

3-2-2018

“The Criminal Class” – Long Term Social Health Consequences of Mass Incarceration

Spencer D. Schaaf
Portland State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/honorsthesis>

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Schaaf, Spencer D., "“The Criminal Class” – Long Term Social Health Consequences of Mass Incarceration" (2018). *University Honors Theses*. Paper 504.
<https://doi.org/10.15760/honors.508>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in University Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. Please contact us if we can make this document more accessible: pdxscholar@pdx.edu.

“The Criminal Class” - Long Term Social Health Consequences of Mass Incarceration

Spencer Schaaf

Peter Chaillé, Ph.D.

Portland State University

Abstract

The United States has been experiencing a dramatic rise in prison and jail populations since the 1980s, which has resulted in a much higher population of individuals reintegrating into society with a criminal record. This brand has been identified to cause several negative effects on one's social and economic capacities, with these effects being exacerbated on target populations such as minorities. Research on limitations and challenges placed on individuals with a criminal record were compared with World Health Organization standards for social determinants of health, to determine the potential for long-term health consequences as a result of society's social consequences for reintegrated criminals. A major failure of nearly every category for focus in social determinants of health was identified, ranging from social standing, lifestyle stress, unemployment and economic opportunities, and implications on social support for children. Multiple sources of academic work would culminate towards a strong implication that a felony sentence, criminal record, or extended period of incarceration, has direct and immediate consequences on one's ability to lead a long, healthy, and fulfilling life. Wide-scale policy reform would seem essential to curb any unforeseen long-term consequences of these findings.

Table of Contents

I. Body.....1

II. Methods.....9

III. Body.....12

IV. Results.....23

V. Discussion.....25

VI. Work Cited.....30

I. Background

Over the course of the past several decades, the United States of America's justice system has seen a dramatic and near continuous growth in its jail, prison, and sentenced population. The increases over the last 40 years has resulted in the United States increasing its incarceration rates by nearly 500%, and has made the country the world's leader in incarcerated individuals per capita. Although national crime rates have been steadily decreasing since the 1990s, the criminal justice discourse community finds general agreement that there is no significant evidence to suggest causation between the incarcerated population and crime rates, and the numbers of incarcerated individuals continue their rising trend regardless (The Sentencing Project, n.d.). Explanations for this rise in incarcerated and sentenced populations can be explained by an era of broadened police discretion and power, dramatically increased and often times forced sentences for specific crimes, and the exploitation of minority citizens, a large portion of legislation change which occurred indirectly or directly as a result of the War on Drugs.

In 1971, the Nixon presidential administration declared a state of emergency, claiming that dangerous and criminal drug use was the highest threat to Americans at the time, and formally beginning the U.S War on Drugs (Hagen, 2010, p. 22). This era of retributive justice led to the passing of various policies and legislation throughout the next several decades which would expand or refine the power of police agencies and American courts, with the formal War on Drugs extending well into the Reagan administration and beyond. The events which led to these policies is outlined by authors such as Michelle Alexander and John Hagen in their respective books, *The New Jim Crow*, and *Who are the Criminals?*.

Hagen argues in his text that the Nixon (and largely Reagan administration) distinctly and purposefully campaigned upon the ideals of realigning American values to those of 'good' and

‘bad’, creating an association for the public between supposed crime and fear. Hagen cites examples such as the Reagan administration’s ignoring of cocaine smuggling into the country during the Iran-Contra arms affair, and the simultaneous push to raise mandated penalties for the possession of crack cocaine (2010, p. 25). By pushing moral responsibilities unto the public and creating fear and hatred for criminal ‘bad guys’, Reagan was able to conjure support for a decade of harsh policies to retributively punish those who commit criminal offenses. Hagen writes that, “the costs of feeding [fear] with steadily increasing reliance on imprisonment should by now be apparent to criminologists and citizens alike,” (p. 29), and by this and other statements enforces his view that the heavy rise in incarcerated populations is strongly tied to policies created during the War on Drugs, and that the cultural shift created by the Nixon and Reagan administrations made these changes in policy inevitable.

Although Alexander’s work in *The New Jim Crow* focuses largely on the racial elements involved with policy change during the War on Drugs, her writing illustrates a general picture of how the policy change during the era came to be, and what its effects were. In a broad perspective, Alexander argues that the era of mass incarceration came to be through three major shifts in legislation - an expansion of the power and discretion for police officers in the streets, a restriction of discretion for judges in the courtroom along with harsh minimum sentencing laws and plea bargaining tactics, and the discrimination that occurs after release from incarceration to increase social control and re-entry chances for those affected (2012, p. 17). Alexander also aims to make it clear that the policies set up during this time were arguably purposefully intended to impact minority communities the most, and that the era of mass incarceration has created an inescapable criminal landscape that particularly grasps the African American communities of the U.S..

Alexander offers specific examples of the use and implications of such mentioned policies throughout her book. ‘Stop and frisk’ policing methods are one such policy, a legal precedent by which was established in *Terry v. Ohio* in 1968, which allows police officers to conduct lawful stops and searches of suspicious individuals on the lowered standard of reasonable suspicion. Alexander argues that stop and frisk policing opened the door for decades of police profiling of minority populations, making “searches of ordinary people driving down the street, walking home from the bus stop, or riding the train to become commonplace” (2012, p. 64). The use of this policy lead to the passage of further expansions, such as asset forfeiture laws which allow police agencies to keep materials and currency which they believe may have been used as part of a crime, which Alexander warns creates direct incentives for police officers to search as many individuals as possible to expand their budgets (p. 78). Furthermore, police create legal burden for individuals to prove their own innocence if they wish to reclaim this property, a luxury of which is not possible for those of low-income who are often targets of the policy (p. 79). These policies would serve as an explanation by which the justice system incentivizes the mass incarceration of low-level offenders, and provides only a single of many anecdotal explanations for a justice system which does not meaningfully impact crime despite its continual growth.

While Alexander seeks to examine the processes and legislation created during the War on Drugs, Hagen seeks to explore the cultural shifts in values and attitudes. The long-term implications of Hagen’s arguments is that the policies put in place by the Reagan administration are difficult to reverse due to the way in which the American public itself believed that they were in need of them. The Reagan administration created or utilized a significant sum of crime and criminal theory research which was used to legitimize the administration’s needs; one such being the 1972 study *Delinquency in a Birth Cohort*, which suggested that society contains ‘chronic

offenders,' or super-criminals whose offenses make up the majority of crime rates (Hagen, 2010, p. 107). Hagen points out the ways in which the Reagan administration used research such as this to convince the public that there were dangerous criminals who needed long-term incarceration to reduce their danger to the public (p. 108).

The 'chronic offender' theory aforementioned is one of several crime theories which delve into explanations of why individuals commit crime, and as many criminologists understand and accept, there are no theories which perfectly encompass all elements of criminal activity and provide completely plausible arguments. Some criminal theories, in fact, suggest that the rise in incarceration and sentencing rates may in fact be encouraging certain individuals to commit crime through the creation of 'strain'.

Strain theory is a modern crime theory developed by Robert Agnew in the 1990s, and expanded over time with more recent sociological developments and research, which seeks to examine the way in which stressors and road blocks in an individual's life can increase their chance of experiencing an emotional reaction, which can potentially be exercised in criminal activity (Agnew, 2001, p. 322). These stressors, titled 'strain', can come from various objective and subjective sources, but the most common types of strain linked to delinquent activity has been found by Agnew to be acute emotional trauma, discrimination and prejudice, and economic hardship (p. 323). From modern perspectives of crime theory such as Agnew's, it can be surmised that increased incarceration, and the unjustified incarceration of an individual, can potentially be seen as a source for increased crime. This would serve as an alternative explanation to that which the Reagan administration chose to support with the 'chronic offender' theory, but would be difficult to find acceptance in from the public due to an already existing shift in values.

Regardless of potential criminal theory, or belief in retributive or rehabilitative justice, the fact remains that incarcerated populations are still on the rise despite a near unilateral reduction in crime rates, and that modern criminal justice research suggests the two are not linked (The Sentencing Project, n.d.). An objective and logical evaluation of a successful prison system, regardless of belief in its purpose, would be to reduce crime rates linearly either due to successful deterrent or recovery of sentenced individuals, or through the removal of repeat offenders from society. The current system fails to find success through either of these interpretations; large amounts of crime remain being committed by a relatively small amount of offenders, and even those who commit only low-level crime often find themselves in a cycle of imprisonment and re-entry.

One of the largest general consequences of a jail or prison sentence is the increased chance of one returning for future incarceration. This can be explained by many varying issues in the sentencing methods of the U.S. justice system, as well as social problems exacerbated by incarceration

. Most individuals sentenced to jail time are there as a result of an inability to pay bail, or fees associated with a court sentence, with the average cost of bail for a felony in the U.S. being approximately \$55,000 (Curley, 2016). This economic strain is amplified by the fact that inmates in jails and prisons are often forced to pay for every item they use while incarcerated, such as hygiene items, postal supplies, and additional food sources beyond the legal minimum provided by jail and prison facilities. A study performed in 2015 by the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights found that approximately 76% of those released from incarceration are unable to find employment after release, and are forced into poverty by debts that average \$13,607 per individual (DeVuono-Powell, 2015). As a result, many individuals are without legitimate means

to provide for themselves, their families, and their financial burdens post-incarceration, and face a higher chance of resorting to criminal activity once again to make ends meet.

Beyond economic hardships, the justice system in and of itself does not offer substantial resources to alleviate the problems faced by individuals before they enter incarceration. Drug addiction is one of the largest pre-indicators of incarceration, with 85% of the U.S. prison population being sentenced for a crime performed while under the influence of alcohol or drugs, committed for money to purchase drugs, or simply incarcerated as a result of alcohol and drug use violations (CASA, 2009). According to a 2010 report by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, only 11% of all prison inmates facing substance abuse or addiction receive treatment in any form during their incarceration period (CASA, 2010). As a consequence, it can be expected that a large proportion of these individuals will continue to seek a fulfillment of their addiction disorders after release from incarceration, either being arrested again in the future or failing to meet the criteria of their parole.

The necessary approach for solving rising prison populations, sentencing system dilemmas, prisoner reentry, and breaking the cycle of imprisonment is dramatic and widespread policy reform. Current justice system policies promote law enforcement officials to seek low-hanging offenses such as drug abuse and property crime, sentencing guidelines and minimum sentencing laws take power away from court officials to give discretion on these cases, and the economic hardships and medical failures involved in incarceration create a culture which makes it impossible for individuals to reform themselves post-incarceration. One potential solution would be to create policy which protects criminal status citizens, giving them rights to medical care, affordable housing options, and stable employment opportunities – a task which would require evidence that the disadvantages placed on these individuals are worthy of a protected status.

The purpose of this research is to answer the following question: How do the disadvantages placed on individuals post incarceration come together to place collateral consequences on their socioeconomic capacities and psychological health? Additionally, do these elements contribute significantly enough to the modern understanding of social determinants of health to separate these individuals to an at-risk group?

Although multiple individual studies and focuses of research have found targeted areas where those with criminal records are disadvantaged in society, few have gone far enough to collaborate research and propose that the U.S. justice system may be systematically putting incarcerated individuals into their own, unique, heightened-risk social group. Michelle Alexander argues in *The New Jim Crow* that there may be evidence of a systematic trend of injustice towards African-American citizens, but chooses not to focus on incarcerated persons as a whole. If evidence of a systematic problem in the labelling of those with a criminal record exists, there could be significant consequences to be examined for future policy reform. As the justice system moves to a more rehabilitative model, it could be a targeted interest to identify how the burdens of those with a criminal record could be alleviated over time.

This research will be conducted by comparing similarities and dissimilarities in existing research performed on wage mobility, education standards, voting rights, civic disenfranchisement, success of children, and living standards of those living with a criminal record. The evidence found in this research will be compared as it relates to social determinants of health identified in subsequent sections. The significance of this relationship is based upon the assumption that an infrastructural system's impact on one's health is an important concern and responsibility for any governing body. Due to the nature of work being performed, some findings

may be somewhat subjective and open to debate, that which will be identified to reasonable extent in the discussion section.

II. Methodology

For the purposes of this research, the standards by which convicted populations will be identified as a unique disadvantaged group will be based on their relative and potential status in relation to social determinants of health. These determinants are chosen for examination based on the ways in which the public health community has found the relative socioeconomic factors defined by them to have a significant impact on the mental and physical health, as well as the longevity of a person's life (Wilkinson, 1997, p. 1). This relationship assumed to be true, an argument could be made that the health outcomes of an individual who has been impacted by the U.S. justice system is to some degree a responsibility of various levels of governing. The U.S. Constitution guarantees, "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," to all citizens, and a failure of U.S. governing bodies to protect the health of individuals inducted to the justice system would represent both an infrastructural and policy-level failure.

Richard Wilkinson, social epidemiology expert from the University of Nottingham, outlines and establishes many key identifiers and the need for recognition of social determinants of health in his book '*Social Determinants of Health: The Solid Facts*'. The body of work performed and collected by Richard Wilkinson has been identified as a critical area of global sociological reform by the World Health Organization. In the aforementioned piece, Wilkinson asserts the importance of clear standards for individual health on a sociological level, due to the way in which it effects all people in modern society. He writes that, "An unhealthy material environment and unhealthy behaviour have direct harmful effects [on a person's health], but the worries and insecurities of daily life and the lack of supportive environments also have an influence" (1998, p. 7). In a most general sense, Wilkinson's social determinants find significance in the way in which a long-term degree of lifestyle and economic stress eventually

comes to place a physical detriment on one's health and potentially lifespan. An argument for the advancement of modern medicine is brought up and identified as an important factor, but Wilkinson argues that social elements have a larger contribution to the general health of a society (p. 7).

The key social determinants described by Wilkinson include position on the social ladder, general lifestyle related stress, emotional support early in life, social exclusion, stressful work environments, job security and unemployment, social support availability, addiction, access to healthy food, and access to transportation resources. It is worth noting that these are not strict or all-encompassing factors in relation to one's psychological and emotional health, as this will often times be uniquely related to one's personal circumstances and experience, as Wilkinson writes "disadvantage has many forms and may be absolute or relative" (p. 8). The definitions and criteria of Wilkinson's social determinants will be established in the corresponding passages of the body sections, with importance noted in relation to the evidence found on the status of post-incarceration individuals.

By analyzing research and statistical analysis from various accredited authors in the field of sociology and criminal justice, the body of work as follows will be to relate factors commonly attributed to those of current or post-incarcerated status to the social determinants identified by Wilkinson. The select social determinants examined will be position on the social ladder, stress, unemployment and economic security, and the emotional support for the children of individuals with a criminal record. These determinants were chosen based on the capabilities of actually making meaningful connections to the literature, and based on what seems most relevant in determining the separation of the subjects to that of the rest of the population. The purpose of the inclusion of the children of those with a criminal background is to identify factors which may

lead to cycles of imprisonment, and to identify if the consequences of mass incarceration can be applied across generations. Due to the wide array of disadvantages being examined, it should be noted that a degree of overlap between categories may occur and should be expected. As previously noted, some findings in the body sections may be found to be subjective, and this subjectivity will be acknowledged to varying degrees in the discussion section.

III. Body

Position on the Social Ladder/Social Gradient

The first social determinant of health under examination will be one's position on the social ladder, or as Wilkinson calls it, the social gradient. In his work, he argues that economic status and position has a strong impact on one's general health, writing that, "Between the top and bottom, health standards show a continuous social gradient, so even junior office staff tend to suffer much more disease and earlier death than more senior staff" (Wilkinson, 1998, p. 8).

In an additional piece of work by Wilkinson, *Socioeconomic determinants of health: Health inequalities*, the impacts of economic status on health are examined in further detail than in his main piece used for this body of work. One area examined includes mortality rates among differing levels of income. Although Wilkinson acknowledges that the difference in mortality among income levels is much less dramatic in relatively wealthy nations such as the United States, a trend of negative health linked to low income can still be observed. Wilkinson's body of research shows significant links between the long-term health and lifespan of individuals and their ability to create wage mobility and improve their economic standing, highlighting the regular stresses and lack of fulfillment which comes from the inability to find achievement in one's career. A graph of mortality observed in over 300,000 men from the United States is provided below in Figure 1.

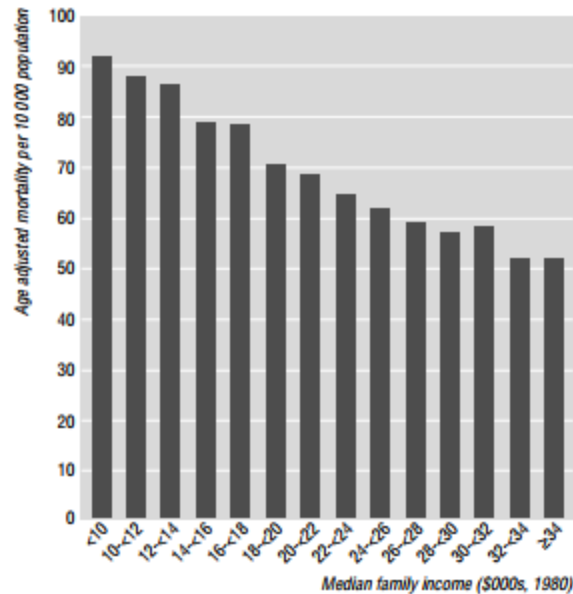


Figure 1. Age adjusted mortality of 300,685 white American men by median family income of zip code areas in the United States.

Although the income inequality gap in America is an issue which effects nearly all citizens, and is a well-documented issue in its own regard, those with a criminal history stand to have a unique and immediate effect on their own economic standing and capacities. Multiple sources of research-based evidence would suggest that incarceration, or a criminal status, has a strong and lasting impact on one's place on the social ladder, specifically due to the impact on the median and ceilings of average income levels, wage mobility, and the ability to attain higher levels of residential status.

In a 2002 report and study published in the American Sociology Review, author Bruce Western analyzed almost 20 years of economic reporting and interviewing of men with a history of incarceration to determine the long-term effects of a criminal background on wage mobility and economic capacities. Elements adjusted for by Western's analysis included education, age, and race, and the results found were additionally adjusted by comparing the data to existing data

on wage gaps between those without a history of incarceration. The results of Western's data suggested "strong evidence that incarceration reduces the wages of ex-in-mates by 10 to 20 percent," (Western, 2002, p. 541) and, "incarceration was also found to reduce the rate of wage growth by about 30 percent." Western noted in his discussion that the impact of incarceration on the wages of minorities was almost definitely much more severe than his findings would suggest, as his data was adjusted for variables such as race (p. 542).

A 2013 study performed by Michael Massoglia and peers found that in addition to potential implications on wage mobility, a history of incarceration is likely to have an impact on higher neighborhood attainment for those with a criminal record. They identify that, "for the nearly 80 percent of prisoners released on parole supervision, the close monitoring of ex-inmate living arrangements may create additional barriers to finding adequate and stable housing..." and that, "correctional agencies often require pre approval of housing choices, and in many respects housing discrimination against former inmates is now legally sanctioned" (Massoglia, et. al., 2013, p. 146). By examining the Bureau of Labor Statistics geographic data on respondents to the BLS Census, the authors identify and monitor incarceration status of approximately 558 individuals in relation to their residential status and location to draw conclusions on the relationship between the two (p. 149).

The findings of the study confirmed hypotheses that felon-status and incarceration have a strong relationship with the residential capacities of Americans of all races (p. 152). Generally speaking, the individuals who found themselves enduring cycles of incarceration also were unable to pull themselves out from low-income communities after release and reintegration. When adjusted for other factors such as prior employment, marital status, and living situations prior to incarceration, the authors note that the effect is diminished on Caucasians, but

exacerbated in the cases of minority groups such as Hispanic populations (p. 154-155). Due to the assumption that poor housing, and an inability to upgrade one's living amenities, can be a major source of stagnation on one's position on the social and economic ladder, these findings suggest troubling correlations between incarceration and one's ability to move upwards in society in a productive and healthy manner.

Stress

Wilkinson identifies stress to be a major contributor to various health concerns, despite its widespread nature and tendency to be overlooked. Elements of a stressful lifestyle are attributed as, "continuing anxiety, insecurity, low self-esteem, social isolation and lack of control over work and home life" (Wilkinson, 1998, p. 10). The consequences of stress are clearly identifiable from a medical standpoint, and stem from the ways in which the body is frequently compensating for psychological stress by raising heart rates and increasing blood flow to muscles to prepare for physical danger. The long-term medical effects of a stressful lifestyle are described as, "depression, increased susceptibility to infection, diabetes, and a harmful pattern of cholesterol and fats in the blood, high blood pressure and the attendant risks of heart attack and stroke" (p. 11).

Identifying factors for stress in the life of a criminal-status or post-incarceration individual can be difficult to ascertain and generalize based on the subjective nature in which they are applied on a case-by-case basis.

Two areas of stress identified by Wilkinson, anxiety and insecurity, can be generally applied to many post-incarceration individuals as a result of an inability for the U.S. justice

system to alleviate drug addiction and dependency symptoms. Previously identified in the background section, the National Center of Addiction and Substance Abuse has found that roughly 85% of all those in American prisons are facing sentences related to drug offenses (2009), but only 11% these inmates receive any form of treatment (2010). Drug abuse can lead to anxiety in individuals based not only upon the side-effects of the drugs in use, but also in the way in which one must live to fulfill the needs of a drug dependency. A 2015 article by USA Today reported that “only 2 cents of every dollar spent on addiction and risky substance abuse goes to prevention or treatment; the rest goes to pay for expenses such as hospital care, jails and courts,” (Szabo, 2015) indicating a widespread policy issue in the way in which the country handles the addiction crisis at large.

Another source of stress identified by Wilkinson as “lack of control over work and home life,” can be attributed to individuals with a criminal record by the way in which the current justice system often strips individuals from access to custody over their children. Authors Uggen and Stewart note in a 2015 report on the collateral consequences of incarceration that, “At the pre-conviction stage, parents can lose custody of their children immediately when police find drugs in a home,” (Uggen, Stewart, 2015, p. 1876) and that, “in many states, incarceration alone is grounds for termination of parental rights, while other states consider incarceration as a salient factor in assessing parental rights” (p. 1894). This has many direct consequences on the well-being of not only the individual in question, but their children as well, especially considering the fact noted by Uggen and Stewart that over half of all incarcerated men and women are parents (p. 1893).

Another source of lifestyle stress can originate from one’s inability to participate in the democratic functions and expectations of a citizen, and from one’s inability to use their voting

rights to make impactful changes to their local and federal political landscape. A study by Christopher Uggen and Jeff Manza sought to examine the effects of political disenfranchisement on felons, examining states and local legislations which have barred felons from their suffrage rights. The authors identify political disenfranchisement to be a mindset which has causal effects on the turnouts of local and higher level elections, apathy towards public governance and services, citizen ignorance, low trust in the political system, and accreditation political disenfranchisement to the rise in partisan politics and voter dealignment (Uggen, Manza, 2002, p. 779). Despite existing literature on voter disenfranchisement, the authors argue that there has been little examination on the direct effects of felon voter suppression laws on the issue, and write that, “overall, the combination of an increasing number of convictions, state laws that prevent most felons from voting, and the steady cumulative growth of the disenfranchised ex-felon population in those states that permanently restrict their voting rights has produced a significant overall growth in the disenfranchised population” (p. 782).

For the study, Uggen and Manza sought to identify the degree to which the lack of turnout from disenfranchised or legally barred felons effected past elections, and to analyze the political consequences of this if a positive result was found. By examining Current Population Survey (CPS) census data on presidential and senate elections, the authors found that 7 out of 400 senate elections between 1972 and 2000 would have been reversed through the input of higher felon voter turnout, which would have had severe enough effects to flip party control of the senate in both 1978 and 1984 (p. 789). In addition to this, the authors found it highly likely that the turnout of felon voters would have impacted the 2000 presidential election of Al Gore and Bush enough to have given the presidency to Al Gore, with some possible additional cases in 1960 and 1976 (p. 792).

Although voter disenfranchisement can have stressful results on any individual in society, the aforementioned research would imply that it has specific and targeted effects on the felon population, enough so to have had significant effect on national election results in multiple occasions. This assertion has strong implications on consequences of voter disenfranchisement on any specific population, be it felon or otherwise.

Unemployment and Economic Security

Those with criminal convictions were found in earlier sections to have negative effects on their economic capacities and position on the social ladder, but there is also strong evidence to suggest that a criminal record impacts one's ability to successfully obtain meaningful employment at all.

A study performed by Devah Pager, published in the *American Journal of Sociology*, found results which suggest significant correlation between race, criminal history, and the one's ability to achieve successful contact by employers. Pager's study measured the response rate of 350 entry-level employment opportunities (Pager, 2003, p. 947), with 4 artificial applicants submitting a day apart from one another with resumes and applications which were identical with exception to racially identifying names and the addition of a low-level felony drug offense (p. 948). The results of the study found statistically significant differences in the response-rates of Caucasian applicants to their African-American counterparts, and difference within respective races to their felony counterparts.

A brief summary of results include a halved chance of a Caucasian individual with a criminal record of achieving a response from employers, which dropped from a 34% to 17% response rate (p. 956). The response rate for African-American applicants was reported at 14%,

which places them at an even lower rate than a Caucasian felon. Additionally, there was a response rate of just 5% in applicants who were both identified as African-American and possessed a criminal record, placing them at a crossroads with the lowest responses of any potential candidate (p. 958). Pager's visualization of these results can be found in Figure 2.

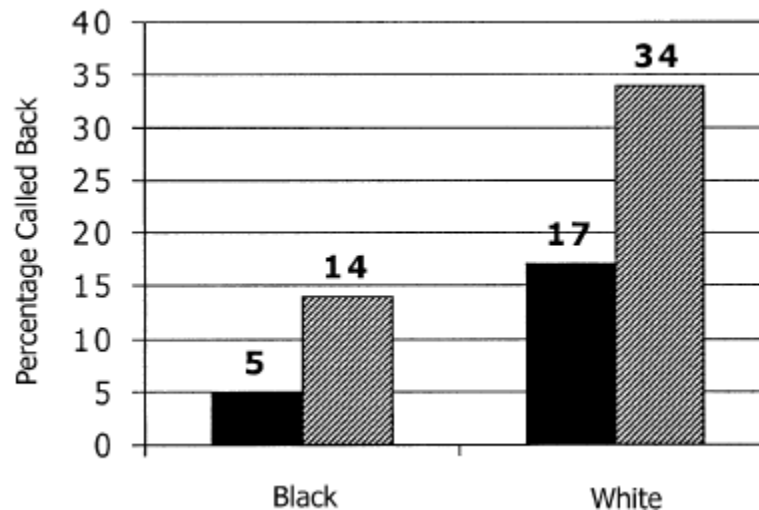


Figure 2. The effect of a criminal record on black and white applicants. The black bar represents applicants with a criminal record, the striped bars represent those without (Pager, 2003, p. 958).

Pager expresses in the study's discussion that, "in our frenzy of locking people up, our 'crime control' policies may in fact exacerbate the very conditions that lead to crime in the first place," (p. 961) and her opinions in this matter would seem to be in line with this research's assumptions on the issues relating to social determinants of health. African-American individuals coming out of incarceration in the United States face near impossible odds when trying to find employment, and this poses dire consequences in their ability to achieve an income which can allow them to reintegrate successfully into society. It is within reason that an individual who cannot find legitimate means of livelihood under normal circumstances may find themselves in a

situation where committing further crime looks like an alternative solution. Wilkinson writes in his report on social determinants of health on the potential health implications, claiming that, “As job insecurity continues, it acts as a chronic stressor whose effects increase with the length of exposure; it increases sickness absence and health service use” (Wilkinson, 1998, p. 10).

Implications on Social Support for Children

Although poor support for children can overlap with various concerns relating to social determinants of health, Wilkinson identifies criteria for stressors in the early life of an individual which can lead to more serious implications in adult life. In addition to mentioning that one source of dangerous stress levels can be poor social support for young children (p. 10), Wilkinson also writes that, “slow growth and a lack of emotional support during this period [childhood] raise the life-time risk of poor physical health and reduce physical, cognitive, and emotional functioning in adulthood” (p. 12). The results of incarceration on children can be somewhat inferred by common knowledge; an parent cycling between periods of incarceration is likely to spend large portions of time apart from their children, potentially during critical growth periods, and this can have many varying and unpredictable effects on the psychological health of both the child and parent. Despite this, there has been research performed to identify specific areas in which incarceration affects the health of children.

One study, performed by Stewart Gabel and published in the Journal of the American Academy of Psychology, sought to examine the emotional adjustment and behavioral impacts attributed to children with an incarcerated parent. By compiling survey and reported responses in a wide variety of existing research, Gabel concluded that the children of incarcerated parents

have a much higher potential of facing severe behavioral and emotional problems both during the incarceration of the parent, and beyond. These problems ranged from difficulty in school, antisocial behavior, anxiety, and symptoms of depression, and stemmed from factors such as, “1) separation, 2) identification with the incarcerated parent, 3) social stigma, and 4) deception of the child about the incarcerated parent’s whereabouts or the reason for incarceration” (Gabel, 1992, p. 40). It is also identified that none of these factors individually contribute to a child’s mental health in any meaningful way, as the impacts are unique on a case-by-case basis, and many children are able to work through the problems without exhibiting any major mental health dilemmas (p. 41). Despite this, the destabilization of a household created by separation and incarceration have a wide variety of potential impacts, those which might potentially affect the child’s ability to see long-term success in their own life.

Although results such as this may seem straightforward or predictable, there are many implications to consider if it can be established that an era of mass-incarceration is having long-term consequences not only on the mental health of the individual, but their children as well. As aforementioned, Wilkinson and the World Health Organization consider childhood to be a key and central area when the long-term mental health capacities and individualized feelings of self-worth are created by a person. The factors applied on a child with an incarcerated parents could have unforeseen consequences on the child’s ability to grow up and overcome their own challenges, may limit the financial and social capacities of the child, and may directly impact personalized success by limiting academic achievement and lowering potential for success in higher education. On top of these factors as they related to social determinants of health, the results of Gabel’s research could prompt a need for long-term criminological study to see if the rise in prison and jail populations, and therefore individuals with a criminal record, are making

impacts on future prison and jail populations by setting the children up for a lifetime of increased criminality.

IV. Results

As aforementioned, any conclusive results in a study of this nature would be discretionary and up to determination based on one's subscription to criminal justice theory and social policy belief. Despite the recognition of this fact, the results of the body of work would suggest a strong trend of problematic relationship between incarceration and the lack of fulfilment in regards to multiple key areas relating to social determinants of health.

When examining relevant areas attributing to social determinants of health – social standing, lifestyle stress, unemployment and economic opportunities, and implications on social support for children – multiple sources of academic work would culminate towards an undeniable identification that a felon sentence, or extended period of incarceration, has direct and immediate consequences on one's ability to lead a long, healthy, and fulfilling life. These detrimental factors range from inability to find meaningful employment or residence, lack of control over work, home, and social life, voting disenfranchisement, reduced employment opportunities, and potential implications on the success of one's children. In addition to the presence of these detrimental factors, the body of work examined would suggest that these elements contribute in a much more significant way to those already disadvantaged by factors such as race and income.

It is important to recognize the ways in which social determinants of health are subject to constant change, updating, or the addition of new factors as modern sociological research seeks to identify and alleviate the symptoms of their absence. Although the areas examined in the body of work were chosen based on relevance and capabilities to be meaningfully examined, it is likely that the effects of incarceration expand into multiple other categories based on

personalized life factors and other areas which could not be reasonably anticipated in an academic manner.

V. Discussion

The findings of the body of work open avenues for the discussion of a wide array of policy implications and improvements to existing legislation. In addition to this, the nature of the analysis performed as well as the field of study of criminal justice prompts a need for brief discussion on values and ideals.

Based on the results of the main analysis, there is an evident and present range of punishments and detrimental factors being applied to individuals post-incarceration, which would seem to both work against the core concepts of an incarceration based punishment system and place undue burden on the long-term ability for individuals to reintegrate into society. Regardless of a subscription to a rehabilitative or a retributive justice system, the purpose of jails and prisons in the American justice system is to punish individuals for crimes committed (or to separate them from society, depending on the crime in question), and prepare them for re-entry into society. The findings suggest that our policy and legislation is failing to fulfill this expectation by extending the punishments of criminal activity long past terms of incarceration, and instead separating criminals into a unique and lowered capacity of health and happiness. Additionally, the burdens placed on the economic and living standards of those with a criminal record has a potential to be actively working against the justice system by generating a culture of increased criminal activity as a result of a lack of legitimate opportunities.

The policy implications and legislative changes needed for progression on the issues at hand will be addressed in an individualized method for each area due to the unique and varying nature of each issue.

Economic burdens placed on those with a criminal record range from a lack of fulfilling employment, reduced wage potential and mobility, and the inability to find and improve living accommodations. Each of these specific issues in some significant part come from an inability for those with a criminal record to achieve employment in a reasonable matter, which in turns has impacts on one's ability to bargain for increased wages and employment rights in part.

Employers may logically choose to reduce their employment of those with a criminal record for a variety of reasons; for example - many businesses face internal issues relating to product or financial shrink, and may not want to hire an individual with a history of theft. Other businesses may simply wish to reduce the amount of variables that come from the nature of human labor to promote smooth functioning of task-based work. Despite this, some employers which have decided to actively seek out ex-convict employees have found success in their ventures. One of the largest employers of ex-convicts in the United States is the U.S. military, which has given "felony waivers," as a chance for former criminals to obtain meaningful work experience since World War II (Lundquist, et. al., 2018, p. 6). An analysis of 1.3 million ex-offender and non-offender enlistees to the U.S. military found that those with a criminal record are not only no more likely to be discharged for misconduct, but additionally find themselves promoted more rapidly and to higher ranks than their peers (p. 2). Beyond the military, research is currently being conducted on companies such as Dave's Killer Bread of Oregon, which boasts increased productivity due to the gratuity of the 300 staff members with a criminal background (Lewin, 2015).

Currently, companies in the U.S. are often forced to accommodate Affirmative Action Plan (AAP) employment blueprints which are designed to protect past-discriminated populations such as women or minority groups. These blueprints educate employers on how to seek out and

achieve increased employment for these protected groups, and sets goals for an employee composition which encompasses these groups. One potential policy implication to protect the employment and economic opportunities of citizens with a criminal record would be to either incorporate them as a protected group of AAP blueprints, or to create a similar program to incentivize employers to integrate a higher amount of employees with a criminal history.

An additional area of concern brought to focus by the research is the potential impacts of on the psychological health and wellbeing of criminal populations affected by these detrimental factors. Although small expansions of coverage in the mental health industry in the U.S. have occurred over the past several years in result of the Affordable Care Act, mental health crises are still identified as a major area in need of improvement globally by the World Health Organization, and most of the money used by the U.S. in regards of mental health is spent in tandem with the pharmaceutical industry rather than in rehabilitative care (Kliff, 2012). The impacts of this are made much more impactful on the populations branded by a criminal record, who face all the challenges of the average American in addition to their potential failure to meet key social determinants of health.

A 2005 report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics found that approximately 56% of state prisoners, 45% of federal prisoners, and 64% of jail inmates in the U.S. suffer from mental health problems, averaging to over half of all incarcerated individuals in the country. In this instance, mental health problems were defined as having had a mental health outbreak in the last 12 months, with a diagnosis or treatment received from a health professional (James, Glaze, 2005, p. 1). A further examination performed in 2017 by the Bureau of Justice Statistics found that 1 in 7 federal prisoners, and 1 in 4 jail inmates “reported experiences that met the threshold for serious psychological distress” (Bronson, Berzofsky, 2017, p. 1). This serious psychological

distress was measured using the Kessler 6 Nonspecific Psychological Distress scale, which screens by examining areas such as feelings of hopelessness, severe anxiety, worthlessness, and depression (p. 2). The combination of these findings would suggest that mental health problems faced by the criminal-status community are both severe, and potentially more prevalent than could be equivalently found in the general public. These findings would also fall in line with the body of research performed in this report, which suggests that those with a criminal record are additionally facing many key failures in relation to social determinants of health, and may face a myriad of health concerns down the line in result.

The solutions for a mental health crisis in populations with a criminal record would likely overlap with solutions posed for the nation at large. Key areas for improvement in the U.S. field of mental health include an increase of mental health care professionals and inpatient facilities, which must occur alongside a reduction in costs from insurance agencies or governmental assistance programs to make these services available to the widest possible range of patients. Once this infrastructure has been established, focus needs to be moved towards identifying early risk signs of mental health, and intercepting them with treatment before the problems escalate into a full-blown mental health crisis. Given the existing numbers which show the high rates of mental health problem prevalence in jails and prisons, these solutions would seemingly simultaneously improve the health of individuals after incarceration, and reduce the amount of individuals who become incarcerated because of undiagnosed or untreated mental health problems.

Although the issue of rising prison and jail populations as they relate to crime rates may remain a debate between partisan and theoretical belief frameworks, issues which relate

to the health and livelihood of American citizens should transcend debate and be mediated with policy reform and action. The body of research performed indicates a strong likelihood of the potential of future health concerns for those who are being made into social and economic outcasts by our current policy for those with a criminal record. Although the United States currently faces a wide range of dilemmas relating to the healthcare and happiness of all citizens, those which are caused in part by the U.S. justice system should be accepted as a governmental burden and obstacle for the nation's leaders as they enact policy creation and reform.

VI. Work Cited

- Agnew, R. (2001). Building on the foundation of general strain theory: Specifying the types of strain most likely to lead to crime and delinquency. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 38(4), 319–361.
- Alexander, M. (2012) *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. *The New Press*.
- Bronson, J., Berzofky, M. (2017). Indicators of Mental Health Problems Reported by Prisoners and Jail Inmates, 2011-12. *Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice*. Retrieved March 1, 2018 from <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/imhprpji1112.pdf>
- Curley, C. (2016). Mass Incarceration: How the US Prison System Creates a Cycle of Poverty. Retrieved January 25, 2018, from <http://www.genfkd.org/mass-incarceration-cycle-poverty>
- DeVuono-Powell, S., Schweidler, C., Walters, A., Zohrabi, A. (2015). Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families. *Ella Baker Center, Forward Together, Research Action Design*. Retrieved January 25, 2018 from <http://ellabakercenter.org/sites/default/files/downloads/who-pays-exec-summary.pdf>
- Gabel, S. (1992). Children of Incarcerated and Criminal Parents: Adjustment, Behavior, and Prognosis. *Journal of the American Academy of Psychology*. Retrieved March 1, 2018 from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/cc3e/ee1510d90d7137916dff3279ee55e4bf6ef5.pdf>
- Hagen, J. (2010). *Who Are the Criminals? The Politics of Crime Policy from the Age of Roosevelt to the Age of Reagan*. Princeton University Press.
- James, D., Glaze, L. (2005). Mental Health Problems of Prison and Jail Inmates. *Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice*. Retrieved March 1, 2018 from

<https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/mhppji.pdf>

Kirk, D. S. (2016). Prisoner Reentry and the Reproduction of Legal Cynicism. *Social Problems*, 63(2), 222–243. <https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spw003>

Kliff, S. (2012). Seven facts about America's mental health-care system. *The Washington Post*.

Retrieved March 1, 2018 from

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2012/12/17/seven-facts-about-americas-mental-health-care-system/?utm_term=.a6bface78236

Lewin, J. (2015). Oregon company makes a point of hiring ex-convicts. *Marketplace.org*.

Retrieved February 15, 2018 from

<https://www.marketplace.org/2015/12/16/business/oregon-company-makes-point-hiring-ex-convicts>

Lundquist, J., Pager, D., Strader, E. (2018). Does a Criminal Past Predict Worker Performance?

Evidence from America's Largest Employer. *University of Massachusetts Amherst*.

Retrieved February 15, 2018 from <http://www.workforcezone.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/ASRDraft01222016-1.pdf>

Lynch, J. P., & Sabol, W. J. (2000). Prison use and social control. *Criminal Justice*, 3, 7–44.

Massoglia, M., Firebaugh, G., & Warner, C. (2013). Racial Variation in the Effect of

Incarceration on Neighborhood Attainment. *American Sociological Review*, 78(1), 142–165.

National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA). (2009). Shoveling Up II: The

Impact of Substance Abuse on Federal, State and Local Budgets. *Columbia University*.

Retrieved January 25, 2018 from <https://www.centeronaddiction.org/addiction-research/reports/shoveling-ii-impact-substance-abuse-federal-state-and-local-budgets>

National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA). (2010). NEW CASA* REPORT

FINDS: 65% OF ALL U.S. INMATES MEET MEDICAL CRITERIA FOR
SUBSTANCE ABUSE ADDICTION, ONLY 11% RECEIVE ANY TREATMENT.

Columbia University. Retrieved January 25, 2018 from

<https://www.centeronaddiction.org/newsroom/press-releases/2010-behind-bars-II>

Pager, D. (2003). The Mark of a Criminal Record. *American Journal of Sociology*, 108(5), 937–

975. <https://doi.org/10.1086/374403>

Szabo, L. (2015). Addiction treatment hard to find, even as overdose deaths soar. *USA Today*.

Retrieved January 25, 2018 from

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2015/05/24/addiction-treatment-shortage/27181773/>

The Sentencing Project (n.d.) The Facts; Criminal Justice Facts. *Web*. Retrieved January 14,

2018 from <https://www.sentencingproject.org/criminal-justice-facts/>

Uggen, C., & Manza, J. (2002). Democratic Contraction? Political Consequences of Felon

Disenfranchisement in the United States. *American Sociological Review*, 67(6), 777–803.

<https://doi.org/10.2307/3088970>

Uggen, C., & Stewart, R. (2015). Piling On: Collateral Consequences and Community

Supervision. *Minnesota Law Review*, 99(5), 1871–1912.

Western, B. (2002). The Impact of Incarceration on Wage Mobility and Inequality. *American*

Sociological Review, 67(4), 526–546. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3088944>

Wilkinson, R. G. (1997). Socioeconomic determinants of health. Health inequalities: relative or

absolute material standards? *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, 314(7080), 591–595.

Wilkinson, R. G., Marmot, M. (1998). *Social Determinants of Health: The Solid Facts*.

Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe. Retrieved January 16, 2018 from
<http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/108082/1/e59555.pdf>