

# Research and Social Policy

- The relationship between research and social policy
  - Bidirectional (research shapes policy and policy shapes research)
  - Basic research versus program evaluation
- Limitations of research
  - Political ideology (left versus right)
  - Timing must be right
  - Misuse of findings

# The Fragile Families Study and Social Policy

- FFCWS was designed to address questions about two policies: Child Support Enforcement and Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC)
- Because of the sample - large number of low-income and minority families – it speaks to many other policy issues, including housing, child-care, education, immigration and incarceration policy.
- Today I will talk first about findings relevant to the first two domains – Child support and AFDC. Then I will say something about the role FFCWS has played in incarceration policy

# Welfare Policy – a brief history

- 1920s – Mothers' pensions
- 1930s – Passage of ADC (federal commitment)
- 1960s – Large expansion of AFDC, Johnson's "War on poverty"
- 1970s – Increase in single motherhood via divorce and non-marital childbearing
- 1980s – Backlash against AFDC, Charles Murray's *Losing Ground* – "Phyllis and Harold"
- 1990s – Welfare reform (work requirements and time limits) (Bush and Clinton)

# Questions and Debates

Does Welfare discourage marriage?

Does marriage improve child wellbeing?

## Findings

- Welfare effects on marriage are mixed
  - High benefits reduce divorce for married couples
  - High benefits reduce marriage for unmarried couples
- Marriage effects on children are mostly positive
  - Larger for behavior problems and for boys
  - Income loss is a big part of the story
  - Selection is part of the story
  - Politics alert!!

# Child Support Policy – a brief history

- 1900 – 1970 state law, private enforcement
- 1970s – Federal government, Office of Child Support Enforcement
- 1980s – Ongoing legislation to increase paternity establishment, standardize award levels and increase payments
  - Right – emphasis on collections
  - Left – assured benefit (not adopted)
- 1990s – Fatherhood and marriage programs
  - Right – emphasis on marriage
  - Left – emphasis on fatherhood

# Questions and Debates

How much child support can non-resident fathers afford to pay?

Does non-resident father involvement increase child wellbeing?

Can government increase marriage?

## Findings

- Child support awards are set too high (30 to 60%)
  - Low capabilities and multi-partner fertility
- Effects of non-resident father involvement are mixed
  - Benefits depend on mother-father relationship quality
- Marriage and fatherhood programs should start at birth
  - High levels of commitment and father involvement

# Incarceration Policy – a brief history

- 1960s and 70s - Increase in violent crime, murder rate doubled, civil unrest loss of industrial jobs
- 1980s – Changes in sentencing laws (mandatory sentences, more focus on drug-related crime, longer sentences)
- 1990s – harsher sentences: 3 strikes and you're out, longer sentences for violent crime
- 2000s – studies show marginal returns to higher incarceration
- 2010s – Growing consensus that incarceration is too high – NAS report
- “The Causes and Consequences of High Rates of Incarceration”

# Questions and Debates

How do high rates of fathers' incarceration affect families and children?

## Findings

- 40% of fathers had been incarcerated by the time of child's birth
- Fathers' incarceration increases material hardship for mothers and children
- Fathers' incarceration increases mothers' risk of a major depressive episode
- Fathers' incarceration increases children's aggressive behaviors
- Fathers' incarceration lowers fathers' involvement (avoidance)



# New Work on School Punishment

- School suspension/expulsion is increasingly used to control children's behavior in elementary school
- There are large racial disparities in exposure to school suspension; about 40 percent of black boys have been suspended or expelled by age 9 compared to 8 percent of white and Hispanic boys
- Racial differences in boys' risk of suspension and expulsion are due to differences in behavior, differences in school policies and differential treatment of black and white boys

# Other Policy Domains

- Housing
- Childcare
- Contextual effects
  - School characteristics (e.g. Racial and income composition)
  - Neighborhood characteristics (e.g. gun violence)
  - Environmental toxins (airborne toxins)

# FFCWS Publications -

<https://ffpubs.princeton.edu/>

## Fragile Families Publication Search

This Publications Database displays forthcoming and published journal articles, working papers (unpublished works-in-progress), and book and book chapters using the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study data as a primary source. Click on **Show Abstract** to read article summaries, or click on the URL to be redirected to the journal's website for further article information.

Please contact [ffdata@princeton.edu](mailto:ffdata@princeton.edu) if you have publications for inclusion in this database.

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### 704 Published Articles

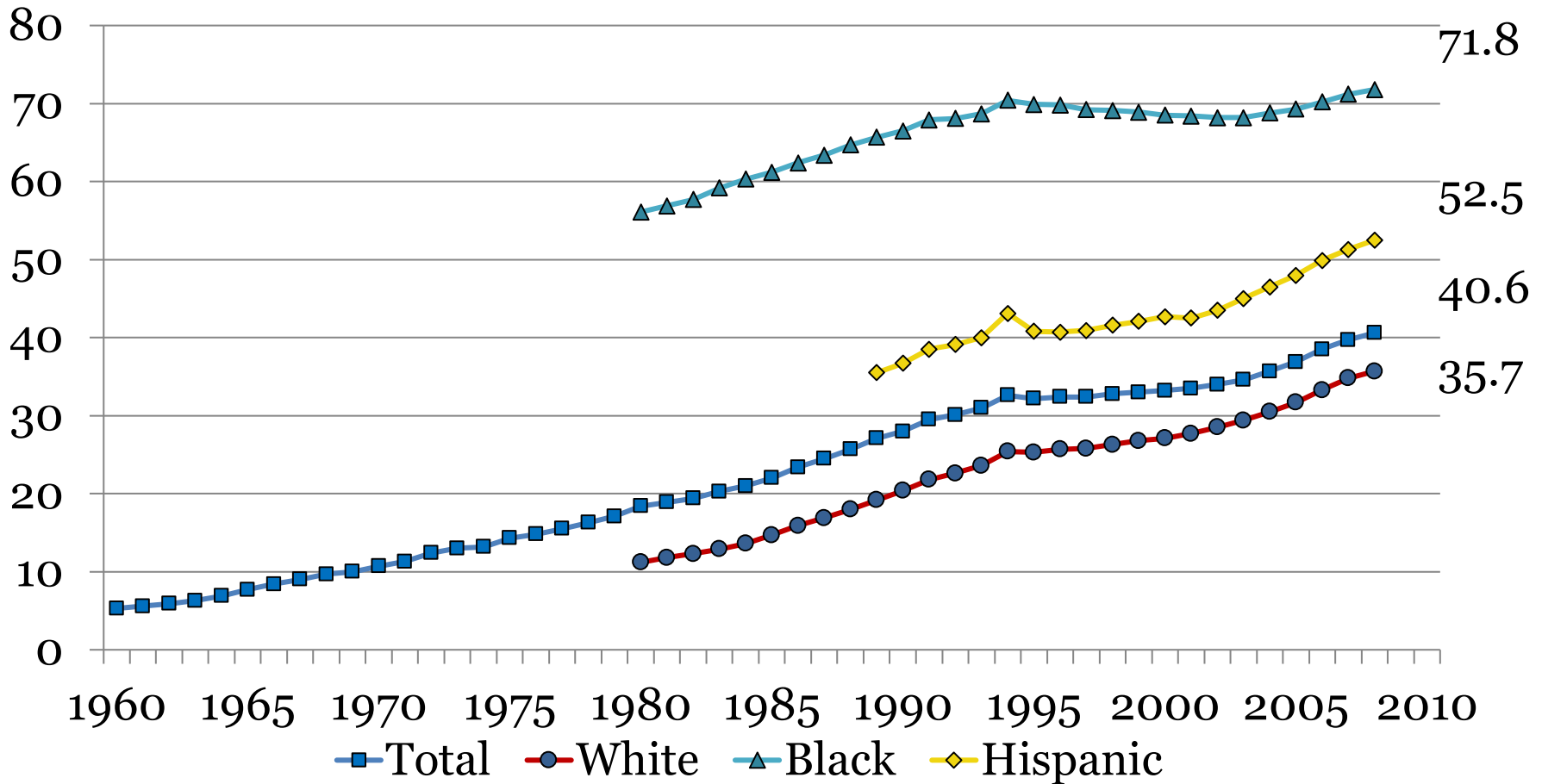
Geller, Amanda and Curtis, Marah. (Forthcoming) [A Longitudinal Examination of Housing Hardships Among Urban Fathers](#)  *Journal of Marriage and Family*.  
[Show Abstract](#)

Gold, Sarah and Nepomnyaschy, Lenna. (Forthcoming) [Neighborhood Physical Disorder and Early Delinquency Among Urban Children](#)  *Journal of Marriage and Family*.

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# Percent of Births to Unmarried Mothers

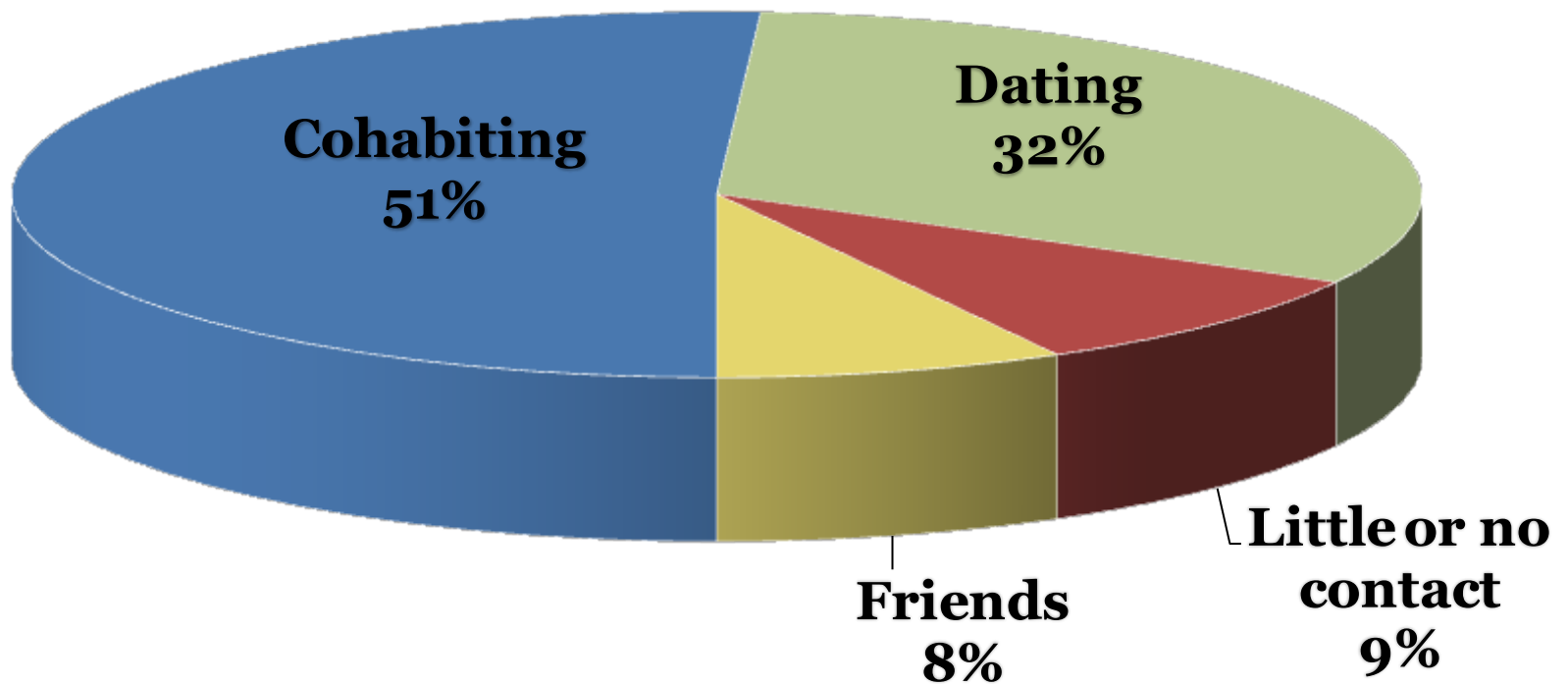


Source: National Center for Health Statistics

# Parents' Capabilities at Birth

	Mothers		Fathers	
	<i>Married</i>	<i>Unmarried</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Unmarried</i>
<i>Education</i>				
Less than high school	17.8	44.9	18.8	41.3
High school or equivalent	25.5	36.7	21.4	37.6
Some college or higher	<b>56.8</b>	<b>18.2</b>	59.8	21.1
<i>Economic Status</i>				
Worked last year	79.3	81.4	95.7	88.4
Poverty status	<b>14.0</b>	<b>42.8</b>	13.2	33.9
Earnings (\$ mean)	25,618.9	11,114.2	38,568.5	18,801.5
<i>Health &amp; Behavior</i>				
Health limitations	7.1	10.1	5.4	12.1
Depression	13.2	15.9	8.1	13.1
Heavy drinking	2.0	7.8	25.1	27.2
Father's past incarceration	<b>8.0</b>	<b>38.5</b>	7.3	36.4

# Parents have 'High Hopes' for their Relationships (at birth)



## Fathers' are Highly Involved (at birth)

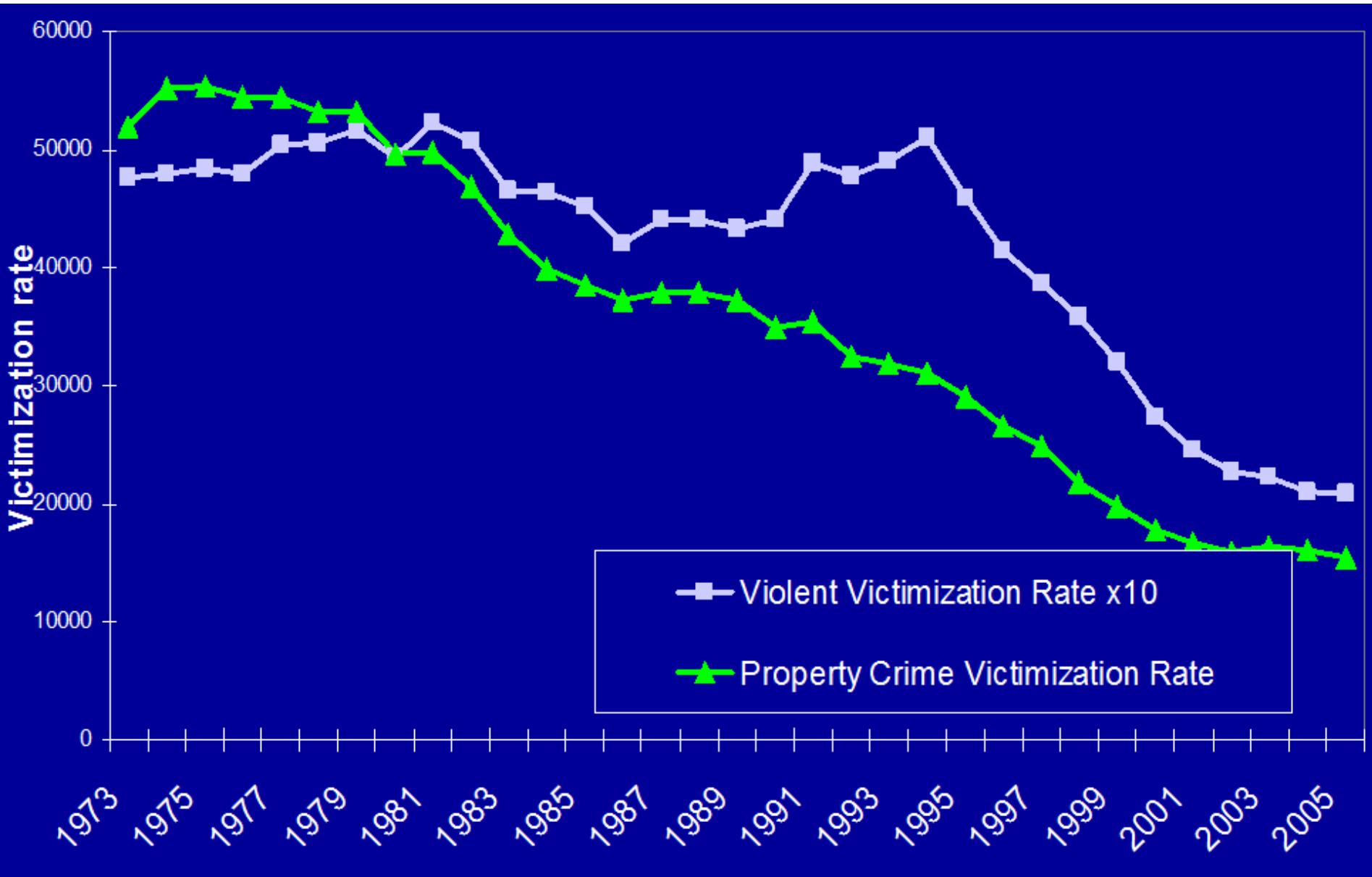
	<b>Total (%)</b>
Gave money/bought things for child	80
Helped in another way	76
Visited baby's mother in hospital	88
Child will take father's surname	92
Father's name is on birth certificate	84
Mother says father wants to be involved	95
Mother wants father to be involved	94



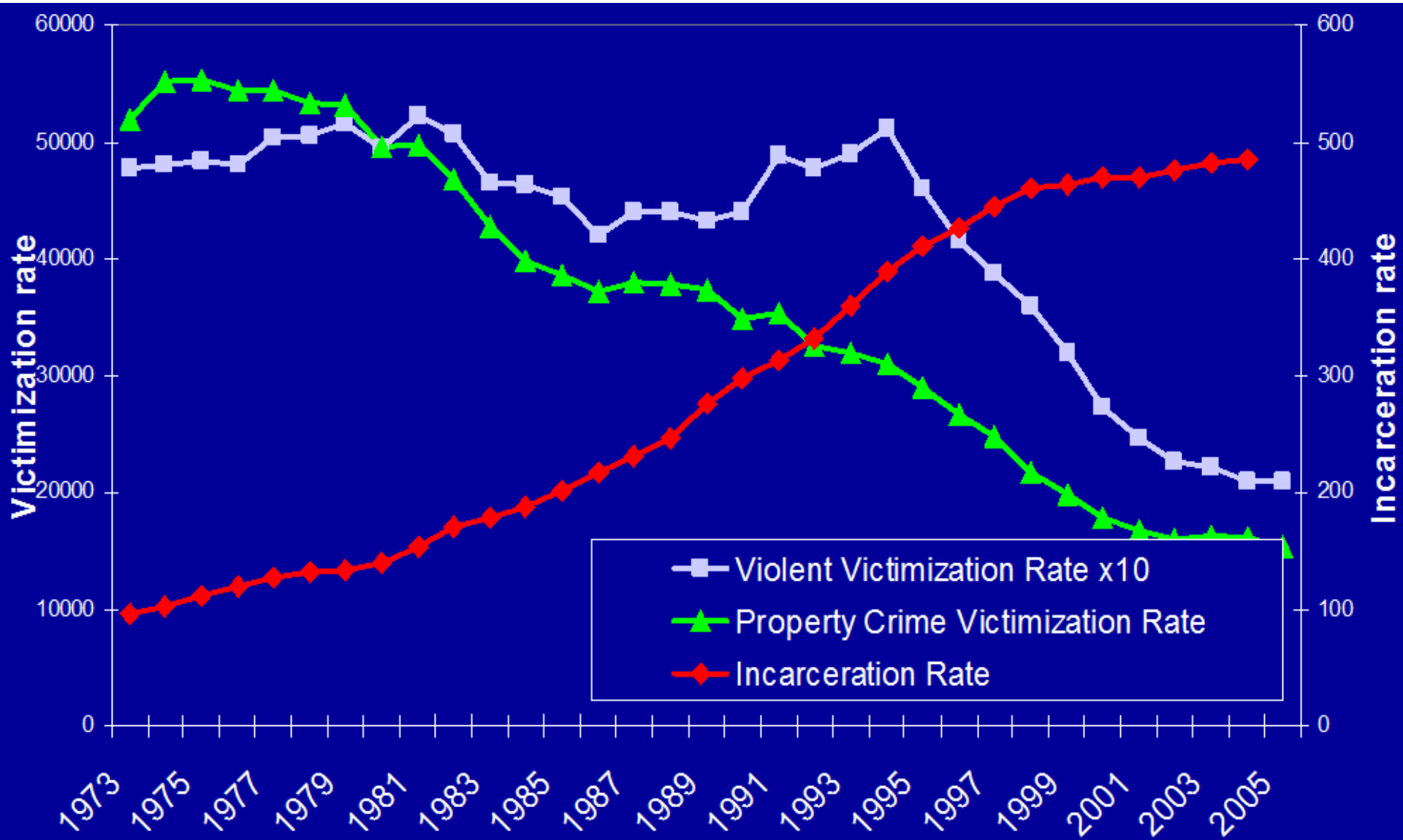
# Rates of Violent Victimization, 1973-2005



# Rates of Violent and Property Victimization, 1973-2005



# Rates of Violent and Property Victimization And Incarceration, 1973-2005



# Major Life Transitions - Young Men

Life Event	Whites	Blacks
<i>All Men</i>		
Prison incarceration	3.2	22.4
Bachelor's degree	31.6	12.5
Military service	14.0	17.4
Marriage	72.5	59.3
<i>Non-college men</i>		
Prison incarceration	6.0	31.9
HS Diploma/GED	73.5	64.4
Military service	13.0	13.7
Marriage	72.8	55.9