incarcerated, but the presence of lower rates when both parents were incarcerated suggests complicating factors that are not here understood.

Although eventual alcohol use does not appear to be strongly linked to parent incarceration in this survey, the varying effects of parent incarceration on children must still be considered, with prevention and treatment being essential for adjustment of affected children. Further research is needed to understand the influence of having one versus two incarcerated parents on the ability of children to adjust, as well as the implications of sentence length, family resources or poverty, and parent alcohol consumption.

REFERENCES

Arditti, J. A. (2003). Saturday morning at the jail: Implications of incarceration for families and children, *Family Relations*, 52(3), 195-204.

Arditti's study entailed interviewing visitors of incarcerated family members, finding support for studies showing that incarceration does social and economic harm to children, but having an unknown level of generalizability.

Mazza, C. (2002). And then the world fell apart: The children of incarcerated fathers. *Families in Society*, 83(5-6), 521-529.

Mazza's literature review details the breadth of studies which show the negative effects of incarceration on the economic, emotional, and psychological stability of children, and the tendency of children to repeat the life experiences of their parents.

Johnson, E. I., & Waldfogel, J. (2002). Parental Incarceration: Recent Trends and Implications for Child Welfare, *Social Service Review*, 76(3), 460-479.

Johnson and Waldfogel review literature showing the negative effects of incarceration on children and consider parent incarceration trends between 1986 and 1997 but not more recently.

Wilbur, M.A., et al. (2007). Socioeconomic effects of fathers' incarceration on low-income, urban, school-aged children. *Pediatrics*, 120, 678-685.

Wilbur et al. considered Children's Depression Inventory, Teacher Report Forms, and Child Behavior Checklist data from an ongoing longitudinal study to compare children whose father has been or never has been incarcerated. Adjusting for other factors such as age, gender, substance exposure, and violence exposure, the analysis showed that children of incarcerated fathers showed more depressive symptoms and externalizing behaviors. The study was limited by sample size and may not be generalizable to other populations besides urban black communities.

METHODOLOGY

Data Set Used: Survey of Inmates in Local Jails, 2002 (available at: <http://bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=dcdetail&iid=274>)

Strengths of Data Set: The data set is from a stratified two-stage sample selection from all jails in the U.S., with jails selected in stage one and then inmates to interview in stage two. This study, compared to previous ones, was modified to include a representative sample of juveniles.

Limitations of Data Set: Face to face interviewing through a computer could entail biased response data from personal questions.

Number of Respondents in Data Set: 6982

Measures/Variables/Indicators Used: Individual characteristics of inmates, current offenses and detention status, characteristics of victims, criminal histories, family background, gun possession and use, prior drug and alcohol use and treatment, medical and mental health history and treatment, vocational programs, etc.