Punishment and Welfare:
Paternal Incarceration and Families' Receipt of Public Assistance

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Abstract

The US criminal justice and welfare systems together form important government interventions into the lives of the poor. This paper considers how imprisonment is related to welfare receipt for offenders and their families. Using longitudinal data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing study, it investigates how recent paternal incarceration is associated with families' receipt of TANF, food stamps, and Medicaid/SCHIP. Results robust to multiple tests find that incarceration does not increase the likelihood of TANF receipt but significantly increases food stamps and Medicaid/SCHIP receipt. Further, the effect of incarceration on welfare receipt is larger than the recent loss of father's employment. The findings suggest that an unexpected consequence of mass imprisonment is the expansion of government regulation through welfare provision for offenders' families.

A growing body of literature suggests that the US criminal justice and welfare systems together form an important government intervention in the lives of the poor. Considered the right and left hands of the state (Bourdieu 1998; Wacquant 2009) or the hard and soft sides of government (Cohen 1985), punishment and welfare systems have been jointly studied by theorists and empiricists. They have been variously proposed as tools of the state for social control (Cohen 1985), as strategies for managing social insecurity and racial inequality (Wacquant 2009), and as characteristics of broader perspectives for governing social marginality (Beckett and Western 2001; Garland 2001). In conceptual models, the retrenchment of welfare provision and the expansion of corrections are caused by a third, debated factor. It has been proposed that the developments are the necessary and direct result of neoliberal government (Wacquant 2009), the changing response of government and professionals to deviant and non-conformist behavior (Cohen 1985), or the products of larger shifts in the philosophies, politics, and public opinion about poverty governance (Garland 1987; Mead 1997; Garland 2001; Beckett and Western 2001).

Drawing from these theories, this paper questions how criminal justice and welfare systems are connected at the micro-level of offenders and their families. In doing so, the paper makes two contributions to the literature on social control and poverty governance. First, it will show that criminal justice and welfare have an important and likely causal *direct* connection. Second, criminal justice involvement is associated with *more*, rather than less, welfare provision—a relationship that runs counter to trends in policy development. The findings suggest that an unexpected consequence of "mass imprisonment" (Garland 2001) is that offenders' families also come under the state's supervision, albeit through its "soft" side of welfare provision rather through the "hard" side of corrections.

This paper uses longitudinal data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing survey to investigate how recent paternal incarceration is related to welfare receipt among families of offenders. The following section briefly describes literature on the relationship among criminal justice, welfare, and other government institutions, on incarceration and families, and on determinants of welfare receipt.

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Section II presents the data, measures, and methods. Section III describes the results and section IV concludes with a discussion of findings, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

I. Background

Criminal justice and welfare: modes of state governance

Criminal justice and welfare systems have long been considered two institutions that govern socially marginal groups. While the criminal justice system's role in managing deviance is explicit, the social welfare arms of government can also be viewed as governing non-conformist behavior (Cohen 1985; Garland 1987; Mead 1997). In *Regulating the Poor* (1993), Piven and Cloward posit that the contemporary US welfare system manages the behavior of poor people by reinforcing work norms, pacifying civil disorder, and ensuring that labor market participation at low wages and dire conditions is preferable to receiving government aid. In the debates leading up to the 1996 welfare reforms, welfare policies were portrayed as shaping consequential behaviors and motivations of the poor. It was argued that the permissiveness of welfare policies promoted non-work, crime, and female-headed households (Mead 1986), although the evidence underlying these arguments is debatable (Katz 1989). More recently, research suggests that the degrading aspects of welfare policies can negatively affect clients' beliefs about government responsiveness, willingness to raise grievances against the state, and perceptions of citizenship (Soss 2002).

Dramatic changes in welfare and criminal justice policy over the last three decades have led to a growing literature from a diverse group of scholars on the two systems as dual modes of poverty governance. Mead and colleagues (1997) suggests that a new form of paternalism, or the "close supervision of a dependent," characterizes recent government policies towards the poor, including welfare reform and criminal justice expansion (1). Garland (2001) describes a general shift away from rehabilitative approaches, which he calls "penal welfarism," and towards a new culture of control that is anti-modern and punitive. Beckett and Western (2001) posit that welfare retrenchment and growth in incarceration rates characterize a turn to punitive, state-level policy. Wacquant (2009) proposes that the

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work-based reforms of welfare policy and the expansion of criminal justice together form a joint strategy of neoliberal government for the management of economically and socially marginal groups.

Despite this rich literature, we have little understanding on how these two government institutions operate in the everyday lives of poor people. Policies from the 1996 welfare reforms prevent drug-related ex-felons from receiving TANF and food stamps in order to ensure that "undeserving" individuals are excluded from government assistance (Rubinstein and Mukamal 2002). Given these restrictions, it is not surprising that prior research on maternal incarceration and welfare receipt found little change, and even lower rates, of program participation post-incarceration (Butcher and LaLonde 2006). However, research on the individual level misses the gendered character of the institutions, where men make up the majority of the incarcerated and women form the bulk of welfare caseloads (Wacquant 2009). Recognizing the gendered division, this paper investigates how paternal incarceration affects maternal receipt of welfare in poor families.

The costs of incarceration to offenders and their families

It is not unreasonable to think that paternal incarceration could lead to greater welfare receipt among families, as prior research has documented a multitude of ways that criminal justice involvement has important and measurable consequences. The burgeoning of the prison system over the last three decades has made incarceration an unavoidable intervention into the lives of many families. In 2002, over 2.4 million children had a mother or father in jail or prison (Mumola 2006). These figures are even higher for particular groups of children because of the concentrated rates of imprisonment among young black men. It is estimated that 1 in 4 black children born in 1990 has experienced parental incarceration before his or her 18th birthday (Wildeman 2009).

The prevalence of incarceration has generated research on the link between corrections and other institutions. Incarceration is a destabilizing intervention for offenders' employment (Pager 2003; Holzer et al. 2004) and marriage prospects (Lopoo and Western 2005). Criminal justice involvement can restrict interactions with other government agencies, such as hospitals and schools (Goffman 2009). The growth

in female imprisonment, combined with welfare retrenchment, has led to recent increases in foster care caseloads (Swann and Sylvester 2006). State policies barring felons and ex-felons from voting have changed the outcomes of state and national elections in consequential ways (Manza and Uggen 2006).

As for incarceration and welfare, there are two main ways that paternal incarceration can financially strain families and lead to welfare receipt: loss of resources (including income and in-kind services) and incarceration-related costs. As a result of these dual processes, families with paternal imprisonment have reported increased material hardship (Schwartz-Soicher et al. 2009). Paternal incarceration decreases family income by eliminating paternal income during imprisonment and by reducing the amount the family receives after incarceration. According to a 2004 survey by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, over half of fathers in prison provided the primary financial support for their families (Glaze and Maruschak 2008). After release, offenders face substantial barriers to finding employment (Pager 2003; Holzer et al. 2004). Fathers are less likely to cohabitate with their families, resulting in fewer financial contributions to family income (Geller et al. *forthcoming*). Ethnographic studies describe fathers providing modest but critical financial support to families prior to imprisonment (Fishman 1990; Braman 2004); however, Comfort (2008) found that female partners were often better off financially after paternal incarceration. Ethnographies have also described many fathers as regular contributors of in-kind resources, such as childcare and other domestic help, which the family loses during paternal imprisonment (Fishman 1990; Braman 2004).

Besides the loss of resources, families also face various costs of criminal justice involvement. During imprisonment, families send money and care packages, travel to visit inmates, and accept costly collect phone calls; a typical prison collect call costs between one and three dollars a minute (Travis 2005). Ethnographic accounts describe family members so compelled to bring requested items to their partners in prison that the rest of the family had to go without everyday essentials (Fishman 1990; LeBlanc 2003; Comfort 2008). A survey of women visiting prison found that the average monthly cost of visiting, calling, and sending packages to their partners was $292 (Grinstead et al. 2001). After

imprisonment, the imposition of monetary sanctions can be substantial, particularly for already strained budgets (Harris et al. 2010).

Factors that determine receipt of TANF, food stamps, and Medicaid/SCHIP

While evidence generally finds that families face greater financial strain as a result of paternal incarceration, a range of factors—not only financial situation—affects a family's likelihood of receiving welfare benefits. A family's decision to enroll in means-tested welfare programs is complex, based on financial need, expectations of future income, ability of extended family networks to provide a safety net, and beliefs about the stigma of welfare receipt (Edin and Lein 1996; London et al. 2004). In addition to these personal expectations and beliefs, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) has also placed greater formal restrictions on eligibility for cash assistance or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and families must cross many hurdles to apply. In New York, which has one of the most complicated processes, applicants must attend two interviews, have a home visit, get fingerprinted, and enroll in up-front work activities in order to begin receiving assistance (Holcomb et al. 2003). Since the 1996 reforms, TANF recipients also face lifetime limits of five years, have greater work requirements, and confront stricter sanctions for noncompliance in many states (Morgan 2001; Rubinstein and Mukamal 2002).

At the same time as introducing greater barriers for TANF, PRWORA separated eligibility for Medicaid, allowing families to obtain Medicaid without receiving cash assistance (Teitler et al. 2007), and states have made concerted efforts to enroll children in the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), enacted in 1997. Similar efforts have been made with federally funded food stamp programs. Although there is considerable variation among states, many jurisdictions have multiple offices and entry points to enroll families in food stamps and health insurance programs like Medicaid and SCHIP in order "to help de-stigmatize these programs and distinguish them from traditional 'welfare'" (Holcomb et al. 2003). Further, the income ceiling to receive TANF is lower compared to food stamps and Medicaid/SCHIP, where states allow income above the federal poverty line and usually make

special allowances for families with young children. Because of these changes, recipients of food stamps and Medicaid/SCHIP experience fewer stigmas as government dependents or "welfare queens," labels more characteristically associated with cash recipients.

The likelihood that a family receives TANF, food stamps, and Medicaid/SCHIP depends on a variety of program-specific factors, including whether the family's household income is low enough to qualify for assistance, the family realizes they are eligible, the family believes that the benefits of receipt outweigh the costs and decides to apply, and the agency approves the family's application. The diversity of program-specific factors suggests that the impact of paternal incarceration on family's receipt of welfare benefits is likely to be different by program—TANF, food stamps, and Medicaid/SCHIP.

II. Data, measures, and methods

Data

To investigate how recent paternal incarceration is related to receipt of welfare benefits, I use data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study ("Fragile Families"). Fragile Families is a longitudinal study of approximately 5,000 children born between 1998 and 2000 to parents in US cities with populations over 200,000. The study conducted initial interviews in 20 cities with mothers shortly after giving birth, contacted and interviewed fathers, and oversampled non-marital births (for more information on study design and sample, see Reichman et al. 2001). Follow-up interviews were conducted with both parents when the child was 1, 3, and 5 years old. By the 5-year interview, nearly 85 percent of mothers were still in the survey sample.

I primarily rely on information gathered from mothers, beginning with the initial interview at the child's birth through the 5-year interview, due to the relatively high attrition rate of fathers in the sample. I exclude mothers who state that the father is unknown or that the father passed away before the 5-year follow up interview. I also exclude mothers who report that they have been recently incarcerated since the effects of maternal incarceration on families are very different from those resulting from paternal

incarceration (Hagan and Dinovitzer 1999). My final sample consists of mothers with complete information on all measures at both the 3- and 5-year surveys (N=3,202).

The Fragile Families data provides a number of strengths for investigating the consequences of paternal incarceration for families. A major difficulty with research on families of offenders is that a "family" can be defined in various ways. Because marital status does not fully capture familial relationships, particularly for groups that commonly cohabitate rather than marry, administrative records or other formal measures are not adequate.[1] Fragile Families data are ideal for this research because they provide information on both parents, regardless of marital and relationship status.

The rich amount of data collected about families and the longitudinal design of the Fragile Families survey allow me address concerns of selection bias in two ways. First, I am able to control for many characteristics prior to paternal incarceration that might affect selection, such as living arrangements, mother's labor market involvement, and prior receipt of social welfare benefits. Second, the longitudinal design allows me to use several statistical models—logit with lagged variables and fixed effects models—which utilize repeated measures over time for the same families to account for any stable differences between families.

Measures

Welfare benefits. I investigate a family's receipt of TANF, food stamps, and Medicaid/SCHIP. For TANF and Medicaid/SCHIP, mothers are asked whether they are currently receiving each of these welfare benefits at the 3- and 5-year surveys. For food stamps, mothers are asked if they have received these within the last year. In most logit models, I include variables for each of these measures at the 3-year survey as control variables (or lagged dependent variables) in order to capture prior knowledge of program availability. Fixed effects models use these measures at both the 3- and 5-year surveys.

Paternal criminal justice measures.

Recent paternal incarceration. This measure reflects mother and father's reports of whether the father was currently incarcerated at the 5-year survey or at any point between the 3- and 5-year surveys.

Prior paternal criminal justice involvement. This is a broad measure of whether the father has ever had previous contact with the criminal justice system. It is based on both mother and father's reports, and indicates whether the father has ever been stopped by the police for a non-minor traffic violation, charged and/or convicted for breaking the law, or experienced time in jail or prison by the 3-year survey.

Paternal employment. In some analyses I compare the effect size of recent paternal incarceration to recent loss of paternal employment, since job loss may be considered a third factor that leads to both incarceration and welfare receipt. To measure job loss unrelated to incarceration, I create a dummy variable for fathers that were employed in year 3 and unemployed in year 5 and did not experience recent incarceration. The measure is based on father and mother reports.

Material hardship index. This index is similar to the one used by Schwartz-Soicher et al. in their paper on paternal incarceration and material hardship (2009). It is the sum of five material hardship questions that are administered to mothers. These questions apply to the twelve months prior to the survey: did you receive free food or meals? Did you not pay the full amount of rent or mortgage payments? Were you evicted from your home or apartment for not paying the rent or mortgage? Did you not pay the full amount of a gas, oil, or electricity bill? Was there anyone in your household who needed to see a doctor or go to the hospital but couldn't go because of the cost?

Household income. This is a logged measure of mother's self-reported total household income. It includes multiple sources, such as formal and informal labor market jobs, public assistance, and child support, and it is measured before taxes.

Relationship with father. Relationship status is measured with three dummy variables for married, cohabiting and non-resident fathers.[2]

Presence of a social father. For mothers that are not romantically involved with the father, the Fragile Families survey asks about the presence of a new romantic partner. The variable "social father" is based on maternal reports that she is either cohabiting or married to a new romantic partner.

Labor market participation. A measure of the mother's formal labor market participation (y/n) is included to control for any differences between mothers that have recently worked and those that have not.

Total children. This measure of total children in the family includes children by the subject father and also by other partners of the mother. I expect that mothers with more children will be more likely to receive social welfare services.

Maternal demographics. I include maternal demographics, such as age, education attainment, race, and citizenship status, which are all measured at the baseline interview. Citizenship status addresses any differences in social welfare program participation that are due to eligibility criteria regarding nationality.

City of residence. Dummy variables are included for the city of residence of the mother at the baseline interview. Because the receipt of social welfare benefits are influenced by regional factors in a variety of ways—for example, policies on TANF and SCHIP eligibility, processes for applying, and generosity of TANF—these variables control for differences at the city level.

Methods

To understand the relationship between recent paternal incarceration and families' receipt of welfare benefits, I first provide descriptive statistics for families by recent paternal incarceration. I then use logit models with lagged variables and fixed-effects logit models to control for possible confounding factors. Recent paternal incarceration is regressed separately on TANF, food stamps, and Medicaid/SCHIP receipt for the full sample of families as well as a sample limited to families with prior paternal criminal justice contact. Limiting the sample to those with a prior history of criminal justice contact restricts the analysis to families that are more similar to each other compared to the full sample. In the limited sample, there may be fewer unobservable factors that could bias findings. These families may be considered the most likely to experience the "treatment" of recent paternal incarceration and the results may align better with experimental results compared to population based samples.

Logit models include independent variables measured at the 3-year survey and dependent variables measured at the 5-year survey. In most models, I include a lagged dependent variable measured at the 3-year survey to capture prior social welfare program participation. Including the lagged dependent variable controls for whether the family had prior knowledge about welfare eligibility and the application process as well as any family characteristics that are associated with prior welfare use but are not captured by the other independent variables measured at year 3.

The logit models include a rich set of control variables and limit the sample to those most likely to receive the treatment of recent incarceration to better address selection bias concerns; however, they do not eliminate the possibility that incarceration and social service receipt are both driven by unobservable factors. There may be unmeasured characteristics that affect a family's use of social welfare services and the likelihood that the family will experience recent paternal incarceration that are not addressed by limiting the sample to those with prior criminal justice contact. For example, if we believe that there is an unobserved factor of general family instability that is correlated with both paternal incarceration and social welfare receipt, logit models may not adequately control for this even in the limited sample. To adjust for any time-stable, unobserved characteristics, I use fixed effects logit models with limited covariates. These models control for unmeasured characteristics that do not change over time but that may affect incarceration and family welfare receipt. I also limit the sample to families with prior paternal criminal justice contact to further minimize potential differences between families with a recent paternal incarceration and those without.

While fixed effects models are useful for addressing concerns of time-stable, unmeasured factors, such as general family instability, there may still be time-variant, unobserved characteristics that bias estimates of paternal incarceration on welfare use. One possible scenario is that the loss of paternal employment leads to both incarceration and to welfare receipt. To address this, I include a dummy variable in the logit and fixed effects logit models for fathers who were not incarcerated but became unemployed between years 3 and 5 and I compare the incarceration coefficient with the coefficient for loss of employment.

III. Results

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Descriptive characteristics of families, by recent paternal incarceration

The overlap between welfare participation and criminal justice involvement is high, as families that experienced a recent paternal incarceration are more likely to receive TANF, food stamps, and Medicaid/SCHIP (see table 1). Twenty percent of families with a recent incarceration were receiving TANF, as opposed to ten percent of families without a recent incarceration. The majority of families with an incarceration (69 percent) were receiving food stamps (compared to 35 percent of families without an incarceration) and 77 percent were receiving Medicaid or SCHIP (as opposed to 51 percent).

Considering the independent variables, families that have experienced a recent paternal incarceration are different from families without recent incarceration on a variety of observable characteristics. The vast majority of families with a recent incarceration (91 percent) reported prior paternal criminal justice involvement (compared to 60 percent). Families with a recent paternal incarceration experience more financially precarious situations, even before paternal incarceration. They report lower household income, higher levels of material hardship, and are more likely to receive TANF, food stamps, and Medicaid/SCHIP before incarceration, compared to families without recent incarceration experiences. They are also less likely to be married and more likely to have non-resident fathers compared to families without a recent paternal incarceration. Families with a recent paternal incarceration were slightly more likely than other families to report having a social father in the household at the 3-year survey.

In terms of maternal demographics, mothers who experienced a recent paternal incarceration were more likely to be US citizens, to be younger, have less education, and to be black compared to mothers without a recent paternal incarceration.

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Families with and without recent paternal incarceration were similar on two observed characteristics—total children in the family and mother's participation in the formal labor market. Families had an average of about 2.5 children and the majority of mothers (nearly 60 percent) reported participation in the formal labor market at the 3-year survey.

Recent paternal incarceration and families' receipt of welfare

According to the descriptive statistics above, there are many differences between families that experience a recent paternal incarceration and those that do not. Recent incarceration is not a random event in the lives of families, and the following analyses aim to account for possible cofounding factors that bias estimates of the relationship between incarceration and welfare.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Tables 2 through 4 describe logit models with welfare receipt outcomes measured in year 5 and independent variables measured in year 3. In a model for TANF receipt (see table 2), recent paternal incarceration is significant in a bivariate relationship but is no longer significant after controls are added and the sample is limited to families with prior paternal criminal justice contact. Instead of recent incarceration, prior TANF receipt, material hardship, household income, and relationship with father are important determinants.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

For food stamps receipt, the story is quite different (see table 3). There is a strong, significant association between recent incarceration and food stamps receipt (column 1). This association diminishes slightly in size but remains significant when controls are added (column 2). The logit coefficient of 0.81 corresponds to an odds ratio of 2.25 times greater likelihood of food stamps receipt following recent paternal incarceration. When the sample is further restricted to families with prior paternal criminal justice contact, the logit coefficient on recent incarceration remains unchanged (column 3).

[Insert Table 4 here]

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The results for Medicaid/SCHIP receipt are similar to those for food stamps (see table 4). The logit model estimates a large and significant association between recent incarceration and Medicaid/SCHIP receipt (column 1). When controls are added, the size diminishes to a logit coefficient of 0.51, which corresponds to 1.67 higher odds of receipt for families with recent incarceration. The odds of Medicaid/SCHIP receipt are similar—and even slightly higher—for the sample limited to families with prior criminal justice contact (column 3).

[Insert Table 5 here]

While the logit models include a rich set of control variables and are tested on several samples, they do not control for time-stable, unobserved characteristics of families that may bias the relationship between recent incarceration and welfare receipt. To address this, I present results for TANF, food stamps, and Medicaid/SCHIP receipt from fixed-effects logit models (see table 5). These models include limited covariates compared to the logit models and account for any unobserved, stable differences between families. For TANF, recent paternal incarceration is not related to receipt in both the full sample and the sample limited to families with prior paternal criminal justice contact, corresponding to the logit findings. For food stamps, recent incarceration is significantly associated with receipt in the full sample (see column 3), corresponding to 1.67 higher odds of receipt. In the limited sample, the effect size and significance level remains virtually unchanged (column 4). For food stamps, the fixed effects models estimate a slightly smaller but still significant effect of recent incarceration compared to the logit models.

For Medicaid/SCHIP, recent paternal incarceration is marginally significantly related (p=0.054) to receipt in the full model (see table 5, column 5). When the sample is restricted to families who are more similar—those with prior paternal criminal justice contact—recent incarceration is significantly related and the effect size corresponds to the logit estimates reported in Table 4.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Figure 1 compares results from the logit and fixed effects logit models for food stamps and Medicaid/SCHIP receipt on the limited sample. The regular logit model estimates 2.24 greater odds of food stamps recent for families that experience a recent paternal incarceration, whereas the fixed effects

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models estimate 1.68 higher odds. For Medicaid/SCHIP receipt, logit and fixed effect logit models estimate 1.70 and 1.72, respectively, greater odds of receipt for families with a recent paternal incarceration. As the findings show, recent paternal incarceration is not associated with TANF receipt, but is significantly related to higher receipt of food stamps and Medicaid/SCHIP.

The above analysis provides suggestive evidence that recent paternal incarceration is not only significantly associated with food stamps and Medicaid/SCHIP receipt but may also be causally related. The use of samples limited to families most similar to each other aimed to minimize unobserved differences between families that did and did not experience a recent incarceration. Fixed effects models further account for any time-stable, unobserved differences by considering changes within families rather than between families. However, these models cannot address time-varying covariates that are not included in the model. One potentially relevant covariate is father's loss of employment, which could lead to the increased likelihood of both imprisonment and welfare receipt. Tables 6 and 7 incorporate a dummy variable for fathers who were not recently incarcerated and who lost employment between years 3 and 5. For food stamps, the recent incarceration coefficient is large and significant, while loss of employment is significant only in the logit, limited sample model (see table 6, column 2). For Medicaid/SCHIP, the recent paternal incarceration coefficient is larger compared to the loss of employment coefficient in the logit models, and is significant in the fixed effects models (see table 7). These findings refute a primary critique against a causal argument—that loss of employment, rather than incarceration, accounts for both incarceration and welfare receipt.

Taken together, the findings make at least two contributions to existing theory and literature on the relationship between criminal justice and welfare systems. First, results robust to multiple tests show that recent paternal incarceration is directly, and likely causally, related to receipt of food stamps and Medicaid/SCHIP. Second, the findings suggest that incarceration leads to *greater* welfare receipt, a relationship that runs counter to trends at the state and national levels.

IV. Discussion

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This paper investigated whether recent paternal incarceration is associated with families' receipt of social welfare services, specifically TANF, food stamps, and Medicaid/SCHIP. Because of differences among means-tested programs, I considered the effect of recent paternal incarceration separately for each type of government benefit. For TANF, logit and fixed effects logit models estimated a non-significant association between recent paternal incarceration and receipt. In contrast, models predict a large, significant effect of recent paternal incarceration on a family's likelihood of both food stamps and Medicaid/SCHIP receipt. For food stamps, the odds of a family receiving benefits are between 1.7 times (for fixed effects) and 2.2 times (for logit) greater than the odds for a similar family than has not experienced recent paternal incarceration. For Medicaid/SCHIP, the odds of a family receiving benefits are about 1.7 times greater (for logit and fixed effects models). The effect of a recent incarceration on food stamps and Medicaid/SCHIP receipt is larger than the effect of loss of employment.

It is not surprising that recent paternal incarceration has different impacts on a family's receipt of welfare benefits, depending on the program. As discussed earlier, TANF, food stamps, and Medicaid/SCHIP vary on numerous program-specific factors, including income eligibility thresholds, enrollment process, work requirements, time limits for receipt, and stigma of receipt. The inclusion of city-level dummy variables attempts to account for regional level variation but program-specific factors still differentiate TANF, food stamps, and Medicaid/SCHIP in consequential ways.

This paper contributes the first estimates of the effect of recent paternal incarceration on a family's receipt of social welfare benefits; however, there are limitations that the reader should keep in mind. First, it is likely that some fathers that experience incarceration have multiple children by different partners and thus have more than one nuclear family. In these cases, analysis using Fragile Families data may underestimate the effects to all families of offenders and may perhaps be viewed as a lower bound estimate of social welfare participation.

Second, the measure of recent paternal incarceration is dichotomous and it is likely that welfare receipt depends on finer characteristics of recent paternal incarceration, such as the length, frequency, and type of conviction, which are not reliably available. While the definition of a recent paternal incarceration

between survey years 3 and 5 necessarily limits the length of incarceration to two years, the data cannot reliably distinguish length of stay. It is also likely that other related factors, such as the distance between a family's residence and father's prison, matter to the costs of communication. Unfortunately, this information is not available.

Finally, paternal incarceration is not a random event, and it is possible that unobserved changes to the family could impact both the likelihood of incarceration and receipt of benefits. The paper has employed several approaches to account for this possibility—the incorporation of a rich set of control variables in the logit models, the utilization of fixed effects logit models, the limited sample, and the inclusion of father's employment; however, it is not able to address all scenarios that could possibly be correlated with both recent paternal incarceration and welfare receipt.

Despite these limitations, these findings specify an important relationship between incarceration and welfare at level of offenders and their families. The expansion of incarceration has not just widened state intervention for offenders but has also unintentionally shaped the lives of poor families by increasing state intervention through the soft side of welfare provision.

In the era of post-welfare reform, food stamps and Medicaid/SCHIP provide critical resources for poor families and entail the least punitive policies and procedures for receipt. While these benefits serve as important safety nets for needy families, the transition to government assistance does not come without costs. To the extent that the incarceration of a family member pushes families across this dependency threshold, they become subjects to the disciplinary sanctions, incentive structures, and surveillance techniques that shape post-welfare reform (Gustafson 2009). Scholars further suggest that participation in means-tested government programs entails social stigma (Katz 1996) and degrade a person's experience of citizenship (Morgan 2001; Soss 2002). While it is important to emphasize that these benefits funnel critical assistance to poor families, it is also necessary to underscore the ramifications of greater government intervention.

The study of welfare receipt is particularly timely given recent debates about the financial costs and sustainability of expanding criminal justice systems. This paper suggests that the correctional

system—and particularly imprisonment—is an even more costly policy intervention than originally

considered. Imprisonment not only requires direct costs of incapacitating offenders but also creates

greater costs to taxpayers and government for the provision of social welfare programs for families of

offenders. This is a revision of Elliot Currie's original premise, which proposed that the US saves money

on welfare and spends on corrections to address the consequences of joblessness (1985). This paper

suggests that the United States pays twice—once for incarceration and second for the unintended need for

welfare among families of offenders. Even when faced with constricted budgets, most states have

continually increased their prison populations while tightening expenditures for other programs and

services (Jacobson 2005). With the recent economic downturn and state budgets increasingly in the red,

policymakers must begin to consider these unintended costs of incarceration in budget calculations of

prison and jail admissions.

Endnotes

[1] According to a 2000 Bureau of Justice Statistics survey, less than one-quarter of parents in state prison were

married.

[2] A broader measure of paternal involvement was used in prior analyses, which included residency and financial

contributions (such as formal and informal child support payments), but was replaced by this measure, as it is more

readily interpretable. An alternate measure, which included in-kind services such as full-time childcare was also

utilized, but eventually excluded from the analysis because of lack of statistical significance.

Table 1: Means and standard deviations, by recent paternal incarceration

Variable	Recent incarceration		No recent incarceration	
Dependent variables (measured at 5 years)				
TANF receipt	0.20	(0.40)	0.10	(0.30)
Food stamps receipt	0.69	(0.46)	0.35	(0.48)
Medicaid/SCHIP receipt	0.77	(0.42)	0.51	(0.50)
Recent loss of father's employment and no incarceration	---	---	0.07	(0.26)
Independent variables (measured at 3 years)				
Prior paternal criminal justice involvement (yr 3 or earlier)	0.91	(0.29)	0.60	(0.49)
TANF receipt	0.24	(0.43)	0.12	(0.33)
Food stamps receipt	0.60	(0.49)	0.35	(0.48)
Medicaid/SCHIP receipt	0.77	(0.42)	0.55	(0.50)
Material hardship index	0.75	(1.04)	0.50	(0.85)
Household income (logged)	9.54	(1.07)	10.10	(1.12)
Relationship with father				
Married	0.13	---	0.38	---
Cohabiting	0.22	---	0.21	---
Non-resident	0.65	---	0.41	---
Presence of a social father in household	0.12	(0.33)	0.08	(0.27)
Participation in formal labor market (y/n)	0.55	(0.50)	0.58	(0.49)
Total children	2.58	(1.50)	2.45	(1.40)
Maternal demographics				
Age (in years)	25.74	(5.38)	28.66	(6.07)
Education				
Some HS or less	0.39	---	0.28	---
HS graduate or equivalent	0.37	---	0.31	---
Some college	0.22	---	0.27	---
College graduate	0.01	---	0.14	---
Race				
Black, non-Hispanic	0.62	---	0.47	---
White, non-Hispanic	0.16	---	0.25	---
Hispanic	0.20	---	0.24	---
Other	0.03	---	0.04	---
US citizen	0.98	(0.14)	0.91	(0.28)
N	388		2814	

Table 2: Logit model for TANF receipt

	(1)		(2)		(3)	
Recent paternal incarceration	0.77	(0.14)***	0.20	(0.17)	0.15	(0.18)
Prior paternal criminal justice contact			0.37	(0.16)*	---	
Prior TANF receipt			1.43	(0.15)***	1.39	(0.16)***
Material hardship index			0.17	(0.07)**	0.17	(0.07)*
Household income (logged)			-0.40	(0.07)***	-0.39	(0.07)***
Relationship with father (non-resident reference)						
Married			-0.73	(0.22)***	-0.62	(0.25)*
Cohabiting			-0.19	(0.17)	-0.17	(0.18)
Presence of a social father in household			-0.40	(0.22)	-0.47	(0.25)
Participation in formal labor market (y/n)			-0.21	(0.15)	-0.16	(0.16)
Total children			0.09	(0.05)	0.09	(0.05)
US citizen			0.96	(0.37)**	0.64	(0.42)
Maternal demographics						
Age (in years)			-0.01	(0.01)	-0.02	(0.02)
Education (less than HS reference)						
HS graduate or equivalent			-0.18	(0.15)	-0.10	(0.17)
Some college			-0.50	(0.20)*	-0.45	().23)*
College graduate			-1.89	(0.75)*	-1.82	(1.04)
Race (white, non-Hispanic reference)						
Black, non-Hispanic			0.10	(0.22)	0.11	(0.25)
Hispanic			0.06	(0.28)	0.16	(0.31)
Other			0.60	(0.41)	0.61	(0.52)
Constant	-2.19	(0.06)***	1.21	(0.85)	1.98	(0.97)*
Dummy variables for city of residence			√		√	
Limited sample: prior paternal criminal justice contact					√	
N	3202		3130		1999	

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Notes: columns 2 & 3: observations from one city are dropped from model because they perfectly predict outcome

Table 3: Logit model for food stamps receipt

	(1)		(2)		(3)	
Recent paternal incarceration	1.38	(0.12)***	0.81	(0.15)***	0.81	(0.16)***
Prior paternal criminal justice contact			0.12	(0.11)	---	
Prior food stamps receipt			1.66	(0.11)***	1.50	(0.13)***
Material hardship index			0.21	(0.06)***	0.20	(0.07)**
Household income (logged)			-0.29	(0.06)***	-0.28	(0.07)***
Relationship with father (non-resident reference)						
Married			-0.82	(0.14)***	-0.84	(0.17)***
Cohabiting			-0.29	(0.13)*	-0.23	(0.15)
Presence of a social father in household			-0.31	(0.17)	-0.43	(0.19)*
Participation in formal labor market (y/n)			-0.43	(0.11)***	-0.51	(0.13)***
Total children			0.20	(0.04)***	0.23	(0.05)***
US citizen			0.67	(0.23)**	0.74	(0.32)*
Maternal demographics						
Age (in years)			-0.04	(0.01)***	-0.05	(0.01)***
Education (less than HS reference)						
HS graduate or equivalent			-0.19	(0.12)	-0.14	(0.14)
Some college			-0.70	(0.14)***	-0.69	(0.17)***
College graduate			-1.68	().34)***	-1.60	(0.47)***
Race (white, non-Hispanic reference)						
Black, non-Hispanic			0.36	(0.15)*	0.32	(0.18)
Hispanic			0.13	(0.18)	0.04	(0.22)
Other			0.01	(0.33)	0.35	(0.42)
Constant	-0.60	(0.04)***	2.01	(0.69)**	2.59	(0.83)**
Dummy variables for city of residence			√		√	
Limited sample: prior paternal criminal justice contact					√	
N	3202		3202		2043	

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Table 4: Logit model for Medicaid/SCHIP receipt

	(1)		(2)		(3)	
Recent paternal incarceration	1.15	(0.13)***	0.51	(0.15)***	0.53	(0.16)***
Prior paternal criminal justice contact			-0.02	(0.11)	---	
Prior Medicaid/SCHIP receipt			1.68	(0.10)***	1.78	(0.13)***
Material hardship index			0.23	(0.06)***	0.19	(0.07)**
Household income (logged)			-0.32	(0.06)***	-0.31	(0.07)***
Relationship with father (non-resident reference)						
Married			-0.65	(0.13)***	-0.60	(0.16)***
Cohabiting			-0.05	(0.13)	-0.12	(0.15)
Presence of a social father in household			-0.11	(0.18)	-0.22	(0.20)
Participation in formal labor market (y/n)			-0.55	(0.10)***	-0.50	(0.13)***
Total children			0.21	(0.04)***	0.23	(0.05)***
US citizen			-0.33	(0.19)	-0.32	(0.28)
Maternal demographics						
Age (in years)			-0.03	(0.01)***	-0.04	(0.01)**
Education (less than HS reference)						
HS graduate or equivalent			-0.24	(0.12)	-0.02	(0.15)
Some college			-0.54	(0.14)***	-0.38	(0.17)*
College graduate			-1.22	(0.23)***	-1.19	(0.34)***
Race (white, non-Hispanic reference)						
Black, non-Hispanic			0.20	(0.14)	0.05	(0.18)
Hispanic			0.24	(0.17)	0.06	(0.21)
Other			-0.02	(0.29)	0.03	(0.40)
Constant	0.03	(0.04)	3.80	(0.70)***	3.58	(0.88)***
Dummy variables for city of residence			√		√	
Limited sample: prior paternal criminal justice contact					√	
N	3202		3202		2043	

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Table 5: Fixed-effects logit model for TANF, food stamps, and Medicaid/SCHIP receipt

	TANF		Food stamps		Medicaid/SCHIP	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Recent paternal incarceration	-0.03 (0.26)	-0.13 (0.28)	0.51 (0.21)*	0.52 (0.22)*	0.46 (0.24)	0.54 (0.26)*
Relationship with father (non-resident reference)						
Married	-1.32 (0.48)**	-1.53 (0.57)**	-0.72 (0.26)**	-0.45 (0.30)	-0.35 (0.26)	-0.23 (0.32)
Cohabiting	-0.36 (0.31)	-0.37 (0.34)	-0.47 (0.23)*	-0.35 (0.26)	-0.23 (0.21)	-0.38 (0.25)
Participation in formal labor market (y/n)	-1.45 (0.19)***	-1.65 (0.23)***	-0.81 (0.15)***	-0.71 (0.18)***	-0.65 (0.14)***	-0.52 (0.18)**
Total children	0.62 (0.17)***	0.65 (0.19)***	0.37 (0.13)**	0.65 (0.17)***	0.19 (0.11)	0.39 (0.15)*
Age (in years)	-0.27 (0.06)***	-0.26 (0.08)***	0.01 (0.04)	-0.05 (0.05)	-0.21 (0.04)***	-0.32 (0.06)***
Limited sample: prior paternal criminal justice contact		√		√		√
N	398	311	621	461	665	420

Figure 1: Odds ratio of food stamps and Medicaid/SCHIP receipt for families with a recent paternal incarceration, by model and welfare program
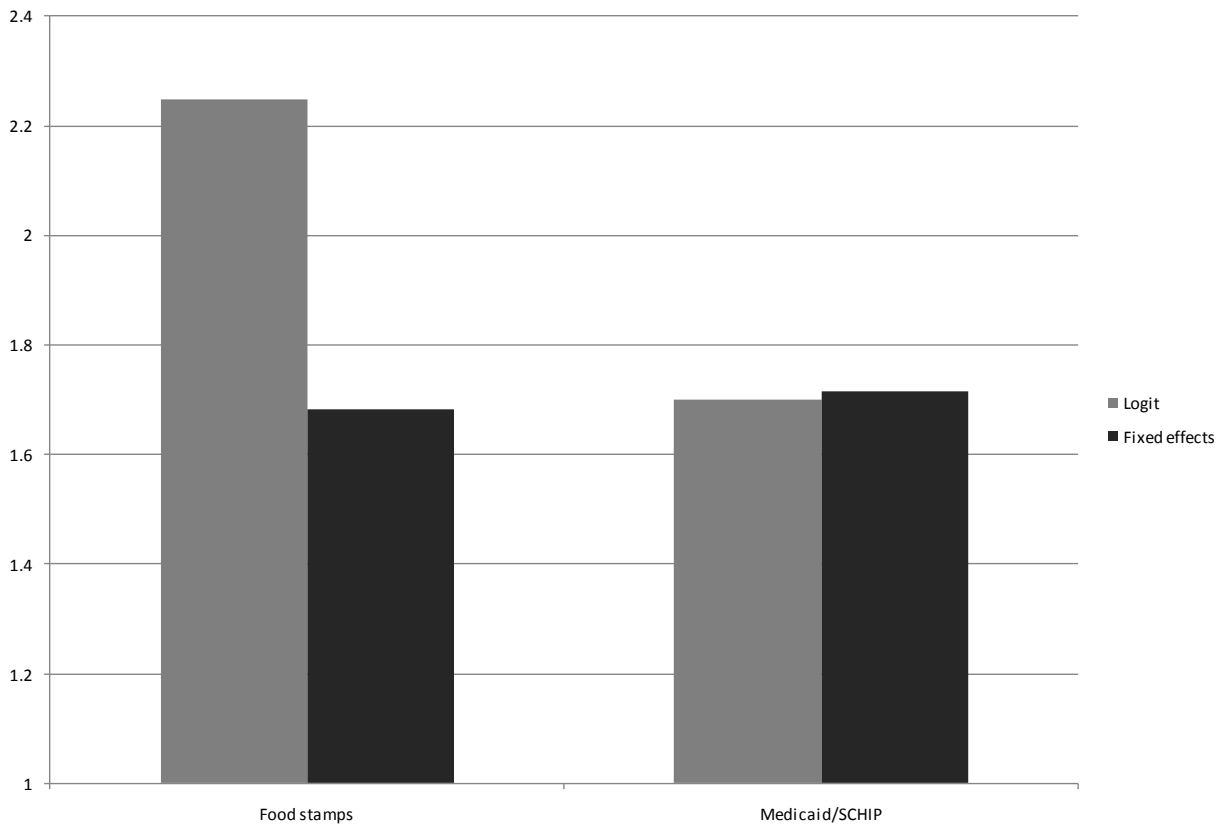
Table 6: Recent incarceration and loss of employment on food stamps receipt, logit and fixed effects logit models

	logit		FE	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Recent paternal incarceration	0.83 (0.15)***	0.86 (0.16)***	0.50 (0.22)*	0.56 (0.23)*
Recent loss of employment	0.27 (0.19)	0.55 (0.23)*	-0.13 (0.36)	0.48 (0.43)
Controls	√	√	√*	√*
Limited sample: prior paternal criminal justice contact		√		√
N	3202	2043	621	461

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Models include a dummy variable to account for missing data for father's employment. This coefficient is non-significant and not reported in the table.

√ denotes the full set of controls, including prior criminal justice contact, prior welfare receipt, material hardship index, logged household income, relationship to father, total children, presence of social father in the household, mother's participation in the formal labor market, citizenship, age, race, education, and city dummies

√* denotes limited controls, including relationship with father, total children, mother's participation in the formal labor market, and mother's age.

Table 7: Recent incarceration and loss of employment on Medicaid/SCHIP receipt, logit and fixed effects logit models

	logit		FE	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Recent paternal incarceration	0.55 (0.15)***	0.58 (0.16)***	0.51 (0.24)*	0.60 (0.26)*
Recent loss of employment	0.41 (0.20)*	0.51 (0.25)*	0.64 (0.35)	0.93 (0.48)
Controls	√	√	√*	√*
Limited sample: prior paternal criminal justice contact		√		√
N	3202	2043	665	420
*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001				

Models include a dummy variable to account for missing data. This coefficient is non-significant and not reported in the table.

√ denotes the full set of controls, including prior criminal justice contact, prior welfare receipt, material hardship index, logged household income, relationship to father, total children, presence of social father in the household, mother's participation in the formal labor market, citizenship, age, race, education, and city dummies

√* denotes limited controls, including relationship with father, total children, mother's participation in the formal labor market, and mother's age.

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