

Impact of parental incarceration on children



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Parental Incarceration and Children's Educational Performance

Murray et al. (2012b) reviewed samples of the Pittsburgh Youth Study; a longitudinal survey of 1009 inner city boys up to 18 years, to investigate any links between parental incarceration and children's poor academic performance. They also accounted for type of parental incarceration, the age of the child and the parent's level of antisocial behaviour. This study is important because it prospectively investigated child outcomes from before to after parental incarceration as well as social environments, which few studies have done. Findings indicated that parental incarceration was associated with increases in delinquency but it did not predict poor academic performance, even after controlling for other childhood risk factors (Murray et al. 2012b). The reason that parental incarceration had no effect on educational performance is argued to point towards resilience among affected children. Murray et al. (2012b) did specify however, that effects sizes for poor academic attainment and parental incarceration may be different for short term studies.

Cho (2009) investigated children whose mothers were incarcerated in state prison compared with children whose mothers were incarcerated in a county jail for 1 week or less (control group) to see the effect of parental incarceration on grade retention rates. Her study was also valid because where possible she minimised selection bias using propensity scores to match control and experimental groups of children (race, gender, age at mothers incarceration and at child outcome and length of incarceration). Cho's findings indicated that children whose mothers were incarcerated in a

state prison facility had lower grade retention rates in the year prior to, during, and immediately after their mother's incarceration than the comparison group. Surprisingly these findings reveal that parental incarceration may be beneficial for short-term children's academic outcomes. Also, findings reveal that factors that pre-exist parental incarceration are worth investigating as they too may have an impact on children's outcomes.

Another US study by Hagan & Foster (2012) that focussed on paternal incarceration revealed that it led to disrupted families unable to monitor school attendance and nurture levels of children's school performance. Thus the absence of incarcerated fathers can predict educational failure in children. The reason for this may be increased stress for the remaining caregiver thus affecting the quality of supervision and help with academic life (Vacha & McLaughlin, 1992 cited in Hagan & Foster, 2012). Hagan and Foster's (2012) results further indicate high levels of paternal incarceration block access to education achievement.

On the other hand, Dallaire et al. (2010), informed by ecological systems theory, carried out a qualitative study where they randomly assigned scenarios to teachers describing a female student whose mother was imprisoned. They also examined teachers' experiences of these children's *emotional and behavioural adjustment in the classroom*. Focus was on maternal incarceration because they believed that it was a greater risk for children than paternal incarceration. They found that the teachers in their experimental treatment group rated these students as less competent than teachers in a control group in which the child's mother was described as

<https://assignbuster.com/impact-of-parental-incarceration-on-children/>

being away for other reasons such as military deployment. Their findings are important to consider because they argue that no empirical research has examined the experiences of children with incarcerated parents in the school setting or with their teachers. More research is required because children of incarcerated parents have poor educational performance and are stigmatised as revealed by Dallaire et al. (2010) study. Other findings revealed that the *quality of the care giving situation* and the *stability of care* were the greatest risks to children's academic achievement cited by these teachers. Teachers also suggested that they felt younger children suffered more and that maternal incarceration had a greater impact than paternal incarceration because of the roles mothers play. Teachers also noted that they had witnessed some teachers stigmatising these children by expecting less from them and that it would be a bad idea to include information about the parent's incarceration in the child's permanent record because of possible mishandling of the information. Findings by Dallaire et al. 2010 therefore suggest that it is stigma effects and labelling processes at hand that predict poor educational performance in children rather than the parental incarceration itself. Therefore, environmental factors play a part in how well children of incarcerated parents do in schools.

Parental Incarceration and Children's Mental Health

Parental incarceration might cause mental health problems due to the separation involved, limited contact opportunities, and inadequate explanations given to children and the challenges faced by alternate caregivers (Murray et al. 2014). Children of incarcerated mothers have also been found to exhibit symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder,

depression, and long-term trauma (Cho, 2010). Foster & Hagan (2013) looked at maternal and paternal incarceration separately as potential sources of traumatic stress for children during the transition of their children to adulthood. They found that childhood maternal imprisonment increased depressive symptoms compared to not having this experience. Results indicate a gendered vulnerability of male children to maternal imprisonment in adolescence (ages 13-18) that results in uniquely high levels of young adult depressive symptoms. Findings suggest males may be vulnerable to both maternal and paternal imprisonment occurring in adolescence. They also further find that race and ethnic minority youth are more likely to be affected by paternal incarceration. Findings also suggest that both paternal and maternal imprisonment experienced during childhood (ages 0-18) and it is therefore influential on child mental health problems

Tasca et al. (2014) argue that little is known regarding variation in the presence or absence of mental health problems within a group of children of incarcerated parents. Their aim was to fill this void in this body of work by comparing incarcerated mothers' and fathers' reports of mental health problems among their children. In an effort to advance work on the needs of children of incarcerated parents, they assess whether incarcerated mothers are more likely than incarcerated fathers to report that their children are experiencing mental health problems. Their study contributes to the literature in that it covers most races allowing for a diverse analysis along multiple demographic dimensions. Tasca et al. (2014) findings suggest that incarcerated mothers reported 15.5% of their children were in need of services for mental health problems, compared with only 6.1% of

incarcerated fathers' children. Among paternal incarceration cases, the majority of children were Latino/Latina, whereas the majority of children in maternal incarceration cases were White. While controlling for child age, race/ethnicity, and gender, incarcerated mothers, compared with incarcerated fathers, reported that their children were 2.368 times more likely to have mental health problems. Race/ethnicity (Latino/Latinas) and gender (girls) were negatively related to mental health problems. On the other hand, child's age was positively related to mental health problems. Regardless of type of parental incarceration, however, the risks posed to these children of prisoners are significant and substantial. Tasca et al. (2014) study highlights that children of incarcerated parents are not a homogenous group. Murray et al. (2012) study results include data samples on general mental disorders, internalizing problems and educational performance from reports by children, teachers, parents, of children's academic performance. They used results from studies that had standardised test scores to see if parental imprisonment is a risk or causal factor for negative outcomes for children. For poor mental health, effects across all showed almost zero association with parental incarceration.

On the other hand, Swisher & Roettger's (2012) results showed that paternal incarceration during childhood is associated with higher depression scores. Surprisingly, white male youths suffered more than black male youths. For blacks and Hispanics there was no significant difference found.