LINKING PARENTAL INCARCERATION AND FAMILY DYNAMICS ASSOCIATED WITH INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION: A LIFE COURSE PERSPECTIVE ON SOCIAL LEARNING

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Background

- Negative effects of recent incarceration trends for neighborhoods, families, and individuals

- Findings indicate negative consequences for the next generation across multiple domains (e.g., delinquency, educational attainment, cj involvement)

- Yet this research has developed along separate track from broader ‘causes of crime’ and related criminological research
Uncoupling Crime and Incarceration

- Research on effects focused largely on family stress, labeling/stigma, and loss of attachment that ties directly to the parent’s incarceration.
- Other features of family life have been included primarily as potential controls, or factors that affect incarceration’s impact.
Uncoupling Crime and Incarceration

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- Other features of family life have been included primarily as potential controls, or factors that affect incarceration’s impact.
- Our objective is to focus directly on the broader family context within which incarceration often unfolds:
  - Critical for a comprehensive view of effects on child behavior/well-being.
  - Allows us to assess the degree to which PI and this broader climate often comprise a formidable package of related family risks.
Role of Social Learning Dynamics

- Most consistent effects of parental incarceration appear to be on children’s conduct problems, aggression, and delinquency.
- Research on incarceration effects often has limited controls for parent’s criminal behavior.
  - Offense severity and offending history are robust predictors of decision to incarcerate.
  - Strong connection between drug use and crime.
A Life Course Perspective on Social Learning

- Child often directly observes parents’ problem behaviors.
- Ongoing interaction and communication with child often fosters ‘definitions favorable to the violation of law’.
- Involvement with a ‘wider circle’ of family members and associates that potentially deepens exposure to criminogenic influences.
Research Objectives

- To explore the role of the broader family climate as an influence on the behavior and well-being of young people who have experienced parental incarceration
  - In-depth interviews provide basis for examining respondents’ own views of nature and perceived impact of broader family climate and parental incarceration
  - Quantitative analyses assessed associations between parental incarceration, broader family climate, and young adult outcomes, net of traditional risk factors
Data and Methods

Data

- Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study (TARS), 5 waves of structured interviews
- Waves 1, 3, 4, and 5 included a qualitative portion
- Respondents were 12-19 at wave 1 (2001) and 22-29 at wave 5 (2011)

Sample

- Quantitative analyses, n = 656
- Qualitative analyses, n = 100
Measures

- **Dependent Variables:**
  - Crime, Intimate Partner Violence

- **Independent Variables:**
  - Parental incarceration
  - Parent/family antisocial lifestyle
  - Characteristics of young adult network (peer and partner crime)
  - Traditional parenting factors (parental support, parental control)
  - Neighborhood quality and other risk factors
Table 2. Coefficients and Odds Ratios for the Negative Binomial and Logistic Regression of Crime and IPV on Parental Incarceration, Family Context, and Sociodemographic Characteristics (n = 656)

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<thead>
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<th>Crime</th>
<th>IPV</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zero Order</td>
<td>Model 1</td>
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<td><strong>b</strong></td>
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<td>0.503***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parental Incarceration</td>
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<td>Broader Family Climate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent/family antisocial lifestyle</td>
<td>0.036***</td>
<td>0.030***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Traditional Parenting Factors</td>
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<td>Parental Support</td>
<td>-0.143</td>
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<td>Parental Control</td>
<td>0.241</td>
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<td>Overdispersion parameter</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIC</td>
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* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Model 2 includes controls for gender, race/ethnicity, age, mother’s education, mother’s employment, family structure, and neighborhood poverty
Figure 1: The Probabilities of Parental Incarceration, Exposure to Parent/Family Antisocial Lifestyle, and Neighborhood Poverty by Class Membership
“My father was never around. He was involved in the drug game a lot, and he was wanted by some drug guys, you know... He didn’t want us to know nothing about it, but we knew....He owed them a lot of money—and he couldn’t come around us. If they found him around us, they would have killed him right then and there, and us...”

“[recalling the first time he held a gun] My dad comes running in the house and he threw me and my brother guns. And said, here if they, if any, if it goes bad, aim for the heads.”
Influence of the ‘wider circle’ of family members

- “Once I started selling drugs, we came closer because we started smoking together…I don’t think I would have known her as well as I knew her before she died if it wasn’t for me selling drugs…When my mom died I kinda went on a ecstasy stint, I lost a lot of weight, I did ecstasy every day for like two weeks straight. I started drinkin’ a lot more too…I would just get a pint of Hennessey and just drink it… I was just kinda in a funk that it was hard to get out of so instead of tryin’ to find positive things to do I just got deeper into drugs” (Alicia, age 24)

- “My uncles and their girlfriends…it’s, it was pretty common in my family. I remember cause my grandparents raised me and my sisters. I remember them always arguing and stuff, and my grandpa, he would get real aggressive with my grandma. And we would have to get in the middle of it. Like as far back as I could remember. I was little, little…” (Krista, age 25)

- “I thought he was my dad...[and] for the longest time I was getting um sexually abused by um my stepbrother and sister. And they had been sexually abused their whole lives as well. Their mother was a recovering crack-head or whatever so they stayed with who I thought was my dad. I really try to block a lot of it out. It was a terrible time. I contemplated suicide daily back then” (Omar, age 23)

- “My dad, however, was an alcoholic. But and that did take a toll on us when we were younger, um, cuz my dad did have a lot of parties. He had a pool table in the basement and I was um, raped by one of his friends when I was 14. And my brother had heard me screaming one night and finally walked into the room cause he thought I was dreaming or something…” (Tasha, age 27)
Conclusions

- Findings suggest that a history of parental incarceration is linked to higher levels of serious criminal involvement and increased odds of IPV.
- However, in-depth interviews revealed that young people were often close-in observers of parental drug use and violence.
- These family circumstances appeared more outsized as formative/continuing influences from the child’s perspective.
- Quantitative analyses add support for emphasis on the broader family climate.
Theoretical Contributions

- That direct observation of parents’ problem behaviors is relatively common is inconsistent with:
  - 1. idea that these occur largely outside child’s purview
  - 2. notion that parental antisocial conduct rare feature of life within families touched by incarceration

- In addition to direct observation, parents exert influence via ongoing patterns of interaction and communication
Implications and Future Research

- Conceptualizing incarceration as part of a “package” of interrelated risks
  - View of parental incarceration as primary source of difficulties provides incomplete portrait of children’s vulnerabilities and needs
  - Focus on reducing use of incarceration insufficient (e.g. provide high quality drug treatment for parents to address underlying problems associated with cj contact)
  - Oversight is needed of child’s living arrangements during parental imprisonment
Thank you!

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