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Those They Leave Behind: Paternal Incarceration and Maternal Instrumental Support

As the American imprisonment rate has risen, researchers have become increasingly concerned about the implications of mass imprisonment for family life. The authors extend this research by examining how paternal incarceration is linked to perceived instrumental support among the mothers of inmates' children. Results from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (N = 4,132) suggest that recent, but not current, paternal incarceration is independently associated with less maternal perceived instrumental support and that this association persists after adjusting for a rich set of control variables, including prior perceived instrumental support. For families of recently incarcerated men, incarceration may be a double strike, simultaneously increasing the need for instrumental support while decreasing its availability when incarcerated fathers return to the community.

The American incarceration rate has increased dramatically since 1973, swelling the number of individuals and families affected by the criminal justice system. In 2009, 1 in 134 U.S. residents—a total of 2.3 million adults—were held in prisons and jails (West, 2010), and an additional 5.1 million adults were on probation or parole (Glaze & Bonczar, 2009). The consequences of incarceration for men are pervasive, as currently and formerly incarcerated men have damaged labor market prospects (Pager, 2003; Western, 2006), decreased union stability (Masoglia, Remster, & King, 2011; Western, 2006), increased physical health problems (Massoglia, 2008), and impeded civic participation (Uggen, Manza, & Thompson, 2006).

Yet incarceration is not only a common event in the life course of disadvantaged men. It is also a common event in the lives of their family members (Comfort, 2007). The majority of inmates have children, and more than 1.7 million children had a parent in prison in 2007 (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Even larger numbers of children have parents recently released from prison and under correctional supervision. Some groups of children are especially affected, in that men who are young, poorly educated, and members of racial/ethnic minority groups, residing in neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage, are at especially high risk of incarceration (Sampson & Loeffler, 2010; Wakefield & Uggen, 2010).

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Incarceration, then, may undermine the fabric of family life in the same way as other forms of family instability. Divorce and nonmarital childbearing, which have become more common in the past half-century, have adverse consequences for adults (Amato, 2000; Meadows, 2009; Williams, Sassler, Frech, Addo, & Cooksey, 2011) and children (Giordano, 2010; Kim, 2011; Sigle-Rushton & McLanahan, 2004). In the same vein, a growing literature describes incarceration as a force contributing to intergenerational social stratification (Wakefield & Uggen, 2010; Western, 2006). Children of incarcerated parents have more behavioral problems (Geller, Cooper, Garfinkel, Schwartz-Soicher, & Mincy, 2012; Murray & Farrington, 2008; Murray, Farrington, Sekol, & Olsen, 2009; Poehlmann, 2005; Wildeman, 2010) and decreased educational attainment (Foster & Hagan, 2007; though for a critical view, see Giordano, 2010, pp. 147–150). The negative consequences of incarceration for children may result from the loss of family income (Geller, Garfinkel, & Western, 2011; Western, 2006), diminished paternal contact (Swisher & Waller, 2008), or decreased maternal well-being (Schwartz-Soicher, Geller, & Garfinkel, 2011; Wildeman, Schnittker, & Turney, 2012).

BACKGROUND: CONSEQUENCES OF PATERNAL INCARCERATION

Although there is considerable interest in the consequences of incarceration for the individuals who are incarcerated and, to a lesser extent, their children, much less is known about the women who link incarcerated men to their children. Indeed, despite attention to the association between incarceration and family structure (Lopoo & Western, 2005; Massoglia et al., 2011), little quantitative research has considered how incarceration shapes family functioning. This is unfortunate, given that these mothers may be the nexus through which much of the negative effects of incarceration on children are channeled. Prior to imprisonment, many incarcerated fathers are romantically involved with the mothers of their children, contribute financially to their children's households, and share additional childrearing responsibilities with these mothers (Nurse, 2002). Incarceration, therefore, represents a forced and potentially unanticipated period of separation from their families, to whom fathers provide at least some

care. To be sure, a relatively small body of qualitative research has examined the familial consequences of paternal incarceration (Braman, 2004; Comfort, 2008; Daniel & Barrett, 1981; Fishman, 1990; Lowenstein, 1984; Morris, 1965), but most of this research has stopped short of exploring the social well-being of mothers (though see Wildeman et al., 2012).

Perceived Instrumental Support

In this study, we examined the relationship between paternal incarceration and one crucial aspect of maternal well-being: perceived instrumental support. The linkages between incarceration and *instrumental* support, the most common form of direct support overall, are particularly important and unite the subjects of several literatures (House, 1981; also see Swartz, 2009). For one, instrumental support is an important predictor of emotional, economic, and physical well-being among adults (Harknett, 2006; Henly, Danziger, & Offer, 2005; House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988; Thoits, 2011; Uchino, 2004; Umberson, Crosnoe, & Reczek, 2010). Furthermore, instrumental support is associated with advantages in children's health and well-being (Jackson, Brooks-Gunn, Huang, & Glassman, 2000; Leininger, Ryan, & Kalil, 2009; Ryan, Kalil, & Leininger, 2009). Mothers' perceived instrumental support may be especially important when children are transitioning to elementary school, because this is a critical period in the life course associated with long-term educational achievement and attainment (Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 2002; Entwisle & Alexander, 1989).

Although support is beneficial for most families, low-income families in particular often depend on friends and family members to provide a necessary safety net over the life course, especially when coping with the difficulties of raising young children (Kalil & Ryan, 2010). In this context, even small amounts of support can be valuable, whether for smoothing consumption or insuring against unexpected events. For example, having someone to provide emergency child care for a sick child may protect mothers from job loss. In addition, one-time financial support may aid in purchasing food or paying a utility bill. Large financial support may protect against material hardship and bankruptcy in the case of unexpected unemployment, divorce or

separation, a health emergency, or additional life stressors. For mothers attached to incarcerated men, financial support may even be necessary to pay for expenses associated with maintaining contact with the father (e.g., transportation costs for visiting, money to accept collect calls from inmates; Braman, 2004; Comfort, 2008). The perception of available financial support may be especially important in reducing maternal stress and, in turn, improving child well-being.

In this study, we considered two types of perceived instrumental support: (a) in-kind and small financial support (whether the mother has a friend or family member who can provide a \$200 loan, emergency child care, and housing assistance; hereafter referred to as *in-kind support*) and (b) large financial support (whether the mother has someone on whom to rely for a \$1,000 loan, a \$1,000 cosigned loan, and a \$5,000 cosigned loan). There are several advantages to examining *perceived* instrumental support rather than *received* instrumental support. Unlike measures of received support, perceived support does not conflate the availability of support and the need for support (Meadows, 2009). Neither does it simply denote the presence of potentially supportive relationships, as might an indicator of the presence or absence of friends. Perceived support is also a stronger predictor of well-being than received support (Wethington & Kessler, 1986).

Linking Paternal Incarceration and Maternal Perceived Instrumental Support

A growing literature suggests that incarceration has detrimental consequences for the women and families attached to currently or previously incarcerated men (Braman, 2004; Comfort, 2008; Murray et al., 2009; Murray & Farrington, 2008; Schwartz-Soicher et al., 2011; Wakefield & Uggem, 2010; Wildeman et al., 2012). Many of these men contributed to family life before they went to prison, and many attempt to maintain contact with their children when in prison (Nurse, 2002). Women who share children with these men, then, face particular challenges that unfold over time. At first, they experience a forced separation from fathers, and many experience resulting economic and emotional challenges. Incarcerated fathers have little, if any, opportunity to earn money in prison, and the cost of maintaining contact with an incarcerated

father is substantial (Comfort, 2008). Qualitative work has revealed that women linked to inmates experience distress, anxiety, and loneliness (Daniel & Barrett, 1981; Fishman, 1990).

It is not clear, however, whether paternal incarceration affects the availability of maternal instrumental support. The net effect depends on the balance of economic and social forces in play, and not all of these forces are parallel. There are compelling reasons to believe that paternal incarceration may lead to less instrumental support. For many mothers, the fathers of their children provide an important safety net, bestowing necessary financial and practical support, regardless of whether they were involved in a relationship (Waller, 2002). But incarcerated fathers experience incapacitation that renders them unavailable and unable to provide even small monetary support or emergency child care. Even when fathers are released from prison, they may be unable to provide instrumental support to mothers. Incarceration damages men's labor market prospects (Pager, 2003) and increases their legal debts (Harris, Evans, & Beckett, 2010), and, for men paying formal child support, their child support orders continue to accrue during prison (Cancian, Meyer, & Han, 2011). Fathers may be simply unable to provide such support.

The negative effects of incarceration may be deeper still, however, in that the social effects of incarceration are not limited to the relationship between mothers and fathers. The private safety net of disadvantaged mothers also includes friends and family (Kalil & Ryan, 2010), and it is also possible that the incarceration of a partner reduces support available from these sources. The stigma of incarceration may spill over to individuals linked to the incarcerated person (Braman, 2004), affecting the behavior of mothers and the responses of others. Stigma may also cause mothers to withdraw from social networks and activities, reducing the size of their social network and, thus, the number of people available to provide support. Alternatively, friends and family members may be unwilling to provide large amounts of financial support if they are not confident a loan would be repaid or do not believe the mother could reciprocate in the future. Thus, *mothers attached to currently or recently incarcerated men may report lower in-kind support and large financial support than their counterparts* (Hypothesis 1).

Alternatively, the incarceration of a partner may increase instrumental support insofar as friends and family rally to support mothers. There is a body of qualitative literature that demonstrates the strength of familial support in low-income Black communities (Stack, 1974), where incarceration is common (Sampson & Loeffler, 2010). Additional evidence suggests that mothers may receive more support when a partner is absent. For example, an interview study of 35 families who experienced a husband's military deployment showed that, when husbands were deployed, women became involved in new social activities and formed new friendships. In addition to providing companionship in the absence of a spouse, these new friends often provided in-kind support, such as child care or assistance with chores (Wood, Scarville, & Gravino, 1995). Similar patterns emerged among a sample of women married to men employed in occupations that frequently took them away from home (e.g., long-haul truck driving; Zvonkovic, Solomon, Humble, & Manoogian, 2005). So long as the stigma of incarceration does not temper such generosity, it is possible that women with husbands in prison experience a short-term outpouring of support similar to that received by women with husbands in the military or jobs that require frequent travel. Thus, *mothers attached to currently or recently incarcerated men may report higher in-kind support and large financial support than their counterparts* (Hypothesis 2).

Although incarceration may increase or decrease support to mothers, mothers attached to currently or formerly incarcerated men are already an especially vulnerable population. For one, although men with criminal records experience economic hardship resulting from imprisonment, they usually were disadvantaged prior to incarceration (Sampson & Loeffler, 2010; Wakefield & Uggen, 2010; also see Giordano, 2010). Similarly, disadvantaged mothers are less likely to report available support, perhaps because of their disadvantaged social networks or the perceived burden on support providers (Harknett & Hartnett, 2011). Indeed, at least one perspective argues that incarceration is neutral with respect to family well-being because of the complex mix of positive and negative influences (Giordano, 2010). Thus, *the relationship between paternal incarceration and maternal in-kind support and large financial support may be spurious* (Hypothesis 3).

Additional Correlates of Paternal Incarceration and Maternal Perceived Instrumental Support

In our multivariate models we included a large set of control variables related to incarceration and support. Blacks were more likely than Whites to experience incarceration (Wakefield & Uggen, 2010), and representative studies show that Whites report more support from kin members than Blacks (Cooney & Uhlenberg, 1992). Immigrants, compared with their native-born counterparts, are less likely to be incarcerated (Butcher & Piehl, 1998) and report less perceived support (Hao, 2003). Age is correlated with incarceration (Pettit & Western, 2004), and younger individuals are more likely to receive support (Cooney & Uhlenberg, 1992). Childhood family structure also is associated with incarceration (Harper & McLanahan, 2004) and social support (Swartz, 2009). Socioeconomic status and social integration are related to incarceration and support (Ellison & George, 1994; Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2008; Western, 2006). Mothers' health and childrearing responsibilities are associated with support (Harknett & Hartnett, 2011), and they were likely associated with incarceration as well. Finally, additional paternal characteristics—impulsivity, domestic violence, and drug or alcohol abuse—have been repeatedly linked to incarceration and may damage family life (e.g., Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990).

METHOD

Data Source

We used data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, a longitudinal survey that follows a birth cohort of nearly 5,000 children and their parents in 20 large U.S. cities (Reichman, Teitler, Garfinkel, & McLanahan, 2001). Unmarried mothers were oversampled, which means the sample overrepresents economically disadvantaged parents. These data provided an exceptional empirical lens through which to understand how paternal incarceration affects the children's mothers, because they included longitudinal information about a large number of fathers with experience in the criminal justice system and a host of variables related to both parents.

Mothers completed a 30- to 40-minute in-person interview at the hospital after the birth of their child, between February 1998 and September 2000, and fathers were interviewed

in the hospital or soon thereafter. Both parents were interviewed again by telephone when their children were approximately 1, 3, 5, and 9 years old. Response rates were relatively high. Of mothers approached for the baseline interview, more than 80% participated, with rates somewhat higher among unmarried mothers than married mothers (87% vs. 82%). Of mothers who participated in the baseline survey, 89%, 86%, 85%, and 74% participated in the 1-, 3-, 5-, and 9-year surveys, respectively (Bendheim-Thoman Center for Research on Child Wellbeing, 2008, 2011).

The final analytic sample included 4,132 observations. Of the 4,898 observations in the baseline sample, we dropped 759 (15%) mothers who did not participate in the 5-year survey (when our dependent variables were measured). We also excluded an additional 7 (<1%) observations missing data on perceived instrumental support. We used multiple imputation to preserve observations missing values for our other variables, although the amount of missing data varied between variables (Royston, 2007). About 12% of observations were missing values for fathers' incarceration, although results were robust to not imputing incarceration. All control variables—with the exception of mother's parenting stress and father's impulsivity—were missing fewer than 1% of the observations. There were some differences between the full and analytic samples, with the analytic sample generally being more advantaged than the full sample: The sample contained slightly more Black mothers and slightly fewer foreign-born mothers ($p < .05$).

Measures

Maternal perceived instrumental support. Mothers were asked if they could count on someone during the next year to (a) loan them \$200, (b) loan them \$1,000, (c) help with emergency child care, (d) provide them with a place to live, (e) cosign a bank loan for \$1,000, and (f) cosign a bank loan for \$5,000. Each of these questions comprised a dichotomous variable (1 = support available, 0 = no support available), and we created two scales: (a) in-kind and small financial support and (b) large financial support (see Turney & Harknett, 2010). In-kind support was a sum of mothers' responses to the following questions, asked at the 5-year survey:

loan for \$200, emergency child care, and housing assistance ($\alpha = .74$). Large financial support was a sum of mothers' responses to the following questions, also asked at the 5-year survey: loan for \$1,000, cosigner for \$1,000, and cosigner for \$5,000 ($\alpha = .73$). In some analyses, we controlled for a lagged indicator of in-kind support and of large financial support, both measured at the 1-year survey.

Paternal incarceration. Our primary explanatory variables were current paternal incarceration and recent paternal incarceration. Each variable provided useful information on its own, but the distinction between them allowed for a rigorous analytic strategy. Fathers were considered currently incarcerated if they were in prison or jail at the 5-year survey. Fathers were considered recently incarcerated if they were imprisoned at any point after the 1-year survey, up to, but not including, the 5-year survey. In addition to these explanatory variables, we also controlled for prior incarceration. Prior incarceration, measured as having been incarcerated at or before the 1-year survey (including prior to the baseline survey), helped us adjust for selection into incarceration. It is important to note these three measures of incarceration were distinct but not mutually exclusive: Eighty-four percent of currently incarcerated fathers and 56% of recently incarcerated fathers experienced incarceration at or prior to the 1-year survey. A similar coding framework has been used in other studies (Geller et al., 2012).

Although reports of incarceration were available from both mothers and fathers, we relied on maternal reports of current incarceration, because time differences between the mother's and father's interviews could result in conflicting yet accurate reports (i.e., the father was incarcerated when the mother was interviewed but not when he was interviewed). For both recent and prior incarceration, we relied on the alternation of maternal and paternal reports, assuming the father was incarcerated if at least one report was affirmative.

Control variables. The multivariate analyses adjusted for a host of characteristics associated with both incarceration and perceived instrumental support, most of which were measured at baseline (unless otherwise noted) to ensure they were assessed before current and recent paternal incarceration. To begin, we controlled

for a host of maternal characteristics, which, relative to paternal characteristics, were more proximate determinants of support. Mother's race was represented by the following mutually exclusive dummy variables: *non-Hispanic White*, *non-Hispanic Black*, *Hispanic*, and *other race*. A dummy variable indicated whether the mother had been born outside the United States. Mother's age was included as a single covariate and ranged from 14 to 45, and a dummy variable indicated that the mother lived with both parents at age 15. We also controlled for mother's social integration, measured by religiosity (*attends religious services weekly*, *attends religious services occasionally*, *never attends religious services*) and relationship status with the child's father (*married*, *cohabiting*, *in a nonresidential romantic relationship*, *separated*). Mother's socioeconomic status was measured by education (*less than high school*, *high school diploma or GED*, *postsecondary education*, and *college degree*) and household income-to-poverty ratio, the ratio of the total household income to the official poverty threshold based on household size and composition, as established by the U.S. Census Bureau. The number of children in the mother's household ranged from one to nine. A dummy variable indicated whether the mother reported she was in fair or poor health. Finally, mother's parenting stress, measured at the 1-year survey, was an average of responses to the following four items (1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*): (a) "Being a parent is harder than I thought it would be"; (b) "I feel trapped by my responsibilities as a parent"; (c) "Taking care of my children is much more work than pleasure"; and (d) "I often feel tired, worn out, or exhausted from raising a family" ($\alpha = .67$). We did not present results that adjust for mother's depression, because depression may be a cause or consequence of a lack of support (House et al., 1988), but results were robust to controlling for major depression at the 1-year survey.

In addition, we adjusted for three paternal characteristics associated with incarceration: (a) impulsivity, (b) domestic violence, and (c) substance use. Impulsivity was measured with an abbreviated version of Dickman's (1990) impulsivity scale. We averaged fathers' responses to the following six questions at the 1-year survey (1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*): (a) "I will often say whatever comes into my head without thinking first";

(b) "Often, I don't spend enough time thinking over a situation before I act"; (c) "I often say and do things without considering the consequences"; (d) "I often get into trouble because I don't think before I act"; (e) "Many times, the plans I make don't work out because I haven't gone over them carefully enough in advance"; and (f) "I often make up my mind without taking the time to consider the situation from all angles" ($\alpha = .78$). We considered fathers to have engaged in domestic violence if the mother reported he had hit, slapped, or kicked her at the baseline survey. Fathers were considered as having abused drugs or alcohol if he or the mother reported at the baseline survey that drugs or alcohol had interfered with his work or made it difficult to get a job or get along with friends or family. See Table 1 for descriptive statistics of all variables included in the analyses.

Analytic Plan

We first examined the bivariate association between paternal incarceration and maternal perceived instrumental support. In Table 2, we present the means of the in-kind support scale, the large financial support scale, and all individual indicators of support by our two key explanatory variables: current incarceration and recent incarceration. We used chi-square tests or *t* tests, depending on the outcome variable, to compare differences in support by incarceration status.

Next, we used ordinary least squares regression models to estimate maternal in-kind support (see Table 3, below) and large financial support (see Table 4, below) as a function of paternal incarceration. Modeling strategies designed to handle categorical and limited outcomes, such as Poisson and ordered logistic regression models, provided substantively similar results, and we used ordinary least squares models for ease of interpretation. In Model 1, we included current and recent incarceration as our key explanatory variables and prior incarceration as a control variable. The remaining models included additional control variables, all exogenous to current and recent incarceration. Model 2 adjusted for maternal characteristics described above. Model 3 added the three paternal characteristics described above. Model 4 added a lagged dependent variable, measured at the 1-year survey. In this model, any remaining association between paternal incarceration and maternal

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Variables Used in Analyses (N = 4,132)

Variables	Full Sample	Ever-Incarcerated Fathers (n = 1,864)	Never-Incarcerated Fathers (n = 2,268)
	% or M/SD	% or M/SD	% or M/SD
Perceived social support			
In-kind and small financial support (y1, M/SD)	2.56/0.85	2.46/0.92	2.65/0.76***
Loan for \$200	83.0%	78.6%	87.0%***
Place to live	84.6%	81.4%	88.0%***
Emergency child care	88.1%	85.5%	91.0%***
Large financial support (y1, M/SD)	1.46/1.25	1.14/1.18	1.75/1.24***
Loan for \$1,000	48.1%	37.3%	58.0%***
Cosigner for \$1,000	59.1%	49.1%	68.0%***
Cosigner for \$5,000	38.7%	27.7%	49.0%***
In-kind and small financial support (y5, M/SD)	2.55/0.87	2.43/0.95	2.66/0.77***
Loan for \$200	83.9%	79.0%	88.0%***
Place to live	83.6%	80.0%	87.0%***
Emergency child care	87.4%	84.0%	90.0%***
Large financial support (y5, M/SD)	1.45/1.19	1.13/1.10	1.75/1.19***
Loan for \$1,000	51.3%	39.8%	62.0%***
Cosigner for \$1,000	58.3%	47.7%	68.0%***
Cosigner for \$5,000	35.8%	25.5%	46.0%***
Father incarceration^a			
Current incarceration (y5)	5.7%	12.9%	
Recent incarceration (y3, y5)	22.2%	48.0%	
Control variables			
Prior incarceration (y1)	35.4%	74.8%	
Race (b)			
White	21.2%	15.4%	26.9%***
Black	49.0%	59.4%	39.2%***
Hispanic	26.4%	22.9%	29.3%***
Other race	3.5%	2.3%	4.6%***
Age (b; M/SD)	25.19/6.05	23.38/5.36	26.69/6.18***
Foreign born (b)	14.9%	7.0%	21.0%***
Lived with both parents at age 15 (b)	42.7%	32.6%	52.0%***
Frequency of attendance at religious services (b)			
Weekly	21.6%	17.5%	25.0%***
Occasionally	64.0%	65.1%	63.0%***
Never	14.5%	17.4%	12.0%***
Educational attainment (b)			
Less than high school	33.5%	42.3%	25.0%***
High school diploma or GED	31.0%	34.7%	28.0%***
Postsecondary education	24.6%	21.0%	29.0%***
College	10.9%	1.9%	19.0%***
Income-to-poverty ratio (b; M/SD)	2.25/2.43	1.45/1.40	2.97/2.90***
Relationship status with child's father (b)			
Married	24.5%	7.9%	40.0%***
Cohabiting	35.9%	40.0%	34.0%***
Nonresidential relationship	26.5%	36.6%	18.0%***
Not in a relationship	13.1%	15.9%	9.0%***

Table 1. *Continued*

Variables	Full Sample	Ever-Incarcerated Fathers (<i>n</i> = 1,864)	Never-Incarcerated Fathers (<i>n</i> = 2,268)
	% or <i>M/SD</i>	% or <i>M/SD</i>	% or <i>M/SD</i>
Number of children in household (b; <i>M/SD</i>)	2.26/1.31	2.41/1.38	2.13/1.23***
Fair or poor health (b)	7.4%	8.7%	6.3%**
Parenting stress (y1, <i>M/SD</i>)	2.18/0.68	2.25/0.68	2.13/0.66***
Father impulsivity (y1, <i>M/SD</i>)	2.17/0.99	2.30/1.03	2.05/0.95***
Father engaged in domestic violence (b)	3.7%	5.5%	2.1%***
Father abused drugs or alcohol (b)	8.8%	14.2%	4.2%***

Note: Source: Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study. b = measured at baseline survey, y1 = measured at 1-year survey; y3 = measured at 3-year survey; y5 = measured at 5-year survey. Asterisks represent two-sided significance tests that compared mothers attached to ever-incarcerated fathers and mothers attached to never-incarcerated fathers. Unless otherwise noted, all variables refer to characteristics of the mother.

^aCurrent incarceration includes fathers in prison or jail at the 5-year survey. Recent incarceration includes fathers in prison or jail after the 1-year survey and up to but not including the 5-year survey. Prior incarceration, a control variable, includes incarceration at or before the 1-year survey (including prior to the birth of their child).

** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 2. *Percentages or Means of Maternal Perceived Social Support at 5-Year Survey, by Paternal Incarceration (N = 4,132)*

Variable	Father Current Incarceration ^a		Father Recent Incarceration	
	Yes (<i>n</i> = 236)	No (<i>n</i> = 3,896)	Yes (<i>n</i> = 915)	No (<i>n</i> = 3,217)
In-kind and small financial support	2.32	2.56***	2.37	2.60***
Loan for \$200	74.6%	84.5%***	76.1%	86.2%***
Place to live	77.5%	84.0%**	79.0%	85.0%***
Emergency child care	79.7%	87.9%***	82.0%	88.9%***
Large financial support	1.02	1.48***	1.07	1.56***
Loan for \$1,000	31.8%	52.5%***	37.4%	55.2%***
Cosigner for \$1,000	43.6%	59.1%***	44.6%	62.1%***
Cosigner for \$5,000	26.3%	36.4%**	25.4%	38.8%***

Note: Source: Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study. Asterisks represent two-sided significance tests that compared (a) mothers attached to currently incarcerated fathers and mothers attached to not currently incarcerated fathers and (b) mothers attached to recently incarcerated fathers and mothers attached to not recently incarcerated fathers.

^aCurrent incarceration includes fathers in prison or jail at the 5-year survey. Recent incarceration includes fathers in prison or jail after the 1-year survey and up to but not including the 5-year survey.

** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

perceived instrumental support at the 5-year survey was net of prior perceived instrumental support. We then went one step further. In Model 5, we restricted the sample to mothers involved with fathers incarcerated prior to the 1-year survey and, thus, fathers with a high risk of experiencing incarceration over the subsequent waves ($n = 1,465$). This strategy further diminished concerns about unobserved heterogeneity, effectively estimating the effect of the "treatment" only among those at risk for it

(LaLonde, 1986; Leamer, 1983). This approach cannot fully rule out the possibility that the association between paternal incarceration and maternal perceived instrumental support was spurious but, considered in conjunction with our wide array of control variables, the approach provided convincing estimates of the association. The estimates were conservative if the social damage associated with incarceration was greater for first-time incarceration than for any subsequent incarceration, which seems likely.

Sample Characteristics

In Table 1, we present descriptive statistics for all variables. In terms of demographic characteristics, nearly half of the sample (49%) was Black, and more than one fourth (26%) was Hispanic. About 15% of mothers had been born outside of the United States. The mothers were, on average, 25 years old at the birth of the focal child, and less than two fifths (36%) had education beyond high school. About 87% of mothers were in a relationship with their child's father at baseline and had about two children in their household at that time. Mothers attached to ever-incarcerated men, compared to their counterparts, were disadvantaged in a host of domains.

RESULTS

Maternal Perceived Instrumental Support, by Paternal Incarceration

On average, mothers in the analytic sample reported four of the six types of instrumental support (see Table 1). Mothers were most likely to report the availability of in-kind support. About 83% reported the availability of a \$200 loan, 85% reported availability of housing assistance, and 88% reported availability of emergency child care. Fewer mothers reported having someone willing to provide large financial support: Fewer than half (48%) reported the availability of a \$1,000 loan, and approximately two fifths (39%) reported having someone available to cosign a \$5,000 bank loan. In addition, a substantial proportion of mothers shared children with men who had contact with the criminal justice system. About 5% shared children with currently incarcerated men, and 22% shared children with recently incarcerated men.

Table 2 shows that mothers who had children with currently incarcerated men had less available support than those attached to men not currently incarcerated. On average, these women reported 2.32 types of in-kind support and 1.02 types of large financial support, compared to their counterparts who reported averages of, respectively, 2.56 and 1.48 ($p < .001$). Their lower level of support was not limited to a specific type or amount of support. For all six individual types of support, women attached to currently incarcerated men reported significantly less support than their counterparts.

For example, only 32% of women attached to currently incarcerated men reported the availability of a \$1,000 loan, whereas 53% of women not attached to incarcerated men reported the same ($p < .001$).

Table 2 also shows striking differences in the support available to women who were and were not attached to recently incarcerated men. Women attached to recently incarcerated men reported having 2.37 types of available in-kind support, compared to their counterparts who reported 2.60 types of in-kind support ($p < .001$). These women also reported less large financial support (1.07, compared to 1.56, $p < .001$). Again, the individual measures tell a similar story, as women attached to recently incarcerated men experienced less support across the board. For example, among women attached to recently incarcerated men, 37% reported the availability of a \$1,000 loan, whereas 55% of women not attached to recently incarcerated men reported the same ($p < .001$). Even if these substantial differences were not caused by paternal incarceration, it is worth noting that these descriptive differences suggest that a group we would expect to be vulnerable, not just because of paternal incarceration but also because of a host of other stressors, was less confident in their ability to receive support if they need it.

Estimating Maternal Perceived Instrumental Support as a Function of Paternal Incarceration

Although the descriptive differences presented in Table 2 are striking, women attached to incarcerated men were disadvantaged in a host of other ways that may render spurious the association between incarceration and perceived instrumental support. The remaining tables attempted to disentangle the association. We first turn to estimates of in-kind support in Table 3. Model 1 shows that, net of recent and prior incarceration, there was a small and nonsignificant association between mothers who share children with currently incarcerated men and in-kind support. But mothers attached to recently incarcerated men had less support available to them than their counterparts (-0.18 , $p < .001$). The magnitude of this coefficient translated to about one fifth of a standard deviation of the in-kind support scale. This model included a control for prior paternal

Table 3. Ordinary Least Squares Regression Models Estimating Maternal In-Kind and Small Financial Support at the 5-Year Survey as a Function of Paternal Incarceration (N = 4,132)

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Father incarceration ^a										
Current incarceration	-0.07	0.07	-0.05	0.08	-0.05	0.08	-0.21	0.06	-0.01	0.07
Recent incarceration	-0.18***	0.04	-0.13**	0.04	-0.13**	0.04	-0.11**	0.03	-0.12*	0.06
Control variables										
Prior incarceration	-0.16***	0.03	-0.06 [†]	0.03	-0.05 [†]	0.03	-0.01	0.03		
Race										
White (reference)										
Black			-0.08	0.05	-0.08	0.05	-0.04	0.04	0.02	0.09
Hispanic			0.04	0.05	0.04	0.05	0.06	0.04	0.05	0.09
Other race			-0.05	0.09	-0.04	0.09	0.02	0.08	0.06	0.19
Age			-0.02***	0.00	-0.02***	0.00	-0.01**	0.00	-0.01*	0.01
Foreign born			-0.11*	0.05	-0.11*	0.04	-0.05	0.04	0.02	0.10
Lived with both parents at age 15			0.11**	0.03	0.11**	0.03	0.07*	0.03	0.04	0.05
Frequency of attendance at religious services										
Weekly			0.09 [†]	0.05	0.09	0.05	0.04	0.04	0.01	0.07
Occasionally			0.09 [†]	0.04	0.09 [†]	0.04	0.03	0.03	-0.02	0.07
Never (reference)										
Educational attainment										
Less than high school (reference)										
High school diploma or GED			0.14**	0.03	0.14***	0.03	0.09**	0.03	0.13*	0.05
Postsecondary education			0.17***	0.04	0.17***	0.07	0.11**	0.03	0.18**	0.06
College			0.21***	0.05	0.21***	0.05	0.13*	0.05	0.24 [†]	0.13
Income-to-poverty ratio			0.03***	0.01	0.03***	0.01	0.02*	0.01	0.04**	0.01
Relationship status with child's father										
Married (reference)										
Cohabiting			-0.12**	0.03	-0.12**	0.03	-0.11**	0.03	-0.13	0.08
Nonresidential relationship			-0.07*	0.03	-0.06*	0.03	-0.08*	0.03	-0.16 [†]	0.08
Not in a relationship			-0.21***	0.04	-0.19***	0.04	-0.13**	0.05	-0.17 [†]	0.09
Number of children in household			-0.03**	0.01	-0.03**	0.01	-0.02	0.01	-0.01	0.02
Fair or poor health			-0.22***	0.04	-0.21***	0.04	-0.15**	0.04	-0.20*	0.08
Parenting stress			-0.08*	0.03	-0.07*	0.03	-0.03	0.02	-0.01	0.04
Father impulsivity					-0.01	0.02	-0.01	0.02	-0.03	0.03
Father engaged in domestic violence					-0.19*	0.08	-0.11	0.08	-0.08	0.14
Father abused drugs or alcohol					-0.02	0.06	-0.04	0.06	-0.04	0.08
Lagged in-kind or small financial support							0.39***	0.02	0.39***	0.03
Intercept	2.51***		3.02***		3.03***		1.83***		1.84***	
Adjusted R ²	0.04		0.10		0.10		0.23		0.22	
N	4,132		4,132		4,132		4,132		1,465	

Note: Source: Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study. All variables refer to characteristics of the mother unless noted. All models include city fixed-effects.

^aCurrent incarceration includes fathers in prison or jail at the 5-year survey. Recent incarceration includes fathers in prison or jail after the 1-year survey and up to but not including the 5-year survey. Prior incarceration, a control variable, includes incarceration at or before the 1-year survey (including prior to the birth of their child).

[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

incarceration, which was also associated with less support ($-0.16, p < .001$).

The association between recent incarceration and in-kind support remained in Model 2, in

which we controlled for a variety of maternal characteristics, and in Model 3, in which we controlled for additional paternal characteristics. The size of the coefficient was reduced by nearly

one third (28%) when both maternal and paternal characteristics were included, but mothers who shared children with recently incarcerated men still had a 0.13-point disadvantage in their available support ($p < .01$). The magnitude of this coefficient translated to about one seventh of a standard deviation of the in-kind support scale. The inclusion of these variables also diminished the coefficient of prior incarceration by 69% and to marginal significance.

We introduced the lagged dependent variable into Model 4. The inclusion of prior in-kind support reduced the size of the recent incarceration coefficient by an additional 15% over Model 3. Mothers attached to recently incarcerated men had a 0.11-point disadvantage in their available in-kind support ($p < .01$). In Model 5, we restricted the sample to mothers attached to men incarcerated prior to the 1-year survey. In this restricted sample, recent incarceration was again linked to diminished instrumental support and, in fact, the magnitude of the coefficient increased ($-0.12, p < .05$).

In Table 4, we turn to large financial support. Similar to estimates of in-kind support, Model 1 showed that, net of prior incarceration, recent but not current incarceration was independently associated with large financial support. Mothers attached to recently incarcerated men reported a 0.36-point disadvantage in their available financial support ($p < .001$). This translated into nearly one third of a standard deviation in the large financial support scale.

Of course, perceived large financial support was not only a matter of incarceration. The inclusion of maternal (Model 2) and paternal (Model 3) characteristics reduced the size of the recent incarceration coefficient by 53%. Still, after accounting for maternal and paternal characteristics, mothers attached to recently incarcerated men reported a 0.17-point disadvantage in their available financial support ($p < .01$). This coefficient was attenuated by an additional 35% once we controlled for prior financial support in Model 4 ($-0.11, p < .05$), but the coefficient remained statistically significant. Thus, consistent with the estimates of in-kind support, much of this association resulted from additional individual-level characteristics and prior support. One interesting difference between results shown in Tables 3 and 4, however, was that the association between prior paternal incarceration and perceived maternal large financial support held even in Model

4 ($-0.08, p < .05$), suggesting that the long-term consequences of paternal incarceration for financial support may be stronger than for other types of support. In Model 5, the model restricted to women attached to ever-incarcerated men, we again found that the recent incarceration coefficient increased from Model 4 ($-0.14, p < 0.05$).

In both Tables 3 and 4, the control variables worked as expected. For example, married mothers reported more in-kind and large financial support than their counterparts who were cohabiting, in a nonresidential romantic relationship, or not in a relationship. Also as expected, education was positively associated with in-kind and small financial support. We found no evidence of racial/ethnic differences in in-kind support but found that Blacks reported less large-scale financial support than their White counterparts. In analyses not presented, we found no consistent evidence suggesting racial/ethnic differences in the association between paternal incarceration and maternal perceived instrumental support.

DISCUSSION

In this research, we used data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study to investigate the relationship between paternal incarceration and maternal perceived instrumental support. We proposed three competing hypotheses that linked paternal incarceration and maternal instrumental support: (a) paternal incarceration is associated with less in-kind support and large financial support for mothers (Hypothesis 1), (b) paternal incarceration is associated with more in-kind support and large financial support for mothers (Hypothesis 2), and (c) the association between paternal incarceration and maternal in-kind support and large financial support is spurious (Hypothesis 3). Our results provided partial support for Hypothesis 1. The results suggested that mothers who shared children with recently but not currently incarcerated men reported less in-kind support and less large financial support. For both types of support, the association between recent paternal incarceration and maternal instrumental support persisted despite adjusting for a wide array of controls, including characteristics of both the mother and father, using a lagged indicator of prior support and thus exploring change, and

Table 4. Ordinary Least Squares Regression Models Estimating Large Financial Support at 5-Year Survey as a Function of Paternal Incarceration (N = 4,132)

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Father incarceration ^a										
Current incarceration	-0.01	0.07	0.04	0.06	0.05	0.06	0.05	0.05	0.06	0.06
Recent incarceration	-0.36***	0.05	-0.17**	0.05	-0.17**	0.05	-0.11*	0.04	-0.14*	0.06
Control variables										
Prior incarceration	-0.49***	0.04	-0.19***	0.03	-0.18***	0.03	-0.08*	0.03		
Race										
White (reference)										
Black			-0.30***	0.07	-0.31***	0.07	-0.17**	0.05	-0.03	0.09
Hispanic			-0.17*	0.07	-0.17*	0.07	-0.04	0.06	0.01	0.13
Other race			-0.21 [†]	0.11	-0.20 [†]	0.11	-0.11	0.10	-0.04	0.17
Age			-0.02**	0.00	-0.02**	0.00	-0.01*	0.00	-0.02**	0.01
Foreign born			-0.03	0.06	-0.03	0.06	0.04	0.04	0.07	0.09
Lived with both parents at age 15			0.16***	0.03	0.16***	0.03	0.07*	0.03	-0.01	0.07
Frequency of attendance at religious services										
Weekly			0.14*	0.05	0.14*	0.05	0.08 [†]	0.04	0.01	0.08
Occasionally			0.14**	0.05	0.14**	0.05	0.08*	0.04	0.01	0.06
Never (reference)										
Educational attainment										
Less than high school (reference)										
High school diploma or GED			0.21***	0.04	0.21***	0.04	0.14***	0.03	0.10 [†]	0.06
Postsecondary education			0.34***	0.05	0.34***	0.05	0.19**	0.05	0.23*	0.09
College			0.60***	0.07	0.60***	0.07	0.32***	0.07	0.38*	0.18
Income-to-poverty ratio			0.09***	0.01	0.09***	0.01	0.05***	0.01	0.10***	0.02
Relationship status with child's father										
Married (reference)										
Cohabiting			-0.35***	0.05	-0.35***	0.05	-0.23	0.05	-0.29*	0.13
Nonresidential relationship			-0.27**	0.07	-0.27**	0.07	-0.19**	0.06	-0.26 [†]	0.13
Not in a relationship			-0.43***	0.06	-0.41***	0.06	-0.24***	0.06	-0.29*	0.12
Number of children in household			-0.01	0.01	-0.01	0.01	-0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
Fair or poor health			-0.10	0.08	-0.10	0.08	0.02	0.07	-0.03	0.09
Parenting stress			-0.14***	0.03	-0.13***	0.03	-0.06*	0.02	-0.05	0.04
Father impulsivity					-0.01	0.02	-0.01	0.02	0.01	0.03
Father engaged in domestic violence					-0.25**	0.08	-0.15 [†]	0.08	-0.13	0.11
Father abused drugs or alcohol					-0.08	0.06	-0.07	0.05	0.01	0.07
Lagged large financial assistance							0.44***	0.01	0.39***	0.03
Intercept	1.61***		2.20***		2.20***		1.16***		1.16***	
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	0.08		0.25		0.25		0.41		0.30	
<i>N</i>	4,132		4,132		4,132		4,132		4,132	

Note: Source: Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study. All variables refer to characteristics of the mother unless noted. All models include city fixed effects.

^aCurrent incarceration includes fathers in prison or jail at the 5-year survey. Recent incarceration includes fathers in prison or jail after the 1-year survey and up to but not including the 5-year survey. Prior incarceration, a control variable, includes incarceration at or before the 1-year survey (including prior to the birth of their child).

[†]*p* < .10. **p* < .05. ***p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

limiting the sample to women attached to ever-incarcerated men and thus diminishing concerns about omitted variables. The effects of incarceration are even more remarkable considering the many other disadvantages these mothers faced. The women involved with incarcerated men would likely have been at an elevated risk of inadequate support even had their partners not been incarcerated, a finding now well established in the literature (Harknett & Hartnett, 2011). In this context of broad disadvantage, it is even more remarkable that incarceration is associated with additional damage.

These data do not contain information about potential support providers, so it is not entirely clear who was providing (or not providing) support to mothers. For two reasons, however, our analyses suggest that available support was not coming from fathers. First, we had no evidence that current incarceration—which makes it impossible for fathers to provide support—was independently associated with less perceived instrumental support. Second, in supplemental analyses not presented, we found no evidence that the association between paternal incarceration and perceived instrumental support varied by the father's preincarceration residential status. If fathers were the primary support providers, we would expect the relationship to be stronger for coresident fathers than non-coresident fathers. Beyond these points, though, we cannot speculate as to whether support was coming from family, friends, or confidants, and understanding this will allow researchers to evaluate the impact of incarceration on the network composition of former inmates. We documented an important net loss in perceived instrumental support, but it is possible that support from neighbors and friends diminished more than support from family, implying a change in the composition of the social network rather than a change in the willingness of any one person in that network to provide support.

Although the mechanisms linking paternal incarceration to maternal perceived instrumental support are unclear, the literature points to several possibilities. It may be that the stigma of incarceration spills over to the people attached to the incarcerated individual (Braman, 2004), causing women to withdraw from social networks or friends and family members to withdraw support. This is particularly problematic insofar as the effects of incarceration on fathers may be realized only years after release, resulting

in less support precisely when incarceration begins to exert the most damage. The same process likely does not apply to other forced absences, such as deployment (Wood et al., 1995) or work-related absences (Zvonkovic et al., 2005). Incarceration is associated with decreased labor market prospects (Pager, 2003; Western, 2006), decreased union stability (Western, 2006), and discrimination (Pager, 2003) in a way that deployment- and work-related absences are not. Future research would benefit from considering further the meaning of incarceration for the reputations of women involved with former inmates. The meaning of incarceration for mothers may be double edged and time dependent in that it invites sympathy early on but undermines credit-worthiness in the long run.

Although we found that recent paternal incarceration was associated with disadvantages in mothers' in-kind support and large financial support, we found no evidence that current incarceration was independently associated with such disadvantages above and beyond recent incarceration. We would expect that the processes linking current incarceration to support are the same as those linking recent incarceration to support. For example, if mothers attached to recently incarcerated men are stigmatized because of the incarceration of their partner, it is likely that mothers attached to currently incarcerated men also experience such stigma. It is possible that the negative effects of incarceration are offset by some positive effects of incarceration. In particular, it is possible that, in the short term, friends and family members rally around women with absent partners only to reduce this support once the formerly absent partner returns (Wood et al., 1995; Zvonkovic et al., 2005).

Our results also point to the long-term detriments of incarceration. In our models, we included incarceration at or prior to the 1-year survey as a control variable or use it as a condition for restricting the sample. We did not focus our results on prior incarceration or interpret it in a substantive way, because we could not establish the timing of prior incarceration, yet the strong association between prior incarceration and large financial support is worth mentioning. This result is remarkable for a number of reasons, but perhaps especially because the outcome is measured years subsequent to the incarceration. Most incarcerated fathers eventually return; many

provide support to their children when they do; and, even when the relationship fails and fathers do not provide support, the passage of time should allow many mothers to find new sources of support. Yet our results suggest that the negative consequences of being attached to an incarcerated man are lasting, especially when it comes to finding support that mothers may not be able to reciprocate. This is consistent with ethnographic work suggesting that incarceration is one of a number of factors that creates long-term family instability among children of incarcerated parents (Giordano, 2010).

Although our analyses suggest that incarceration of fathers is linked to perceived instrumental support of mothers, certain important features of the link remain unclear, and we cannot make causal conclusions about this relationship. For one, what exactly incarceration does is ambiguous, reflecting a lack of information about the conditions surrounding incarceration and potential mechanisms stemming directly from prison experiences. We do not know, for example, whether and how often the mother visited the father when he was imprisoned. Additional information on these influences will provide scholars more leverage regarding what factors increase or diminish incarceration's social impact. Future research should consider these mechanisms.

There is, likewise, some uncertainty surrounding the social support measures. The measures we used provide a good overview of the instrumental support available to these mothers and link our study to others that have used these outcomes. We do not know whether the mothers were satisfied with the available support, our measures did not encompass the universe of ways support can be provided, and the specific source of support was undetermined. It is possible, for instance, that effective financial support can come in units well short of our \$200 starting point or even in nonfinancial material contributions, as when a family provides food to a mother and her child. Moreover, a good deal of support may be emotional rather than material. The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study contains information about whether the respondent has a confidant, an important source of emotional support, but the question was not asked in early waves, preventing us from exploring change in support and thus allowing us to rule out a spurious relationship. Such provisions are no less important to overall well-being.

Despite some limitations, these findings fit in with a growing body of literature that documents the severe consequences of incarceration for those associated with inmates. Given the substantial numbers of women who experience the incarceration of a partner, the unequal distribution of incarceration across the population, and the importance of instrumental support for maternal and child well-being, disentangling the consequences of paternal incarceration for maternal perceived instrumental support adds a vital new dimension to our understanding of the collateral consequences of incarceration. The findings also provide insight into the reproduction of social inequality. Although a lack of instrumental support can lead to a host of disadvantages for all members of a family, understanding the instrumental support of mothers is particularly important given the role of such support in maternal well-being and the role of mothers in the well-being of children (Harknett, 2006; Henly et al., 2005; House et al., 1988; Leininger et al., 2009; Ryan et al., 2009; Turney, 2011). It is also possible that a lack of support is one mechanism through which paternal incarceration negatively affects children. The rise of incarceration has clearly harmed the lives of many young men, but incarceration has also taken a toll on those attached to them as well, and researchers should continue to examine the spillover effects of incarceration in order to develop a more complete catalog.

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