



# *Criminological* Highlights

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*Criminological Highlights* is designed to provide an accessible look at some of the more interesting criminological research that is currently being published. Each issue contains “Headlines and Conclusions” for each of 8 articles, followed by one-page summaries of each article.

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This issue of *Criminological Highlights* addresses the following questions:

1. Should schools suspend or expel youths who are involved in fights?
2. Will drivers of expensive cars stop at crosswalks and respect pedestrians’ right of way?
3. Should prison administrators institute formal systems of incentives and earned privileges to shape the behaviour of inmates?
4. Is the presence of a medical marijuana dispensary in an urban neighbourhood associated with unusually high crime rates?
5. Does the use of Conducted Energy Devices (e.g., Tasers) reduce injuries to criminal suspects?
6. When judges who have been sentencing under rigid guidelines are given more latitude to sentence as they see fit, does sentencing disparity increase?
7. What is the effect of the imprisonment of fathers on the behaviour of their young children?
8. How does the imprisonment of men affect their spouses?

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**The effect of harsh school policies on violent offending – those favouring suspension from school rather than sanctions carried out within school – can be counterproductive. For youths who tend to make careful decisions about their own lives, harsh school policies are associated with *increased* violent offending.**

Some of the most common delinquency prevention programs involve improving adolescents’ cognitive skills, or, in the context of these findings, encouraging thoughtful and reflective decision making. However, these findings suggest that “harsher school disciplinary regimes disarm the process of cognitive reflection.” Though there was some evidence that simple harsh policies (suspensions from school) might be associated with lower levels of certain misbehaviour (being drunk in school) for those youths with “extremely weak cognitive skills”, these positive effects were offset by the fact that harsh school sanctions undermined the generally favourable impact of thoughtful decision making.

..... Page 4

**When the motivation and opportunities to act in an illegal or unethical manner are held constant, those of higher social class are more likely to engage in unethical or illegal behaviour.**

Seven studies demonstrate that “relative to lower-class individuals, individuals from upper-class backgrounds behaved more unethically in both naturalistic and laboratory settings. It would appear that for ‘upper class individuals’ more favourable attitudes toward greed can help explain their propensity toward unethical behaviour. Furthermore, economics education, with its focus on self-interest maximization, may lead people to view greed as positive and beneficial.... The findings suggest that the pursuit of self-interest is a more fundamental motive among society’s elite [than it is for others]” (p. 4).

..... Page 5

**Systems of incentives and earned privileges in prisons may create more problems than they solve.**

As a result of the initial evaluation, which clearly found serious problems, there has been increased emphasis on fairness and a decrease in the punitive tone of the policy within the English prison system. The “language of rights and responsibilities is being used to emphasize earned privileges and links to addressing offending in part to offset (misguided) public and media concerns about ‘cushy’ prisons’.” (p. 39). More generally, however, the study shows that “There are limits to a rational choice model of prisoner behaviour, particularly with prisoners who find prison life difficult.... Maintaining dignity was more important to some prisoners than ‘being rewarded’.” (p. 39). “The key theoretical lesson... was that prison officers deploy their authority through relationships with prisoners. They use the rules [only] when relationships don’t work, and this is one of the reasons for the centrality of staff-prisoner relationships to prison life. If they resort to the formal rules without first going through relationships – without talking first – this is bad news for prison stability” (p. 40).

..... Page 6

**Having a medical marijuana dispensary in a neighbourhood does not increase neighbourhood crime.**

Although this study does not show an association between the presence of medical marijuana dispensaries and crime, it is, of course, possible that the introduction of these dispensaries could have had an effect on the neighbourhood characteristics that might affect crime. However, the research findings in this study “run contrary to public perceptions” (p. 529) and suggest there is no simple relationship between the presence of medical marijuana dispensaries and crime. When such an association is seen, the higher level of crime is more likely to be due to other characteristics of the neighbourhood (e.g., relative poverty, etc.).

..... Page 7

**When the police use Conducted Energy Devices (CEDs, known, typically as TASERs) in ‘use of force’ incidents, the accused person is more likely to suffer an injury than when CEDs are not used.**

There are no weapons that can be used without the risk of some kind of injuries. CEDs, are a popular weapon for police officers in part because they are seen as a tool that will incapacitate a suspect without increasing the risk of injury. This study suggests, however, that the use of CEDs may *increase* rather than decrease the likelihood of injuries to citizens in citizen-police encounters. Given the importance of police legitimacy, these findings from use-of-force reports completed by police officers are clearly important when considering the uses to which CEDs are put.

..... Page 8

**Liberating judges from rigid US federal sentencing guidelines did not have a substantial immediate impact on sentencing.**

After US federal sentencing guidelines were deemed to be advisory rather than ‘mandatory’, disparity and local variation do not seem to have increased. There was ‘extra-legal’ variation before judges were given more leeway in handing down sentences; for the most part, this variation continued. Greater freedom for judges to consider factors such as whether the offender was employed or had family or community ties and, more generally, “to use their own interpretations of focal concerns in sentencing, need not result in greater extralegal disparity or greater between-district variation, at least within the confines of an overall, now-advisory guidelines regime” (p. 830). It is possible that the guidelines had, prior to being ‘loosened’, created a culture of what sentences were to be expected. At least in the short run, giving judges the ability to be flexible did not create chaos in US federal sentencing. Judges largely followed the guidelines even after they were given additional ability to ignore them.

..... Page 9

**The incarceration of fathers leads to increased physical aggression in their 5-year old sons.**

Perhaps the most important finding, from a policy perspective, is that “the effects of paternal incarceration on boys’ physical aggression are concentrated among boys of nonviolent fathers” (p. 304). For young boys, 3-5 years old, the incarceration of their fathers appears to cause an increase in aggressive behaviour. Whether this will translate into criminal behaviour when the child is older is, of course, not known. However, given that the increase in childhood aggressiveness from paternal incarceration is concentrated in families of non-violent offenders, an examination of sentencing policies for these offenders might be warranted.

..... Page 10

**One of the collateral effects of imprisonment is that the imprisonment of the father of a young child increases the likelihood of a major depressive episode in the mother.**

Incarcerating a child’s father appears to have a causal link with the onset of depression in the mother. It does not appear to be solely a ‘selection’ effect. Though changes in the quality of the relationship between the parents explained some of the effect of incarceration, changes in parenting experiences and economic well-being appear to be important in understanding why mothers whose partners are incarcerated are likely to suffer from major depression. Mothers whose partners are incarcerated experience depression in large part because it “leads to financial instability among mothers, further deterioration of already vulnerable relationships, and growing parental stress” (p. 234).

..... Page 11

**The effect of harsh school policies on violent offending – those favouring suspension from school rather than sanctions carried out within school – can be counterproductive. For youths who tend to make careful decisions about their own lives, harsh school policies are associated with *increased* violent offending.**

It has been suggested that “an individual’s ability to process information adequately and to consider available choices effectively” – sometimes referred to as “thoughtfully reflective decision making” – will be important in youths’ choices to avoid involvement in crime (p. 499). There is some evidence, however, that “settings with high levels of sanctioning [may] *disarm* individuals’ cognitive decision making processes and *attenuate* the effect of thoughtfully reflective decision making on delinquent behaviours” (p. 501).

As part of a survey of adolescents in Grades 7 through 12 in 132 American schools, school administrators were asked to indicate what the school does with a youth who is caught, for the first time, fighting with another youth. Almost 70% removed the youth from school temporarily or expelled them permanently from the school. Youths in these schools were assessed on their level of thoughtfully reflective decision making by asking their level of agreement with questions such as “When you have a problem to solve, one of the first things you do is to get as many facts about the problem as possible.” Youths also were asked about their own violent offending, generally, not just in school. Previous research would suggest that a substantial amount of youth violence takes place in or around school.

Overall, youths who generally engage in thoughtfully reflective decision making were less involved in violence. This effect held up even when various individual characteristics (e.g., sex, age, race, family structure, school performance, prior levels of violence, and the amount of unstructured

socializing they engaged in) were controlled statistically. In addition, youths attending schools that removed youths from schools after they were caught fighting were somewhat *more* likely to engage in violence.

However, the effect of thoughtful decision making on violence differed depending on schools’ policies. For youths attending schools that used less harsh (in-school) techniques of responding to fights, the youths who engaged in thoughtful decision making were less likely to be violent than were those who did not engage in thoughtful decision making. Most importantly, however, the extent to which the youth engaged in thoughtfully reflective decision making was essentially irrelevant for those youths who went to schools with harsh levels of punishment for violence. It appeared that engaging in thoughtful decision making was rendered irrelevant by harsh school discipline procedures.

*Conclusion:* Some of the most common delinquency prevention programs involve improving

adolescents’ cognitive skills, or, in the context of these findings, encouraging thoughtful and reflective decision making. However, these findings suggest that “harsher school disciplinary regimes disarm the process of cognitive reflection.” Though there was some evidence that simple harsh policies (suspensions from school) might be associated with lower levels of certain misbehaviour (being drunk in school) for those youths with “extremely weak cognitive skills”, these positive effects were offset by the fact that harsh school sanctions undermined the generally favourable impact of thoughtful decision making.

*Reference:* Maimon, David, Olena Antonaccio, and Michael T. French (2012). Severe Sanctions, Easy Choice? Investigating the Role of School Sanctions in Preventing Violent Offending. *Criminology*, 50(2), 495-524.

## **When the motivation and opportunities to act in an illegal or unethical manner are held constant, those of higher social class are more likely to engage in unethical or illegal behaviour.**

“Greater resources, freedom, and independence from others among the upper class give rise to self-focused social cognitive tendencies....The recent (world) economic crisis has been attributed in part to the unethical actions of the wealthy... These results parallel [US] findings showing that upper-class households donate a smaller proportion of their incomes to charity than do lower class households” (p. 1). Seven studies were done to test whether upper class individuals were more likely to act in their own self-interest in circumstances where the motivation for self-interested behaviour was fairly similar for all types of individuals.

In the first study, observers recorded the status of cars approaching a busy four way stop. The California Vehicle Code requires vehicles to yield to any other car that has already arrived at the intersection. The observers recorded whether the driver of the target car cut off, or did not yield, to the driver who had the right of way. ‘Upper class’ drivers [defined by ratings of their cars] were the most likely to cut off other vehicles at the intersection even when controlling for sex and age of driver, time of day, and amount of traffic. A second study found that ‘upper class’ drivers (again, defined by their cars) were more likely *not* to yield to pedestrians at cross-walks. In a third study, students indicated their own social class and were presented with scenarios in which the protagonist improperly took or benefitted from something. Again, higher social class was associated with higher levels of unethical behaviour.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> study people were randomly assigned to compare themselves either to those with the highest or the lowest income, education, or prestigious jobs. Those who compared themselves with lower status people

described themselves, and apparently thought of themselves temporarily, as relatively higher in social class than those who compared themselves with high social class others. They were then put in a room where there was a jar of candy ostensibly intended for children and told that they could take ‘some’. Those who had been induced to think of themselves as ‘higher class’ people took more candy (from the children) than those induced to think of themselves as ‘lower class’ people. A 5<sup>th</sup> study asked participants to imagine that they were an employer offering a job to someone looking for a permanent job. They were told that the job would be eliminated in 6 months and were asked whether they would tell a job applicant that the job was temporary in order to get the applicant to accept the job that he otherwise might turn down. Upper class individuals were less likely to tell the job applicant the full nature of the job, and therefore, acted in their own self interest. A 6<sup>th</sup> study measured the propensity to cheat at a game of chance. The results showed that upper class participants were more likely to cheat because of their favourable

views of greed. The 7<sup>th</sup> study suggests that focusing on the benefits of greed eliminated the social class difference, suggesting that upper class people ‘naturally’ assume that greed is good.

*Conclusion:* Seven studies demonstrate that “relative to lower-class individuals, individuals from upper-class backgrounds behaved more unethically in both naturalistic and laboratory settings. It would appear that for ‘upper class individuals’ more favourable attitudes toward greed can help explain their propensity toward unethical behaviour. Furthermore, economics education, with its focus on self-interest maximization, may lead people to view greed as positive and beneficial.... The findings suggest that the pursuit of self-interest is a more fundamental motive among society’s elite [than it is for others]” (p. 4).

*Reference:* Piff, Paul K., Daniel M. Stancato, Stéphane Côté, Rodolfo Mendoza-Denton, and Dacher Keltner. (2012) Higher social class predicts increased unethical behaviour. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)*, PNAS Early edition, 1-6.

## Systems of incentives and earned privileges in prisons may create more problems than they solve.

In 1995, a policy of ‘incentives and earned privileges’ (IEP) was introduced into the prison system in England and Wales. Popular politically, the program was based on the idea that ‘good behaviour’ would be rewarded with certain privileges. The theory was simple: prison order would be easier to maintain and prisoners who behaved themselves would get the privileges they deserved.

The difficulties with the program begin with attempts to operationalize what is meant by ‘good behaviour’ and privileges. Rewarding prisoners for good behaviour and punishing them for bad is, of course, not new. But starting around 1993, “there was a marked harshening of the emotional tone of penal policy” (p. 28) which focused in large part on security and control. More generally, however, it seems that the Prison Service “had a somewhat simplified conception of the links between incentives, compliance in prison, and the likelihood of reduced reoffending on release” (p. 29). One difficulty is that ‘non-compliance’ takes many forms – non-engagement, for example. But, in addition, the ‘key earnables’ (p. 31) were such things as extra and improved visits with families, access to television and one’s own clothes, and time to interact with other prisoners.

Though prison staff approved of IEP, a systematic evaluation of the program in five prisons suggests that the operation of IEP may have been unfair. Prisoners were uncertain about what was actually required, and prison officers were unaware of procedures that were designed to make IEP operate fairly. It was unclear whether prisoners had obligations

to participate in certain treatment programs, whether privilege levels transferred with prisoners when they were moved to other institutions, and what the relationship of IEP decisions to classification and release/transfer decisions was. Prisoners saw the inclusion of family contact in the list of ‘earnables’ as being both unfair and counterproductive, since reintegration was harder to arrange if privileges involving visits were restricted.

More generally, however, wings of some prisons “developed significantly different practices” from others (p. 34). From the perspective of prisoners, “Overall, there were significant losses to staff-prisoner relationships, perceived fairness of staff and the [prison] regime, and perceptions of procedural justice in all five prisons” (p. 35). Staff, on the other hand, tended to like IEP because “it gave them a lever and could sometimes be used effectively to motivate individual prisoners” (p. 37). They believed IEP “improved prisoner behaviour, even though the evidence did not support this perception” (p. 37).

*Conclusion:* As a result of the initial evaluation, which clearly found serious problems, there has been increased emphasis on fairness and

a decrease in the punitive tone of the policy within the English prison system. The “language of rights and responsibilities is being used to emphasize earned privileges and links to addressing offending in part to offset (misguided) public and media concerns about ‘cushy’ prisons.” (p. 39). More generally, however, the study shows that “There are limits to a rational choice model of prisoner behaviour, particularly with prisoners who find prison life difficult.... Maintaining dignity was more important to some prisoners than ‘being rewarded.’” (p. 39). “The key theoretical lesson... was that prison officers deploy their authority through relationships with prisoners. They use the rules [only] when relationships don’t work, and this is one of the reasons for the centrality of staff-prisoner relationships to prison life. If they resort to the formal rules without first going through relationships – without talking first – this is bad news for prison stability” (p. 40).

*Reference:* Liebling, Alison (2008). Incentives and Earned Privileges Revisited: Fairness, Discretion, and the Quality of Prison Life. *Journal of Scandinavian Studies in Criminology and Crime Prevention*, 9, 25-41.

## Having a medical marijuana dispensary in a neighbourhood does not increase neighbourhood crime.

In 17 US states, marijuana can be sold legally to those who have a documented medical reason for using it. Concern has sometimes been expressed about the impact of having a marijuana dispensary in one's neighbourhood because of the perceived connection between 'drugs' and 'crime,' and the assumption that the presence of a dispensary means cash and drugs are likely to be carried by those using the dispensary.

However, marijuana dispensaries are not placed randomly in urban neighbourhoods: there is some reason to believe that for economic or other reasons they may be placed in high crime areas of the city. Hence it is necessary to go beyond a simple measure of the crime rate in neighbourhoods with medical marijuana dispensaries compared to crime rates in other areas of the city.

This study therefore examined violent and property crime rates in Sacramento, California's 95 census areas. Twenty-eight of the census areas had at least one marijuana dispensary. Not surprisingly, crime rates were correlated with such factors as the number of vacant housing dwellings (probably a measure of urban decay), high concentrations of single or disrupted households, high concentrations of males, high unemployment rates, and high concentrations of poor families. Without taking into account these (and other) factors, the presence of medical marijuana dispensaries was associated with violent and property crime.

The more appropriate analysis, however, which controlled statistically for the neighbourhood factors known to be associated with crime, showed that above and beyond those factors, the presence of medical marijuana dispensaries was *not* associated with an increase in the violent or property crime rate in the neighbourhood.

It appears that the factors related to crime rates in these California census tracts are consistent with studies of neighbourhood crime reported in other research. "However, no cross-sectional associations were observed between the density of medical marijuana dispensaries and violent or property crime rates, controlling for ecological variables traditionally associated with [theories of crime]" (p. 528).

*Conclusion:* Although this study does not show an association between the presence of medical marijuana dispensaries and crime, it is, of course, possible that the introduction of these dispensaries could have had an effect on the neighbourhood characteristics that might affect crime. However,

the research findings in this study "run contrary to public perceptions" (p. 529) and suggest there is no simple relationship between the presence of medical marijuana dispensaries and crime. When such an association is seen, the higher level of crime is more likely to be due to other characteristics of the neighbourhood (e.g., relative poverty, etc.).

*Reference:* Kepple, Nancy J. and Bridget Freisthler (2012). Exploring the Ecological Association Between Crime and Medical Marijuana Dispensaries. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 73 (4), 523-530.

## When the police use Conducted Energy Devices (CEDs, known, typically as TASERS) in 'use of force' incidents, the accused person is more likely to suffer an injury than when CEDs are not used.

Police are authorized to use force in circumstances in which ordinary citizens do not have this authority. In recent years, Conducted Energy Devices (CEDs), often referred to as TASERS, have been described as a tool that can "quickly, safely, and fully incapacitate citizens" without injury to them. Though the focus of controversy on the use of CEDs has been on deaths (e.g., the death of Robert Dzieka\_ski in the Vancouver, Canada, airport in 2007), this study addresses a more general question: Is the use of CEDs associated with increased injuries to citizens?

One of the advantages of CEDs is that they can be used at a distance and are not as lethal as firearms. Nevertheless, concerns have been expressed about their use. This study moves from individual case studies to systematically collected data on the use of CEDs in 13,913 'use of force' incidents in 7 US police agencies in which ordinary officers had CEDs available to them. The main data came from police 'use of force' reports filled out by police officers. Police officers used CEDs in 18% of these incidents (in 5% of cases CEDs were used alone, and in 13% they were used along with other forms of force). The researchers looked at the use of CEDs in relation to any citizen injury, type of injury, and whether the citizen was transported to a hospital. Various control factors – e.g, whether the citizen showed resistance, the citizen's age, sex, use of alcohol/drugs, presence of a weapon – were used to assess the impact of CEDs on injuries above and beyond these control factors.

There was a citizen injury reported in 32% of the cases – 41% of the cases when the CED was used alone, 47% when the CED was used in combination with some other form

of force, and 29% when no CED was used. Controlling for characteristics of the citizen and the encounter, use of a CED was still positively associated with injuries to the citizen. Compared to circumstances in which CEDs were not used, citizens were more likely to receive a more severe injury in cases where officers used a CED compared to cases where officers used only 'hard-hand' force. In addition, use of a CED increased the likelihood that the citizen needed hospitalization. Use of CEDs was, however, associated with a lower likelihood of injury, and a lower likelihood of injuries requiring hospital contact when they are compared to use of batons, dogs, or firearms.

One difference between this study and others is that in this study all injuries (including those, such as lacerations, burns or abrasions, that were solely the result of being hit with darts from the CED) were counted as injuries. In some previous studies, injuries directly related to contact with the CED were not counted as injuries. Injuries from the CED were counted because the alternative – excluding them because they are directly caused by the CED – ignores the fact that in

55% of cases involving CEDs, there was no injury at all. Furthermore, to exclude these injuries because they are seen as 'the intended purpose of the weapon' would suggest that gunshot wounds should similarly be excluded because they, too, are the intended purpose of the weapon.

*Conclusion:* There are no weapons that can be used without the risk of some kind of injuries. CEDs, are a popular weapon for police officers in part because they are seen as a tool that will incapacitate a suspect without increasing the risk of injury. This study suggests, however, that the use of CEDs may *increase* rather than decrease the likelihood of injuries to citizens in citizen-police encounters. Given the importance of police legitimacy, these findings from use-of-force reports completed by police officers are clearly important when considering the uses to which CEDs are put.

*Reference:* Terrill, William and Eugene A. Paoline, III (2012). Conducted Energy Devices (CEDs) and Citizen Injuries. The Shocking Empirical Reality. *Justice Quarterly*, 29(2), 153-182.

## **Liberating judges from rigid US federal sentencing guidelines did not have a substantial immediate impact on sentencing.**

The US federal guidelines have been in place since 1987. For many years they were criticized for being too rigid in that it was difficult for judges to ‘depart’ from the guideline range even in cases where they thought that justice would be served by a departure (see *Criminological Highlights*, 11(2)#4). Beginning in 2005, however, a series of US Supreme Court cases expanded judges’ discretion allowing them to sentence outside of the guideline range if they thought it appropriate to do so.

Concern was expressed by some that the decisions in these cases would lead to at least two problems: (1) Less consistency across judicial districts since judges were no longer required to follow a national standard, and (2) Increased disparity in sentencing associated with race, gender, and other legally irrelevant dimensions. One argument that was used to suggest that these problems would not be exacerbated is the fact that most federal district judges have *only* sentenced under the guidelines and would, therefore, continue to use the guidelines as a benchmark.

After the Supreme Court decisions that freed sentencing, somewhat, from the guidelines, the proportion of departures from the prescribed guideline sentence increased somewhat. Prior to the first of three separate changes to the rigidity of the guidelines, there were departures downward in 13% of the cases; after all of the changes had taken place, downward departures had increased to 25%. Upward departures increased from 1% to 1.8%. Judges were, therefore, somewhat ‘liberated’ from the guidelines in that they were more likely to depart. However, an increase in overall departures does not necessarily mean that there would be an increase in inter-district variability or an increase in disparity due to extra-legal factors such as race.

Looking first at variation across judicial districts, it was found that controlling for characteristics of the offender (e.g., race, age, gender, education) and the case (e.g., offence, criminal record of the offender), there was significant variation across judicial districts before and after the legal changes were implemented. In other words, judicial districts did vary in their sentences. However, looking across the various time periods – when the constraints on judges were changed as a result of legislation and court decisions – the amount of variability accounted for by judicial district did not change substantially.

Similarly, in each of the four time periods (defined by changes in legislation and Supreme Court decisions) there was significant variation in the sentences that were imposed due to extra-legal factors. Controlling for legal factors (e.g., offence, record) black and Hispanic offenders were more likely to be incarcerated than whites, women were less likely to be incarcerated than men, and non-citizens were far more likely to be incarcerated than comparable citizens. However, allowing judges additional flexibility in crafting sentences did not lead to substantial changes in the size of the effect of these extra-legal factors.

*Conclusion:* After US federal sentencing guidelines were deemed to be advisory rather than ‘mandatory’, disparity and local variation do not seem to have increased. There was ‘extra-legal’ variation before judges were given more leeway in handing down sentences; for the most part, this variation continued. Greater freedom for judges to consider factors such as whether the offender was employed or had family or community ties and, more generally, “to use their own interpretations of focal concerns in sentencing, need not result in greater extralegal disparity or greater between-district variation, at least within the confines of an overall, now-advisory guidelines regime” (p. 830). It is possible that the guidelines had, prior to being ‘loosened’, created a culture of what sentences were to be expected. At least in the short run, giving judges the ability to be flexible did not create chaos in US federal sentencing. Judges largely followed the guidelines even after they were given additional ability to ignore them.

*Reference:* Ulmer, Jeffery, Michael T. Light, and John Kramer (2011). The “Liberation” of Federal Judges’ Discretion in the Wake of the Booker/Fanfan Decision: Is There Increased Disparity and Divergence between Courts?” *Justice Quarterly*, 28(6), 799-837.

## The incarceration of fathers leads to increased physical aggression in their 5-year old sons.

It is well established that the incarceration of a parent has collateral effects on families and communities (see *Criminological Highlights* 12(5)#1, 9(5)#6, 10(2)#2, 10(3)#2). “Seeing a father arrested, visiting him in prison, and dealing with paternal absence may traumatize children” (p. 285). When combined with diminished financial resources and generally less favourable parenting, the effects on children can be serious. This paper examines the impact of paternal incarceration on very young children’s level of physical aggression.

Using data from a longitudinal study of largely ‘at risk’ families, mothers were interviewed in hospital shortly after birth of the child, and again when the child was 1, 3, and 5 years old. The aggressiveness of the child was assessed from the mother’s report when the child was 3 and 5 years old. The focus of the study was on incarcerations that took place when the child was between 3 and 5 years old. In addition, data were collected on a large number of ‘risk’ factors including whether the father had been incarcerated prior to the child’s third birthday.

Children were matched at age 3 on their likelihood of experiencing paternal incarceration after their third birthday. Boys who experienced incarceration of their fathers after age 3 were reported to be more physically aggressive at age 5. This effect held even when the sample was restricted to families in which the father had been incarcerated at some time prior to the boy’s third birthday. For girls, however, the incarceration of the father after age 3 did not increase childhood aggression.

Various statistical tests “provided no evidence that changes in family life (aside from paternal absence and stigma) mediate the relationship between paternal incarceration and boys’ physical aggression” (p. 299). Other analyses suggest that “the first time boys experience paternal incarceration, they experience it as they would experience the separation of parents – with increasing aggression while the father is gone that dissipates when he returns. For boys who have already experienced paternal incarceration, a new bout of incarceration has large effects both during the incarceration and after it” (p. 301). Removing a father who was abusive to the mother had an independent effect of reducing aggressiveness at age 5. Thus for these families, “the benefits of having a [father who was abusive to the mother] removed from the household may outweigh the costs” (p. 304).

*Conclusion:* Perhaps the most important finding, from a policy perspective, is that “the effects of paternal incarceration on boys’ physical aggression are concentrated

among boys of nonviolent fathers” (p. 304). For young boys, 3-5 years old, the incarceration of their fathers appears to cause an increase in aggressive behaviour. Whether this will translate into criminal behaviour when the child is older is, of course, not known. However, given that the increase in childhood aggressiveness from paternal incarceration is concentrated in families of non-violent offenders, an examination of sentencing policies for these offenders might be warranted.

*Reference:* Wildeman, Christopher (2010). Paternal Incarceration and Children’s Physically Aggressive Behaviours: Evidence from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study. *Social Forces*, 89(1), 285-310. .

## One of the collateral effects of imprisonment is that the imprisonment of the father of a young child increases the likelihood of a major depressive episode in the mother.

In some communities – most notably low income minority communities in the U.S. – the incarceration of a parent is a relatively common event. Incarceration clearly can have important impacts – separation of partners, transforming an intact family into single parent family, diminished social and economic resources, and stigma which “spreads to people associated with inmates” (p. 217). This paper examines the impact of incarceration of fathers on mothers’ mental health.

Currently in the US, “one in four black children can expect to have a parent imprisoned during their childhood” and the parent (most commonly the father) is likely to be “absent during key developmental periods of their children’s lives” (p. 218). As a consequence, the incarceration of the father can affect children’s mental health which, itself, is likely to have a negative impact on the mother.

The difficulty in evaluating the impact of the incarceration of the father of a child on the mother’s mental health is that “mothers who share children with incarcerated men may suffer from high levels of stress whether or not the father was incarcerated” in part, perhaps, because of the characteristics of men who are sent to prison. Alternatively, mental illness, or “depression itself may be associated with mothers getting involved with incarcerated men” (p. 220).

This study examined the families of 3,826 children from a survey in which the parents (a disproportionate number of whom were identified as ‘at risk’) were interviewed when the child was 1, 3, and 5 years old. Standard measures of maternal depression and life dissatisfaction

were obtained from the mothers at the 3- and 5-year surveys. “Recent” paternal incarceration was defined as incarceration at least once between the 3- and 5-year surveys and characterized 20% of the sample. Incarceration prior to the 3-year interview (39% of the sample) was defined as “distal” incarceration. Various factors associated with paternal incarceration and maternal mental health were statistically controlled.

Recent paternal incarceration was associated with a much greater risk of maternal depression. Some – but not all – of the simple association could be explained by characteristics of the mother (e.g., that she had a parent who had experienced depression or she experienced material hardship), and an additional portion can be explained by characteristics of the father. Nevertheless, the relationship of the recent incarceration of the father to depression in the mother was still significant. The effect of the ‘recent’ incarceration held even for those who had been incarcerated prior to the 3-year interview, suggesting that the effect was not caused simply by characteristics of the mother or father.

*Conclusion:* Incarcerating a child’s father appears to have a causal link with the onset of depression in the mother. It does not appear to be solely a ‘selection’ effect. Though changes in the quality of the relationship between the parents explained some of the effect of incarceration, changes in parenting experiences and economic well-being appear to be important in understanding why mothers whose partners are incarcerated are likely to suffer from major depression. Mothers whose partners are incarcerated experience depression in large part because it “leads to financial instability among mothers, further deterioration of already vulnerable relationships, and growing parental stress” (p. 234).

*Reference:* Wildeman, Christopher, Jason Schnittker, and Kristin Turney (2012). *American Sociological Review*, 77(2), 216-243.