Paternal Incarceration and Early Child Behavioral Problems

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The U.S. has the Highest Incarceration Rate in the World…

- Significant racial divide among those incarcerated

- Violent crimes (e.g. murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault) account for more than 50% of all crimes committed.

- More than 90% of incarcerated men are fathers to children younger than 18 (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010).

- Elicits concern as to how children are affected, especially minority children.
Background and Contribution

Background:

- Literature:
  Confirms an inverse relationship between paternal incarceration and early child wellbeing (e.g. Craigie, 2010; Geller et al., 2012; Wakefield and Wildeman, 2011)

- Mechanisms at work:
  {resource deprivation, loss of parental capital, instability}

Contribution:

- Research Question:
  What is the effect of paternal incarceration on early internalizing and externalizing behaviors? By Gender? By Race/Ethnicity?
Data

Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWS)

- Geared towards understanding unwed parents and their children
- Follows a cohort of about 5,000 (focal) children born from 1998 to 2000
- Provides excellent data on paternal incarceration
- Data from the Five-Year In Home Longitudinal Survey used to assess child behavioral problems.
Key Variables

- **Paternal Incarceration:**
  Binary indicator equal to 1 if a father was incarcerated anytime after the focal child’s birth; equal to 0 otherwise.

- **Internalizing Behaviors:**
  Index comprised of 20 questions from the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) ($n = 1,982$). Captures symptoms such as depression, anxiety, and withdrawal.

- **Externalizing Behaviors:**
  Index comprised of 30 questions from the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) ($n = 1,960$). Captures symptoms such as aggressive, violent, hostile, and destructive acts.
OLS Specification

“Early Child Behaviors = f (Incarceration, X)"

- Other Covariates:
  {Child gender, birth order; parents’ age, race, education, household income}

- Caveat:
  Study does not account for bias from omitted unobserved variables.
General Findings

Internalizing
(Mean: 0.24)

Externalizing
(Mean: 0.43)

0.054**

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10
By Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internalizing</td>
<td>0.036</td>
<td>0.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Mean: 0.24)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Externalizing</td>
<td>0.055*</td>
<td>0.053*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Mean: 0.43)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10
By Race/Ethnicity

Internalizing
(Mean: 0.24)

- White: 0.076
- Black: 0.014
- Hispanic: 0.071

Externalizing
(Mean: 0.43)

- White: 0.069
- Black: 0.044*
- Hispanic: 0.106*

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10
Conclusions

✓ Inextricable link between paternal incarceration and early externalizing behaviors.

✓ The study indicates that paternal incarceration exacerbates externalizing problems among five-year old children.

✓ The effect on externalizing problems is statistically the same for boys and girls.

✓ The effect on externalizing problems is statistically significant for blacks and Hispanics, but not whites.