

**Dissertation Summary**  
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**Managing the Situation: A Mixed Methods Study of Incarceration and Family Life**

Increasing attention has been paid to how interactions with the justice system exacerbate inequalities and hardship among families, yet two key questions have remained unanswered. First, how do different kinds of incarceration shape families? Second, to what extent do the changes that incarceration imposes on families contribute to differences in wellbeing? In my dissertation I use a combination of qualitative interviews and quantitative analyses to investigate the mechanisms through which incarceration shapes families over the course of three papers.

My first paper uses structural equation modeling to identify how changes in family resources and father engagement mediate the relationship between paternal incarceration and acting out behavior in children. Two key findings have emerged from this line of research. First, changes in family engagement, material hardship, and to a lesser extent maternal stress account for nearly half of the total relationship between recent paternal incarceration and children's behavioral problems. Second, the remaining relationship between paternal incarceration and children's behavioral problems is no longer significant when modeled with changes in family relationships and resources. This paper begins to address the lingering question of which mechanisms drive the relationships we see between paternal incarceration and intergenerational disadvantage.

The study of incarceration has necessarily been skewed toward longer prison sentences due to data limitations, and in my qualitative project I focus on families whose experience of incarceration consists of brief encounters with a county jail. For this project, I gained unique access to a rural county jail to recruit and conduct qualitative interviews with the families of men incarcerated both pre- and post-sentencing. Through 41 interviews, this project examines how families interact with the jail, and how the jail shapes daily life for a broad group of parents, partners, and siblings. One key finding from this rich data is that the collateral consequences of incarceration begin early and can be exacerbated by the uncertainty of pretrial incarceration. Families are responsible for shouldering much of the financial, organizational, and personal costs of their family members situation. Despite these costs, some families rely upon and even collaborate with the jail to provide treatment, structure, and care unavailable in the community.

A final paper builds on questions that arose in the course of these interviews. This paper examines how the relationship decisions mothers make when their child's father is incarcerated- whether to remain together, separate, or repartner- contribute to heterogeneity in family wellbeing after the incarceration. Mothers who separate face the largest decline in their own wellbeing as measured by parent engagement, relationship support, and cooperative parenting. Yet the increased prevalence of domestic abuse in these families relative to before the father's incarceration suggests the nature of the relationship had substantially changed post-incarceration. Finally, repartnering bolsters some of the losses single mothers report, and is associated with improvements in both the mother's relationship and parent involvement.

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