Incarceration, Marriage, and Family Life

Bruce Western[1]
Department of Sociology
Princeton University

September, 2004

[1]This research was supported by grants from the Russell Sage Foundation and the National Science Foundation. Much of this work was developed in collaboration with Sara McLanahan and Len Lopoo. Mitch Duneier provided very helpful comments on sections of the manuscript.

Abstract

This paper examines the effects of incarceration on marriage and family life. The paper reports on three empirical analyses. First, estimates show that incarcerated men are only about half as likely to be married as noninstituional men of the same age, however they are just as likely to have children. By 2000, more than 2 million children had incarcerated fathers; 1 in 10 black children under age 10 had a father in prison or jail by 2000. Analysis of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 and the Fragile families Study of Child Wellbeing, indicates that formerly incarcerated men experience lower marriage rates and increased risks of divorce. Finally, analysis of domestic violence data shows that formerly-incarcerated men are about twice as likely to have assaulted the mothers of their children than men of the same age, race, and recent hsitory of spouse abuse. Married women in longlasting and affectionate relationships are at lower risk of domestic violence. These results suggest that the crime-suppressing effects of incarceration, through incapacitation, may be offset by the negative effects of imprisonment on marriage.

As imprisonment became common for low-education black men by the end of the 1990s, the penal system also became familiar to poor minority families. By 1999, 30 percent of noncollege black men in their mid-thirties had been to prison and through incarceration many were separated from their wives, girlfriends, and children. Women and children in low-income urban commmunities now routinely cope with absent husbands and fathers lost to incarceration, and adjust to their return after release. Poor single men detached from family life are also affected, bearing the stigma of a prison record in the marriage markets of disadvantaged urban neighborhoods.

Discussions of the family life of criminal offenders typically focus on the crime-suppressing effects of marriage, not incarceration. Researchers find that marriage offers a pathway out of crime for men with histories of delinquency. Not a wedding itself, but marriage in the context of a warm, stable, and constructive relationship offers the antidote to crime (Sampson and Laub 1993; Laub, Nagin and Sampson 1998). Wives and family members in such relationships provide the web of obligations and responsibilities that restrain young men and reduce their contact with the male friends whose recreations veer into anti-social behavior (Warr 1998). The prison boom places the link between crime and marriage in a new light. If a good marriage is important for criminal desistance, what is the effect of incarceration on marriage?

The connections between incarceration, marriage, and the family are also implicated in the larger story of rising urban inequality. In the last three decades, American family life was transformed by declining marriage rates and growth in the number of single-parent households. Marriage rates fell among women from all class backgrounds. Between 1970 and 2000, the share of white women aged 25 to 34 who were married, declined from over 80 percent to just over 60 percent. Marriage rates for African American women

halved from 60 to around 30 percent. The decline in marriage propelled growth in the number of single-parent households, although this effect was confined to those with little education (Ellwood and Jencks 2004). The share of college-educated women who were single mothers remained constant at around 5 percent between 1970 and 2000, while the fraction of single mothers among low-education white women increased from 8 to 18 percent. Trends were most dramatic among black women. In 1970, about one-third of low-education black women were single parents, but the number increased to over 50 percent in the next thirty years. By 2000, stable two-parent households became relatively rare, especially among African Americans with little schooling.

Poverty researchers closely followed the changing shape of American families. Growing numbers of female-headed families increased the risks of chronic poverty for women and children. Growing up poor also raised a child's risk of school failure, poor health, and delinquency. Writing in the mid-1980s, William Julius Wilson traced the growth in the number of female-headed black families to the shrinking number of "marriageable men" in poor urban areas (Wilson 1987). The shortage of suitable husbands in ghetto neighborhoods was driven by two proceses. High rates of male incarceration and mortality tilted the gender ratio making it harder for poor urban women to find partners. These effects were small, however, compared to the high rate of joblesness that left few black men in inner cities able to support a family. Many studies later examined the impact of men's employment on marriage rates and found that the unemployed are less likely to be married and that joblessness can increase chances of divorce or separation (e.g., Lichter, LeClere and McLaughlin 1991; McLanahan and Casper 1995; and Blau, Kahn, and Waldfogel 2000). Studies of the effects of employment

dominated research on marriage among the disadvantaged, and the idea that incarceration destabilized family life was undeveloped.

This paper studies the effects of the prison boom on marriage and the family. Given its prevalence among young low-education African American men, imprisonment may have devastated family life in poor urban neighborhoods. Before accepting this hypothesis, we should consider that criminal offenders are unlikely to marry or develop strong family bonds, even if they don't go prison. I try to untangle the links between the penal system, marriage and the family with three pieces of empirical evidence. First, to better understand the familial bonds of prisoners, I calculated marriage rates in the penal population, and estimated the number of children with incarcerated fathers. Next, data from two social surveys—the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 (NLSY), and the Fragile Families Survey of Child Wellbeing—were used to estimate the effects of incarceration on a single man's chances of marriage and a married man's risk of divorce. Although marriage is generally associated with criminal desistance and a reduced risk of poverty, marriages with ex-inmates may be different from others. Serious offenders have histories of antisocial behavior, lower cognitive ability, and a tendency to impulsive behavior. Whatever the salutary effect of marriage in general, women may be better off without men with prison records, particularly if they are violent or abusive. Finally, then, to assess the welfare of women married to formerly incarcerated men, I returned to the Fragile Families data to examine the links between incarceration, marriage and domestic violence.

The Effects of Incarceration: Selection or Incapacitation?

The effects of imprisonment on marriage and families depends on the strength of an incarcerated man's attachments to his kin and community. An outcast

without friends or other social ties will be less missed than a pillar of the community who is closely involved with family and neighbors.

Studies of the effects of crime and the economy on marriage supports a skeptical view of imprisonment's corrosive effect on family life. Criminal offenders are often found to have weak family attachments. For example, the young delinquents studied by Robert Sampson and John Laub (1993, 132) were 2 to 4 times more likely to get divorced than their nondelinquent counterparts. While married, men with criminal backgrounds were 2 to 3 times more likely to be only weakly attached to their wives. Fathers with criminal records are also less likely to be closely involved with their children, and their families are more unstable (e.g., Farrington 1989; Baker and Mednick 1984). Consequently, low rates of family attachment among ex-prisoners may be due to a selection effect and not imprisonment. Criminal offenders—the men selected to go to prison—are less likely to develop strong ties to wives and children regardless of whether they are incarcerated.

We needn't even appeal to prisoners' criminality to doubt their attachments to wives and children. Weak marital and family connections have long predated the prison boom in the poor black neighborhoods that supply the penal system with inmates. Wilson's (1987) work re-ignited interest in the family structure of disadvantaged African Americans, but black men's tenuous attachment to women and children in inner cities had been observed at least since DuBois's (1973 [1899]) study of Philadelphia's Seventh Ward. In the Philadelphia ghetto of the the late nineteenth century, low marriage rates were thought to echo the "lax moral habits of the slave regime" and reflect the strains of supporting a household without a living wage (DuBois 1973 [1899], 67, 70, 72). A line of sociological analysis, through E. Franklin Frazier, Gunnar Myrdal, to Moynihan's report on *The Negro Family* also

traced family instability among poor urban blacks to the legacy of slavery and the deprivations of irregular employment and low wages (Frazier 1939; Myrdal 1996 [1944], 930–935; Office of Policy Planning and Research 1965). Urban ethographers took up this analysis, often emphasizing the economic roots of men's detachment from their families. For Elliot Liebow's (1966, 131) idle black men on *Tally's Corner*, "the plain fact of supporting one's wife and children defines the principal obligation of a husband," but "money is chronically in short supply and chronically a source of dissension in the home." Liebow (1966, 135–36) concludes that,

> marriage is an occasion of failure. To stay married is to live with your failure, to be confronted by it day in and day out. It is to live in a world whose standards of manliness are forever beyond one's reach, where one is continuously tested and challenged and continually found wanting.

This is the historical and social context of the selection effect. In poor inner-city neighborhoods where gender relations are contentious and marital bonds are vexed by poverty, how could the prison boom make things worse? In these communities, crime-involved and jobless men, without steady partners or ties to their children, leave few footprints. They have few bonds to be broken by imprisonment. In short, the hypothesis of selection warns that men at risk of imprisonment have traits and live in situations that frustrate the development of stable two-parent families.

Against this skepticism about the effects of imprisonment, some observers paint a different picture of the family life of poor and crime-involved men. Ethnographers have described inmates' rich network of kinship relations. In these accounts, the prison penetrates deep into family life. If we think that

men who go to prison are embedded in families and communities, sending a man to prison produces an "incapacitation effect." The term incapacitation usually describes how incarceration reduces crime by restraining prisoners from committing crime in society (Zimring and Hawkins 1995). Just as the penal system restrains prisoners from crime, it may also restrain them from performing the prosocial roles of suitor, spouse, and parent. While incarcerated, prisoners of course have little opportunitiy to meet partners and get married. Married men are prevented from contributing emotionally and financially to their primary relationships.

For incarceration to matter, prisoners must have family and friends to be incapacitated from. Kathryn Edin and her colleagues (2004) interviewed a large number of incarcerated fathers and their children in Charleston, South Carolina, and argued that the effects of father absence are far-reaching:

> Incarceration often means that fathers miss out on those key events that serve to build parental bonds and to signal to the community that they intend to support their children both financially and emotionally. These key events include attending the child's birth or observing developmental milestones such as walking and talking. The father's absence at these crucial moments, we argue, can weaken his commitment to the child and, years later, the child's own commitment to his or her father (Edin et al. 2004, 57).

Reporting on his fieldwork in the poor neighborhoods of southeast Washington DC, Donald Braman (2003, 109) suggests how father absence has many small effects on everyday life. He relates the story of Kenny, in jail and awaiting trial for murder: "Kenny had been one of the primary caretakers of his

children, had helped his mother with mortgage payments and contributed to his niece's college education at Howard." Kenny himself, observes,

> They're trying to fix the house up and... its slower now because I'm not there to do the work... I fix the car, and I fix all the plumbing and, you know, and when nobody's there and nobody has finances to pay a person to come in and do that, it becomes a strain when you have to find money to fix things (Braman 2003, 110).

For Edin and Braman, even poor families provide a net of social supports and mutual aid. Indeed poor women and children are particularly dependent on family networks because they cannot afford to buy help in the marketplace. The loss of poor fathers to incarceration thus imposes a heavy burden.

For those who claim the disruptive effects of imprisonment, families are also seen to pay a price for their ties to incarcerated relatives. Family members must overcome the obstacles to communicating with relatives in prisons—taking the bus to far-flung facilities, accepting expensive collect calls, exchanging mail screened by correctional authorities (Braman 2003; Travis 2004, ch. IIIB). Like the inmates, those that visit are exposed to the many small routines and humiliations of institutional life—waiting to be called, passing through metal detectors, surrendering identification, submitting to searches. They too are, in some degree, institutionalized.

The hypotheses of selection and incapacitation offer two contrasting claims about the strength of an incarcerated man's family ties. The hypothesis of selection says that men who go to prison would be weakly attached to wives and children, even if the weren't incarcerated. The incapacitation hypothesis says that imprisoned men have ties to kin and community, and their removal

inflicts hardships on family members left behind. These are the basic terms of debate. Let's now turn to some empirical evidence to unravel these rival claims.

Fatherhood and Marriage in the Penal Population

To study the family ties of prisoners, I begin by simply describing the levels of marriage and fatherhood in the penal population. Figure 6.1 compares rates of marriage and fatherhood in the penal population to those for men who are not incarcerated. Levels of marriage are measured for noninstitutional men and male prison and jail inmates, aged 22 to 30, in 2000. Rates of fatherhood are the percentage of noninstitutional men and male state prisoners, aged 33–40, who have ever had children by 1997–1998.

Marriage rates among prison and jail inmates are very low compared to those on the outside. White male inmates in their twenties are less than half as likely to be married as young white noninstitutional men of the same age. The incarceration gap in marriage is also large for black and Hispanic men. The general level of marriage is highest for Hispanics, but in this case inmates are only half as likely to be married as their counterparts in the noninstitutional population. Although marriage rates are lowest for black men, only 11 percent of young black inmates are married compared to 25 percent of young black men who are not incarcerated. In short, marriage rates among male prisoners in their twenties are only around half as high as in the free population.

Although marriage is uncommon among prisoners, they are just as likely as other men to have children. Figure 6.1 shows the percentage of men who have ever had children by their late thirties. The prevalence of fatherhood among prisoners is almost identical to that on the outside. For example, 73

percent of noninstitutional black men have had children by their late thirties compared to 70 percent of black male prisoners of the same age. Male fertility reates among prisoners and nonprisoners are also very similar for whites and Hispanics.

The combination of high incarceration rates with a large proportion of fathers among inmates means many children now have incarcerated fathers. Data from surveys of prison and jail inmates can be used to calculate the numbers of children with fathers in prison or jail. A time series for 1980 to 2000 shows that the total number of children with incarcerated fathers increased sixfold from about 350,000 to 2.1 million, nearly 3 percent of all children nationwide in 2000 (Figure 6.2). Among whites, the fraction of children with a father in prison or jail is relatively small—about 1.2 percent in 2000. The figure is about 3 times higher (3.5 percent) for Hispanics. Among African Americans, over a million or 1 in 11 black children had a father in prison or jail in 2000. The numbers are higher for younger children: by the 2000, 10.4 percent of black children under age 10 had a father in prison or jail. Just as incarceration has become a normal life event for disadvantaged young black men, parental incarceration has become commonplace for their children.

High rates of parental incarceration translate into high rates of family disruption. A Bureau of Justice Statistics report finds that about 45 percent of prisoners in 1997 were living with their children at the time they were incarcerated (Mumola 2000, 3). During incarceration, over 60 percent of state prisoners have at least monthly contact with their children, mostly by mail or phone calls. Visits are relatively rare. More than half of prisoners are housed over a 100 miles from home and only 1 in 5 are visited at least monthly by their children. Mothers are frequently the gatekeepers in these

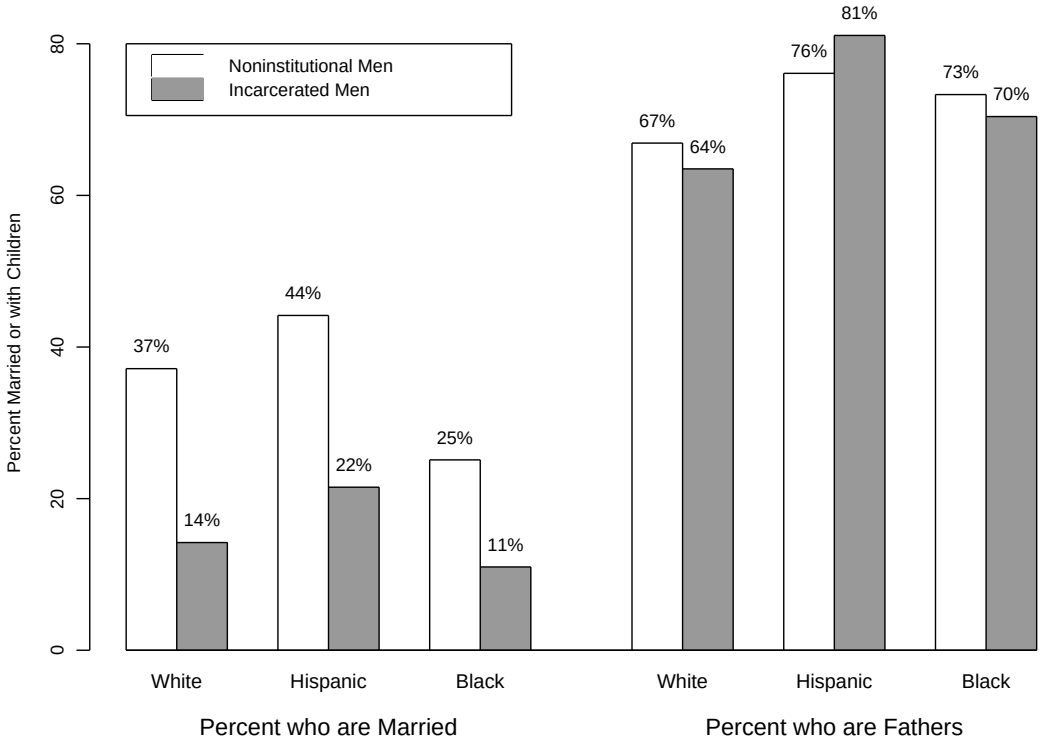

Figure 6.1. The percentage of men, aged 22–30, who are married in 2000 and men, aged 33–40, who are fathers by 1997–1998. Marriage and male fertility rates in the penal population are estimated from surveys of prison and jail inmates. Marriage rates for noninstitutional men are taken from the Current Population Survey (CPS). Male fertility in the noninstitutional population is estimated using the NLSY. More details are reported in the Appendix.

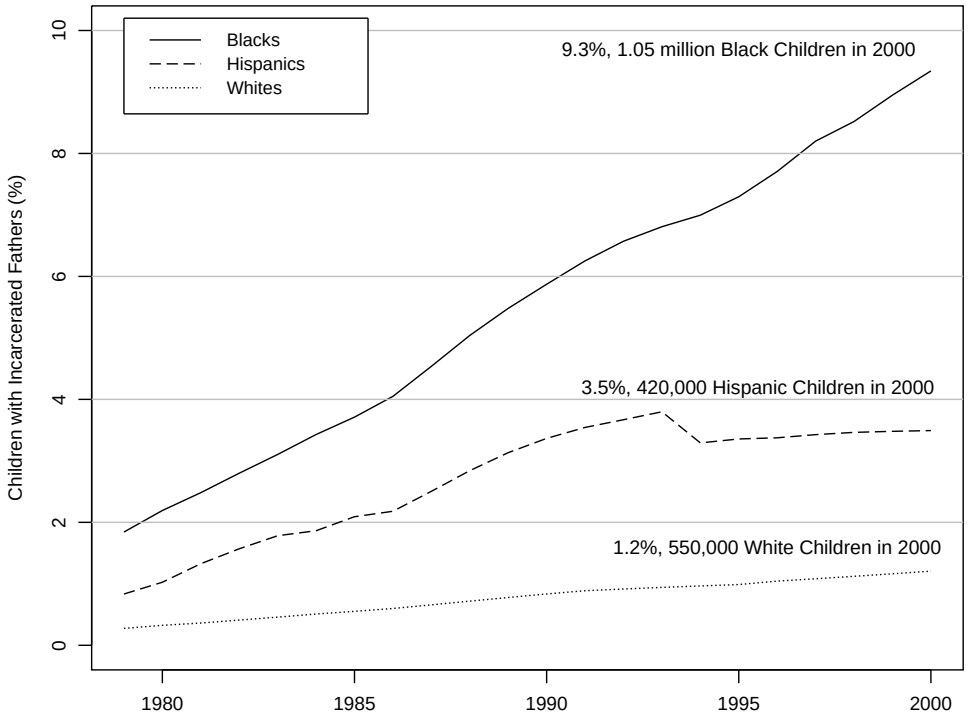

Figure 6.2. Numbers of children with father's in prison or jail, by race and ethnicity, 1980–2000. See the Appendix for data sources and more details.

relationships. If male prisoners remain on good terms with the mothers of their children, the children are more likely to visit and write (Hairston 1995; Nurse 2002). Despite low marriage rates among African Americans, however, black children are more likely to retain some contact with their incarcerated fathers than whites or Hispanics.

Prisoners may be unlikely to be married, but they do have extensive kinship ties, reflected in the many children with incarcerated fathers. Around half of these children have some ties with their fathers, living with them at the time of incarceration and maintaining contact while their fathers are in prison or jail.

The Effects of Incarceration on Marriage and Divorce

The prevalence of marriage and fatherhood among prison and jail inmates tells us something about the incapacitation effect of incarceration. Men behind bars are cannot fully play the role of father and husband. Single incarcerated men are unlikely to get married while they are locked up. On the outside, the incapacitation effect takes the form of lopsided gender ratios of poor communities. For example, in the high incarceration neighborhoods of Washington DC there are only 62 men for every 100 women (Braman 2003, 86). Studying U.S. counties, William Sabol and James Lynch (1998) quantify the effects of the removal of men to prison. After accounting for educational attainment, welfare receipt, poverty, employment and crime, Sabol and Lynch find that the doubling of the number of black men admitted to prison between 1980 and 1990 is associated with a 19 percent increase in the number of families headed by black women.

The incapacitation effect captures only part of the impact of the prison boom on marriage. In Wilson's terms, incarceration also damages men's mar-

riageability. Wilson (1987, 83–92) traced declining marriage rates among the ghetto poor to the increasing inability of young disadvantaged black men to support families. Incarceration erodes men's economic desirability even more. Other research shows that incarceration reduces men's wages, slows the rate of wage growth, increases unemployment, and shortens job tenure (Western 2002). If a poor employment record damages the marriage prospects of single men and contributes to the risk of divorce among those who are married, the economic effects of incarceration will decrease the likelihood of marriage among men who have been to prison and jail.

Wilson measured marriageability mostly by employment, but a man's criminal record also signals his ability to care and provide for his family. While poor women care about men's economic status, they also worry about men's honesty and respectability. Edin's (2000) ethnographic interviews showed that these non-economic concerns weighed heavily on low-income women in metropolitan Philadelphia. The women Edin interviewed were deeply distrustful of men. The respondents were often reluctant to marry or develop romantic relationships because they viewed men's marital infidelity as inevitable. Some women's trust in men was shaken by boyfriends who spent household savings on drugs or drink, and neglected children in their care. This wariness was compounded by the men's low social status. For the women in Edin's sample, marriage offered a route to respectability, but "marriage to an economically unproductive male means... permanently taking on his very low status" (Edin 2000, 29). Elijah Anderson (1999, 153) makes a similar point in the opposite way, describing the dreams of teenage girls in ghetto neighborhoods, a "dream of living happily ever after with one's children in a nice house in a good neighborhood—essentially the dream of the middle-class American lifestyle." In these cases, it is the social status of

jobless men, their lack of esteem, as much as their material resources, that limits their appeal as husbands.

If reliability and reputation measure the non-economic aspects of marriageability, incarceration has likely eroded the pool of marriageable men. Just as the stigma of incarceration confers disadvantage in the labor market, it also undermines a man's prospects in the marriage market. Men in trouble with the authorities cannot offer the respectability that many poor women seek from their partners. A prison record—the official stamp of criminality—can convey trouble to mothers looking for a stable home. For example, Edin's interviews described women's aversion to drug dealing, even when it provided a couple with income: "Mothers fear that if their man gets involved in drug dealing, he might stash weapons, drugs, or drug proceeds in the household, that the violence of street life might follow him into the household..." Because marriage offers a way of enhancing status, the trouble foreshadowed by a prison record may be even more repellent than chronic unemployment.

The stigma of incarceration also strains existing relationships. Erving Goffman (1963, 30) describes stigma's contagious quality, suffusing personal relationships: "In general the tendency for a stigma to spread from the stigmatized individual to his close connections provides a reason why such relations tend either to be avoided or to be terminated where existing." Braman's (2003) fieldwork in Washington DC provides empirical support. The high prevalence of incarceration, he finds, does little to reduce its stigmatic effect. Braman describes the experience of Louisa, whose husband, Robert was arrested on an old armed robbery charge after a lengthy period out of prison and in recovery from drug addiction. The couple,

> had come to think and present themselves as morally upstanding citizens and churchgoers. Because of this, Louisa felt the stigma

> of her husband's most recent incarceration all the more intensely. She began to avoid friends and family, not wanting to talk about Robert's incarceration and lying to them when she did (Braman 2003, 170).

Louisa came to withdraw from her extended family and grappled with depression during Robert's incarceration. Braman argues that the stigma of incarceration is even more severe for family members than the offender, because wives and children live and work outside the prison, exposed to the condemnation of neighbors and other community members.

The separation imposed by incarceration also weighs heavily on relationships. Interviews with ex-offenders suggests that the friendships that underlie romantic relationships are diluted by time apart. Often women become more independent and self-sufficient while their partners are incarcerated (Nurse 2002, 109). Just as Edin's female respondents distrusted men's commitment, Anne Nurse (2002) reports that her Californian sample of juvenile offenders were constantly suspicious of the fidelity of their wives and girlfriends. Often these fears were well-founded and many romantic relationships failed while men were still incarcerated (see also Edin et al. 2004, 62).

The burdens of incarceration may further weaken the fragile relations between men and women in poor urban neighborhoods. The incapacitation effect of imprisonment—the removal of men from the marriage market—reduces the opportunities for marriage. The economic penalty of incarceration and its costs in social status may have deepened the declining marriageability of men with conviction records. The effects of incapacitation, economic disadvantage, and stigma should be seen in low rates of marriage and high risks of divorce or separation among men with prison records. Any empirical test, however, must allow that low marriage rates among ex-prisoners

are to selection, and not the effects of incarceration. I next weigh these competing claims by analyzing survey data from the NLSY.

Incarceration Effects in the NLSY

In studying things like marriage or divorce, interest often centers on the time taken until the event. In practice this means estimating the chances that a couple will marry, say, during a certain year, given that they are not already married. The effect of incarceration is the difference in the probability of marriage between ex-inmates and non-inmates (men who have never been incarcerated). If having a prison record reduces the chances of marriage in a given year, incarceration will tend to delay marriage over time.

We can illustrate how the chances of marriage evolve over time with a graph called a survival curve. By calculating the fraction of the population getting married for the first time at a given age, we can show how the prevalence of marriage rises as a population ages. (Survival curves are so named because their original depiction of death rates showed the fraction surviving to a given age.) Survival curves for first marriage can be constructed with data from the NLSY. The NLSY provides a nationally representative sample of men, aged 14 to 21 in 1979. The men are interviewed annually until 1994, then every other year until 2000. Using the NLSY, we can construct survival curves of first marriage for men who are never incarcerated, and for men who are incarcerated at some time before age 40. Like the analysis of wages and employment in Chapter Five, incarceration is indicated by respondents who are interviewed in prison or jail. I also use data from a special set of questions asked just in 1980, about criminal involvement. The 1980 crime module also identifies people who say they have spent time in a correctional facility. Throughout the marriage analysis, NLSY respondents are tracked

from age 18 to marriage or age 40, which ever comes sooner. (A handful of male respondents are married before age 18 and they are discarded from the analysis.)

Survival curves of first marriage for never-incarcerated and incarcerated men are shown in Figure 6.3. The solid line in Figure 6.3 indicates marriage rates for men who are never incarcerated. At age 18, the entire sample of NLSY men is unmarried, but the share of never-married men plunges between ages 20 and 25. By age 26, over half of all men who have never been incarcerated have got married. The rate of marriage slows from this point, but only 1 in 8 never-incarcerated men remain unmarried by age 40. Compare marriage rates among men who go to prison or jail. By age 26, about 25 percent of men involved with the penal system have married compared to 46 percent of those without incarceration records. By age 40, 2 out of 5 incarcerated men remained unmarried.

Of course the low marriage rate among incarcerated men is not due entirely to the effect of imprisonment. The selection of men into prison also explains a large share of the incarceration gap in marriage. Men spending time behind bars are more likely to be African American, have little education, and be involved in crime. These factors are also associated with a low likelihood of marriage regardless of involvement in the criminal justice system. To isolate the impact of incarceration we need to account for the many factors associated with incarceration that also affect a man's chances of marriage. In effect, we must find a comparison group that resembles our incarcerated men in all respects but their history of imprisonment.

To analyze the effect of incarceration, I adjust for the effects of many factors that influence the likelihood of marriage. Statistical adjustments for things like race and education that are correlated with marriage and

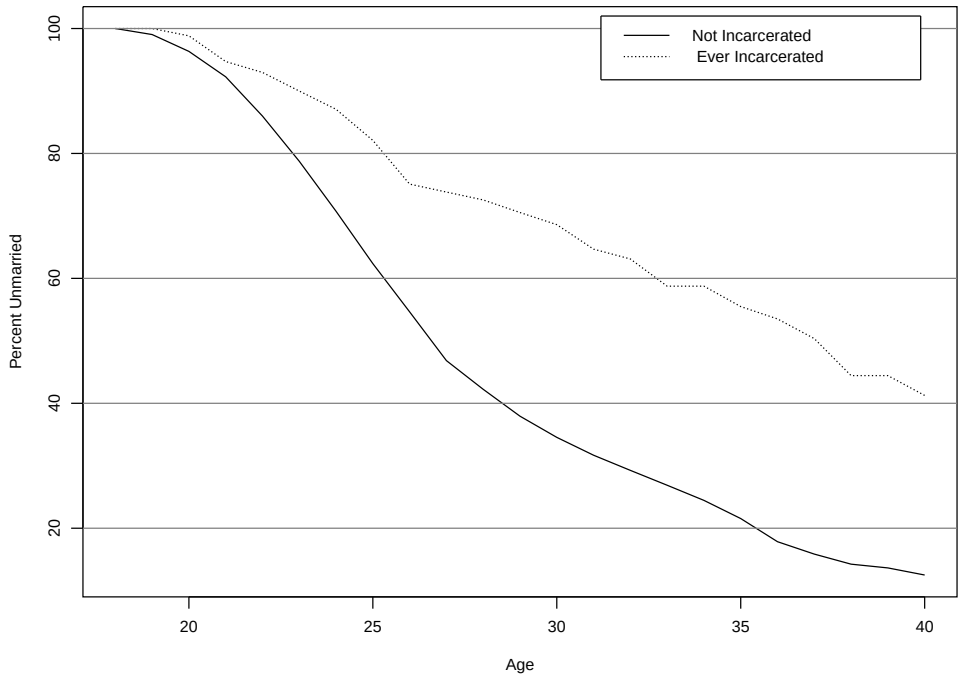

Figure 6.3. Survival curves of first marriage for men, aged 18 to 40, by incarceration status, NLSY.

incarceration, help allow for the nonrandom selection of men into the penal system. Race and education controls allow us to calculate the difference in marriage rates for an ex-inmate and a non-inmate of the same race and level of schooling. Many variables can be introduced to minimize the differences between those who have been incarcerated and the comparison group who have not. Previous research on marriage suggests we should control for the region of the country in which a man lives, whether he is Catholic or very religious, and whether he has fathered children before marriage. (Premarital births increase the likelihood of marriage.) Besides these factors that are often linked to marriage, selection can be controlled by allowing that criminal behavior rather than incarceration may make men less likely to get married. To help separate the effects of incarceration from criminal behavior, I also control for the respondent's recent of use of drugs and his self-reported history of violent delinquency. Accounting for demographics, religion, and criminal behavior provides a comparison group that is relatively similar but differs mostly from the ex-inmates in their incarceration status. As we will see, most of the incarceration gap in marriage rates is due to the effects of these control variables.

Control variables can also be used to study the causal mechanisms that explain how incarceration reduces the likelihood of marriage. The three mechanisms of incapacitation, stigma, and economic disadvantage are all observable in varying degree. Incapacitation is the most transparent, captured by the low likelihood of marriage among men who are locked up. The stigma of incarceration is difficult to measure with survey data, but if stigma reduces marriageability, the effect of incarceration will persist after release as the reputation for criminality follows the ex-offender through his re-entry into society. Economic disadvantage is directly observed in men's employ-

ment rates, measured here by the number of weeks worked by a man in the previous year. Imprisonment reduces marriage rates through the mechanism of economic disadvantage where reduced employment due to incarceration makes men less attractive marriage partners. If controlling for employment significantly reduces the estimated effect of incarceration, we can say that differences in employment between non-inmates and ex-inmates helps explain the incarceration gap in marriage.

Incarceration and First Marriage

The analysis of first marriage estimates two incarceration effects. First, incapacitation is captured by calculating the reduction in marriage rates in the year a man is in prison or jail. Second, to gauge the effects of stigma and economic disadvantage, I also examine whether men with incarceration records marry at lower rates.

Not surprisingly, the data clearly show that men in prison are unlikely to get married. Under a variety of statistical models with different control variables, men behind bars are about 70 percent less likely to get married in the year they are incarcerated than non-incarcerated men. While the incapacitative effect of incarceration is large, its implications are less far-reaching than the possible effects of social stigma and economic disadvantage which may reduce marriage rates among men coming out of prison. How strong is the evidence for the post-release effect of incarceration on marriage?

The effect of incarceration is shown by comparing the probability of first marriage by age 40 for two men who are similar in many ways, except incarceration status. The probability of marriage is calculated for a never-married man, with a twelfth grade education, living in the northeast, who uses drugs but has no history of violent delinquency, who is not religious, and who has a

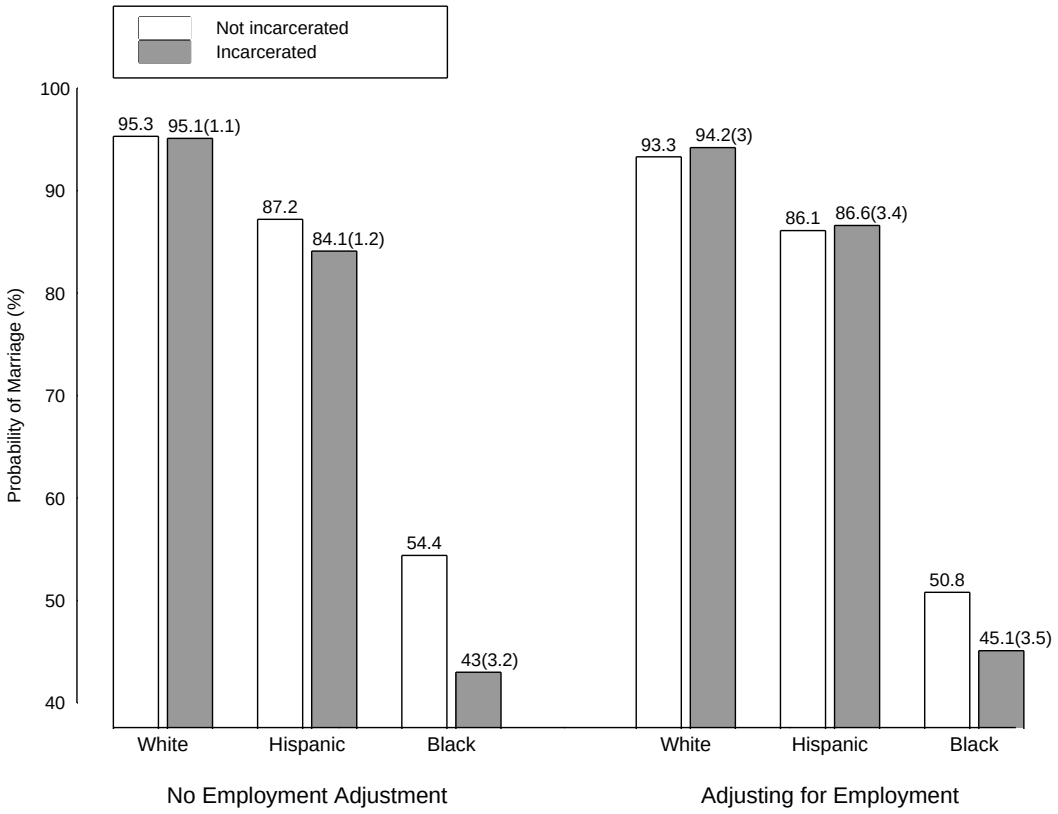

Figure 6.4. The effects of incarceration on a man's probability of marriage by age 40, by race and ethnicity, NLSY. Figures in parentheses show the statistical error of the prediction, approximately equal to 1.65 times the predictive standard error.

child. We compare this man's chances of marriage to another with identical characteristics but who was incarcerated for one year at age 25. Figure 6.4 shows the effects of incarceration on marriage under two assumptions. First we assume that men's employment has no direct impact on marriage. If men with high rates of employment are more likely to get married, low rates of marriage among ex-inmates will partly be due to their high unemployment. Second, we assume that employment directly affects marriage. After adjusting for employment, the estimated incarceration gap in marriage will get smaller if economic disadvantage explains ex-inmates' low marriage rate.

The effects of incarceration are different for white, Hispanic, and black men. Just over 95 percent of white non-inmates get married by age 40, virtually the same marriage rate among white ex-inmates with the same characteristics. There is stronger evidence of an incarceration gap in marriage rates among Hispanics. Among ex-inmates, 84.1 percent get married compared to 87.2 percent of observably identical non-inmates. Th gap in marriage rates is larger among blacks. A black men without a prison record is 54.4 percent likely to get married by his late thirties compared to a 43 percent chance of marriage for a black ex-inmate.

If ex-inmates don't marry because they don't have jobs, the estimated incarceration gap in marriage should shrink when employment is controlled. Controlling for employment fully explains the incarceration gap in marriage among Hispanic men. After adjusting for employment, the chances of marriage for Hispanic inmates and non-inmates are nearly equal. The employment adjustment reduces the incarceration gap in marriage rates for black men from 11.4 to 5.7 percentage points. About half the gap in marriage rates among African American men is thus due to joblessness among ex-inmates. Of course, the employment deficit of ex-inmates is not due entirely to incar-

ceration. Estimates from Chapter Five indicated that incarceration reduces employment by around 15 percent. Still, the results suggest that improving employment among men released from prison will help their marriage prospects.

Incarceration and Divorce

So far, we have seen evidence that incarceration suppresses marriage, at least among African American men. Moving forward in the life course, we can also ask about the effects of incarceration on married couples. Figure 6.5 shows survival curves of first marriages for men who have never been incarcerated and those that have been incarcerated at some time. Because marriage rates are so low among incarcerated men, there are few cases of men with prison records in long-lasting marriages. Nevertheless the risk of divorce is very high among men going to prison, and they attain the divorce rate of 50 percent experienced by the general population in about one-third of the time.

Marriages are particularly at risk when men are in prison or jail. During incarceration, the shame and anger of incarceration for men's families is most severe (Braman 2003). The chances that wives will develop other romantic attachments is also greatest at this time (Nurse 2002, 57–61). After release from prison, the stigma of incarceration may endure, and ex-inmates may be less able to contribute financially to their families. The statistical analysis tries to capture these processes by estimating the chances of marital dissolution while a husband is incarcerated and after an incarcerated husband has been released.

Like the marriage analysis, the effect of incarceration on divorce or separation is estimated while accounting for a variety of other factors. In particular, I control for incarceration prior to marriage. When specifying a comparison

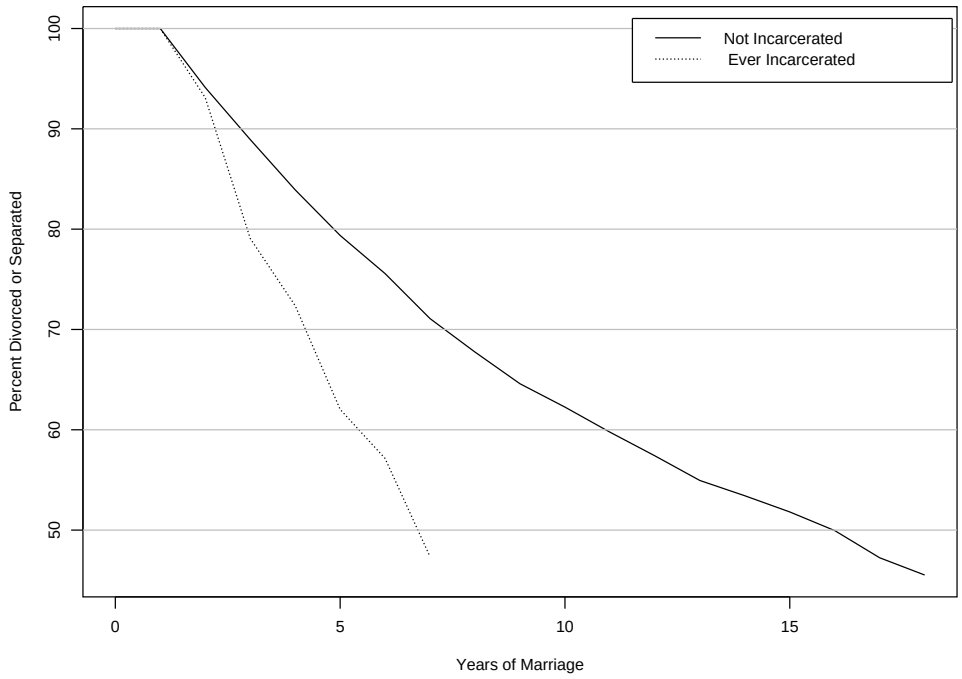

Figure 6.5. Survival curve of the risk of marital dissolution among first marriages, by incarceration status, NLSY.

group to measure the effect of incarceration, those imprisoned before marriage share much of the propensity to criminal behavior that we see in men who are incarcerated during marriage. Controlling for prior incarceration thus provides strong test of the disruptive effects of incarceration during marriage. Figure 6.6 reports rates of divorce or separation six years after marriage. The benchmark divorce rate is calculated for a man aged 23 at first marriage, living in the northeast, with a twelfth grade education, who currently uses drugs, is not religious, has a child from the marriage but has no history of violence or prison incarceration.

The divorce rate among these men varies by race and ethnicity. A white man with these characteristics is 22.8 percent likely to separate after six years of marriage. The marriage of a white ex-inmate with identical characteristics is more than twice as likely to fail. Similarly large effects are estimated for Hispanic men. Incarceration is estimated to raise the failure rate of marriages among Hispanics from 31.4 to 50.1 percent. The effects of incarceration on divorce or separation among blacks however is negligible. This result is due to limitations of the data in which there are very few black men who incarcerated while married. Unlike incarceration's effect on marriage, it does not appear that high divorce rates among incarcerated and formerly incarcerated men is due to their low employment rates. Estimated divorce rates are largely unchanged by accounting for men's employment.

Aggregate Effects on Marriage and Divorce

A prison record substantially reduces the chances that a black man will get married. However, it does not follow that high rates of imprisonment have substantially reduced black marriage rates. Because men with little education and involved in crime are unlikely to marry, the prison boom may just

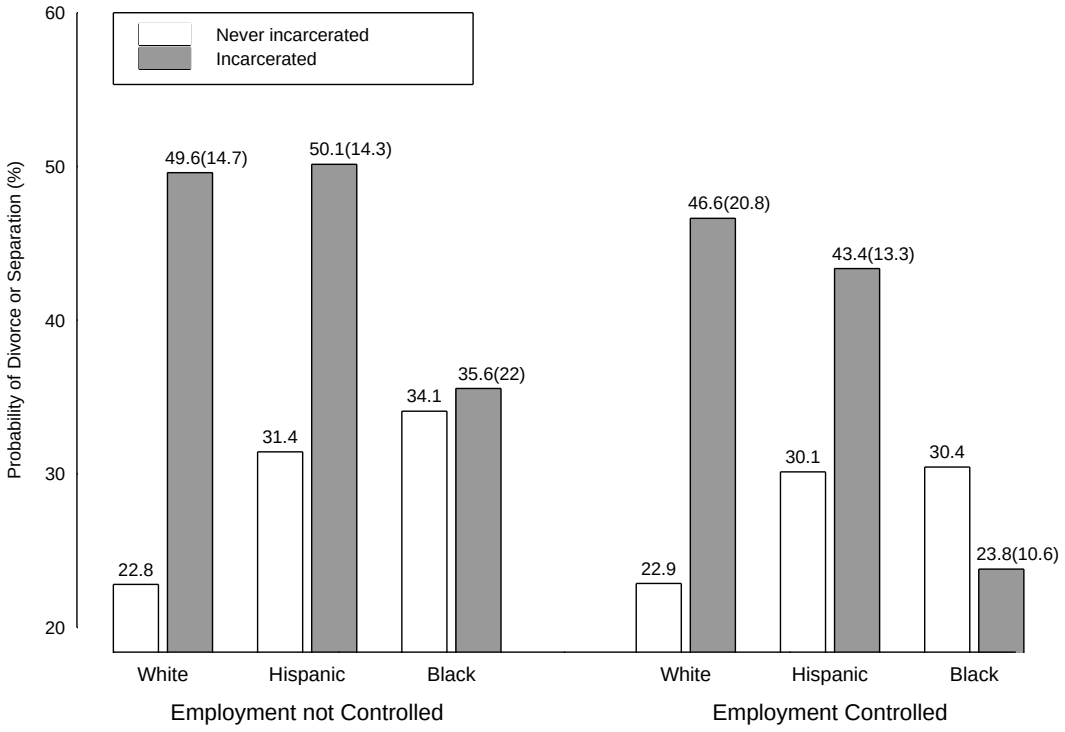

Figure 6.6. The effects of incarceration on a man's probability of divorce by the sixth year of marriage, by race and ethnicity, NLSY. Figures in parentheses show the statistical error of the prediction, approximately equal to 1.65 times the predictive standard error.

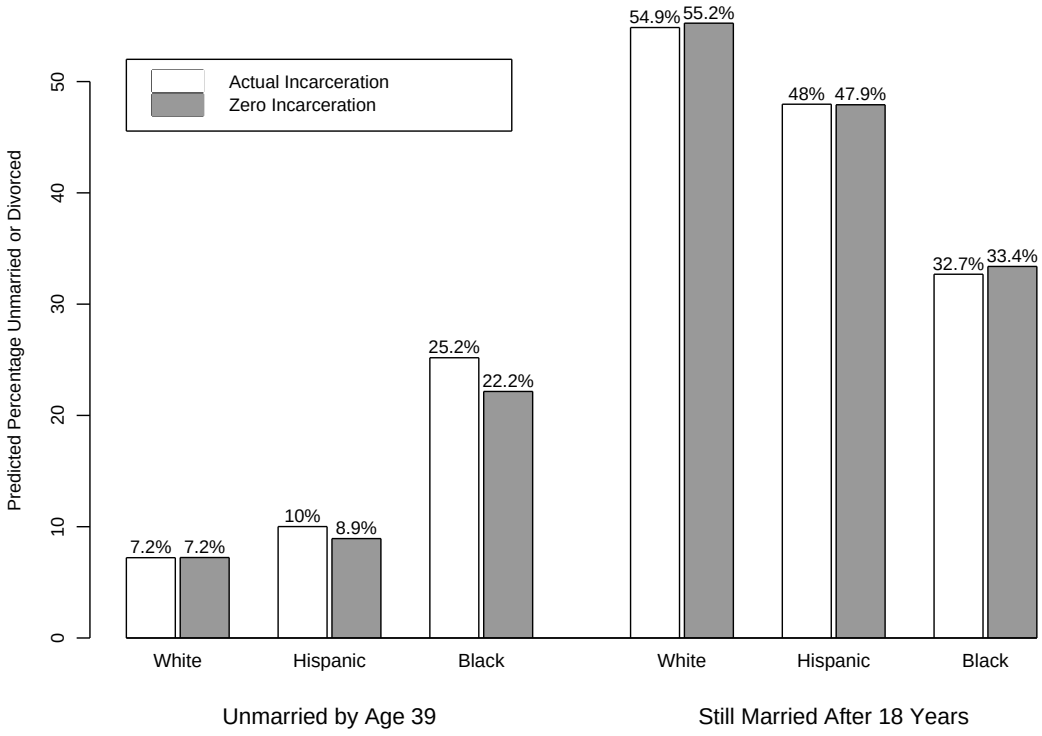

Figure 6.7. Predicted percentage of single men remaining unmarried by age 40, and men still married 18 years after marriage assuming the actual level of incarceration and zero incarceration in the NLSY.

be affecting those whose marriage rates are very low to begin with. To examine the aggregate effect of incarceration in the NLSY sample, I predicted the level of marriage and divorce under two scenarios. I first predicted marriage and divorce rates at the observed level of incarceration, and then predicted these rates assuming that none of the men in the NLSY sample were sent to prison.

Aggregate marriage rates in the NLSY would only be slightly changed if none of the respondents were incarcerated (Figure 6.7). The largest ef-

fect of incarceration is on marriage rates of African American men. About one-quarter of black men remain unmarried by age 40. Although this marriage rate (75 percent) is much lower than whites' (93 percent), it would be increased by only 3 percentage points if the incarceration rate among black men were zero.

The effects of incarceration on aggregate divorce rates are even smaller. In this case I predict the percentage of men who have remained married after 18 years. For white, Hispanic, and black, men the rate of marital dissolution would be changed by less than a percentage point if the incarceration rate were in the NLSY. Although the individual-level effects of incarceration on divorce are much larger than the effects on marriage, the aggregate rate of divorce would barely change if the NLSY men were never incarcerated. The aggregate effect is small because marriage rates are so low among men who go to prison. The NLSY does tend to under-estimate imprisonment among those with low levels of schooling. Even allowing for this undersampling of low-education prison inmates, the same pattern of results would obtain. The destabilizing effects of incarceration, in the aggregate, are largest among those who are not yet married and even in this case the effects are small.

Marriage and Separation in Fragile Families

The NLSY analysis suggests that incarceration reduced marriages rates, either by reducing the chances of marriage among single men or by increasing rates of divorce and separation among those who were married. Although the NLSY draws from a national sample observed over a long period of time, the sampling frame captures only a small number of incarcerated men and offers little information on men's partners.

Another survey, the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, reme-

dies some of the limitations of the NLSY. The Fragile Families study is a longitudinal survey of new (mostly unmarried) parents and their children in urban areas. Data were collected in twenty U.S. cities, stratified by different labor market conditions and welfare and child support policy regimes. New mothers were first interviewed at the hospital within 48 hours of having given birth. About 60 percent fathers were also interviewed in the hospital, and another 15 percent were interviewed soon after the child left the hospital. Mothers and fathers were first interviewed between 1998 and 2000, and then again 12 months later. The Fragile Families data are unique, because information about men's incarceration status is obtained from the men in the survey and their partners. This provides a more complete accounting than the NLSY, yielding data on incarceration even for men who are unable to be located for a survey interview. Even more than the NLSY, the Fragile Families survey provides detailed information on the living arrangements of poor urban couples. Unlike the NLSY, however, Fragile Families data are only available at several points in time. Still, the data offer valuable new information on a segment of the population that is difficult to study with traditional survey methods.

The short time series of the Fragile Families does not allow us to draw a survival curve for the prevalence of marriage, but we can examine the relationship between men's incarceration status and their living situation a year after their child is born (Table 6.1). In this sample of mostly poor, minority, urban couples, incarceration is much more common than in the NLSY. Whereas only 7.8 percent of the NLSY men were ever interviewed while incarcerated, 27 percent of the Fragile Families men were known to have been incarcerated, either by their own report or by their partners.[1] As

[1]The NLSY provides a good measure of longer spells of incarceration and closely tracks

Table 6.1. Percentage of non-inmates and ex-inmates, married or living with the mother of their one-year old child, by race and ethnicity, Fragile Families Survey.

	Living Together	Married	Sample Size
Father White			
Not Incarcerated	18%	68%	715
Incarcerated	35	23	157
Father Black			
Not Incarcerated	31	25	1100
Incarcerated	34	8	558
Father Hispanic			
Not Incarcerated	42	35	678
Incarcerated	40	19	228

in the NLSY, men who have never been incarcerated are much more likely to be married (40 percent) than men who have been to prison or jail (13 percent). Marriage rates were extremely low among black men. Only 25 percent of never-incarcerated blacks and 8 percent of those formerly-incarcerated blacks were married a year after the birth of their child. Incarceration is not systematically related to cohabitation. However, adding together the percentage married and the percentage living together shows that ex-inmates are much more likely than non-inmates to be separated from the mother of their children. For example, 29 percent of never-incarcerated whites are not living with the mother of their infant child compared to 52 percent of the formerly incarcerated. Separation rates are highest for black men who were incarcerated. Over half of formerly-incarcerated black men (58 percent) were living separately from their partners and year-old children.

The Fragile Families data lacks the long time series of the NLSY but a

prison incarceration rates (Western 2002). By asking respondents if men were ever incarcerated, the Fragile Families measure includes jail spells as well as prison terms.

similar analysis can be conducted using data from the two available time points. First, I look at those fathers who are unmarried when their child is born and see if they are married a year later. There are likely to be many differences between unmarried couples who are living together and those living apart. To try and provide a demanding test of the effect of incarceration, I only examine couples whose likelihood of marriage is low—those living apart at the time of their child's birth. Second, I also study couples who are together at the birth of their child and calculate the chances they have separated by the following year. Because marriage rates are so low in the Fragile Families data, I look at separation among those who are initially married or living together. In studying the effect of incarceration on the chances that a couple has married or separated, I account for the mother and father's age, race, ethnicity, education, and whether or not the mother has any older children. Father's economic status is measured by whether he worked in the previous week. The analysis also includes measures of the quality of the relationship, including mother's reports of whether her partner shows affection, or tends to compromise with her in disagreements. Finally, to capture the father's propensity to be involved in crime that is distinct from the effect of incarceration I account for whether the father has hit the mother or whether he heavily uses drugs or alcohol.

The effects of incarceration are measured against the probability of marriage for a high-school educated couple, mother and father both aged 26, with their first child (Figure 6.8). The probabilities of marriage, estimated for just one year, are much smaller than the NLSY estimates which added up marriage rates over a 20-year period. If we take no account of father's employment, 4.9 percent of couples with white fathers will marry within a year of their child's birth, provided the father has not been incarcerated. If the

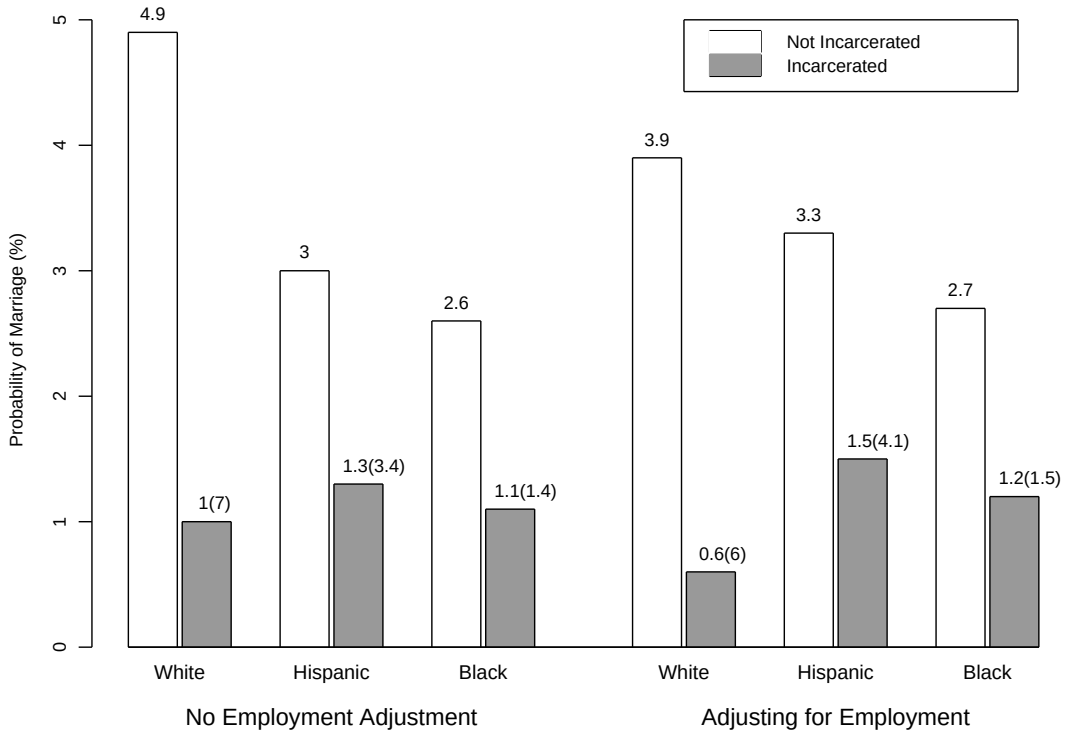

Figure 6.8. Estimated probability of a couple marrying a year after the birth of their child, given that they were not living together at the child's birth, by race/ethnicity and incarceration status, Fragile Families Survey.

father has been to prison or jail, the likelihood of marriage is only 1 percent, although a large statistical error accompanies this estimate. Like the NLSY analysis, the only statistically significant effect of incarceration on marriage is found among blacks. Couples with black fathers, are more than twice as likely to get married if the father has a clean record (2.6 percent compared to 1.1 percent for black ex-inmates). Accounting for the men's employment makes little difference to the effects of incarceration in the Fragile Families data. Only the effect of incarceration among blacks is estimated precisely enough to confidently infer an incarceration gap in marriage rates.

As with the NLSY, the Fragile Families data offer stronger support for the effects of incarceration on separation than marriage (Figure 6.9). For black, white, and Hispanic men, ex-inmates are more likely to be in failing relationships than those who have not been incarcerated. Also similar to the NLSY, the destabilizing effects of incarceration are largest among whites in the Fragile Families data. A white male high school graduate, aged 26 is 12.7 percent likely to have separated from the mother of his 12 month old child. A man with those identical characteristics is nearly three times (34.5 percent) more likely to be separated if he has a prison record. Among Hispanics, men with prison records are twice as likely to separate as those who haven't been incarcerated. Although the effects of incarceration are relatively small for African Americans, they are statistically significant in the Fragile families data, incidating that incarceration raises the risk of separation by about half, from 30 to 45 percent.

Because the effects of incarceration are large and there are many more men with prison and jail records in the Fragile Families sample than in the NLSY, the aggregate effects of incarceration are also much larger. The aggregate effect of incarceration compares predicted rates of marriage and sep-

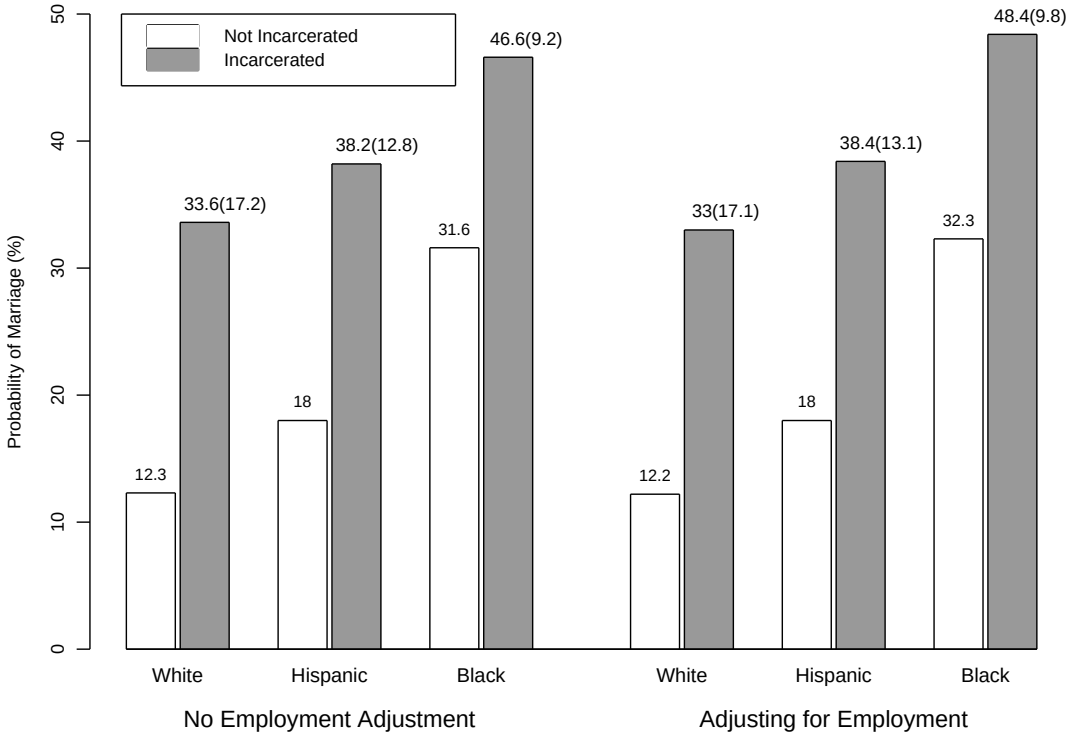

Figure 6.9. Estimated probability of a couple separating a year after the birth of their child, given that they were living together at the child's birth, by race/ethnicity and incarceration status, Fragile Families Survey.

Table 6.2. The percentage of fathers getting married or separating, one year after the birth of their child, at the observed level of incarceration and assuming zero incarceration, by race and ethnicity, Fragile Families Survey.

	Assumed Incarceration:		Ratio
	Actual	Zero	(Zero/Actual)
Percentage Getting Married			
All	5.0%	6.0%	1.20
White	4.9	6.4	1.31
Hispanic	10.6	11.7	1.10
Black	3.7	4.5	1.21
Percentage Separating			
All	18.0	15.0	.83
White	13.0	9.6	.74
Hispanic	13.6	11.0	.81
Black	27.4	24.4	.89

aration assuming the actual level of incarceration observed among the Fragile Families men, and assuming no incarceration. Table 6.2 shows that 5 percent of single men are predicted to marry after one year, but the marriage rate would be about 6 percent if none of the fathers in the study were incarcerated. The effect is largest for white and black men. The estimates indicate that marriage rates would be 20 to 30 percent higher, at zero incarceration. The aggregate effect of incarceration on rates of separation are also larger than we saw with the NLSY. While 18 percent of Fragile Families fathers are estimated to separate from their partners after one year, the separation rate would be 15.0 percent if none of the fathers had been to prison or jail. The effects are largest for whites. With no incarceration, the separation rates among whites is estimated to fall by one-quarter from 13.0 to 9.6 percent. The aggregate effects of incarceration on marriage and divorce are small in the NLSY, but the Fragile Families Survey uses a more permissive measure

of incarceration and draws from a poor urban sample. With these data, incarceration is estimated to reduce marriage rates and raise separation rates by 10 to 25 percent.

Statistical analysis of the NLSY and the Fragile Families data provide similar results. Black single men, but not whites or Hispanics, are especially likely to remain unmarried if they have prison records. The gap in marriage rates between black non-inmates and ex-inmates is estimated to be anywhere from 20 to 200 percent. The data point more strongly to the destablizing effects of incarceration on couples, whether they be married as in the NLSY, or coresiding as in the Fragile Families data.

Why are marriage rates low among black ex-inmates, but not others? NLSY results suggest that low employment rates among ex-inmates provides a partial explanation. The remainder of the incarceration gap in marriage rates is harder to explain, but we can speculate that it relates to the social context to which black ex-inmates return. Marriage rates for black men, given age, education, and employment, are a third lower than those for whites. Where marriage is more selective, women may attach more weight to negative characteristics like a prison record. Edin's (2000) respondents who emphasize the importance of a man's respectability convey this outlook for inner-city Philadelphia. Black women, living amidst concentrated poverty, may judge black ex-inmates to be less respectable and have worse prospects than their white counterparts. Other researchers suggest that communities receiving white and Hispanic ex-prisoners offer a richer web of family and neighborhood social supports (Nurse 2002; Sullivan 1989). Because such communities better foster criminal desistance, white and Hispanic ex-offenders may be better re-integrated into their local marriage markets.

This analysis began by warning that low marriage rates among ex-prisoners

may be due not to imprisonment, but to a selection effect in which criminal offenders are unlikely to marry, even if not incarcerated. Are my claims for the effect of incarceration on marriage and divorce contaminated by selection? I accounted for selection by controlling for men's drug use and history of violence, in addition to the demographic factors usually associated with marriage. The NLSY results for divorce, which adjusted for incarceration before marriage, offers the strongest control over criminal offenders' antipathy to marriage. The Fragile Families results—relying on two time points with incarceration occurring some time before the first—should be viewed more cautiously. There are other methods for controlling selection, but these work best for outcomes like wages or employment that vary a lot over time, not infrequent events like marriage. It would also be useful to study factors that are just related to incarceration, but not marriage. Unfortunately, the tangle of correlations among marriage, economic disadvantage, criminal behavior, and incarceration, offers little direct information about imprisonment that is unrelated with family formation. Still, analyzing two surveys is better than one. We can draw additional confidence from consistency in the results across two very different samples produced by two different research designs. The analysis can also be pushed further, by shifting the focus from marriage and divorce to the quality of relationships reflected in patterns of domestic violence.

The Quality of Married Life: Domestic Violence in Fragile Families

The evidence so far suggests that the prison boom separated many fathers from their children and contributed to low marriage rates and high risks of divorce among poor urban residents. By disrupting families and reducing mar-

riage rates, growth in the penal population rate has incurred a large and uncounted social cost. Absent fathers in prison and jail and low marriage rates among ex-convicts ultimately increases the number of female-headed households. The risks accompanying these households are well-known. Around half of all female-headed families live below the poverty line, their children face high risks of school failure, teen pregnancy, poor health and delinquency. The follow-on costs of incarceration for American families would thus seem to be substantial.

In estimating these effects of incarceration I have tried to account for how the men who go to prison and jail are different from the rest of the population. By adjusting for demographic characteristics, criminal behavior, and other factors, the analysis acknowledges that criminal offenders are unlikely to marry even if they haven't been incarcerated. The implications of the argument can be extended to marriage itself. Marriages with men involved in crime may not have the positive effects of poverty reduction, good health, and school success. Indeed, a woman may be well-served by a man's incarceration if he is violent. From this point of view, the social costs associated with low marriage rates may be balanced by gains in public safety obtained by distancing dangerous men.

The balance sheet is often acknowledged, but we rarely see a close accounting of costs and benefits. For example, Joan Petersilia (2003, 41) observes that "a solid marriage can give a prisoner emotional support upon release... On the other hand, marriage can also produce dynamics that contribute to family violence, substance abuse, and economic pressure." Jeremy Travis (2004, 257) offers a similar formulation: "For some families, the arrest of a parent may be a blessing: removing a violent or emotionally oppressive mother or father may improve the well-being of the family unit... For

other families, the arrest of mother or father may signify the removal of a breadwinner and force the family into poverty." Although close-knit families can help deflect crime and poverty, Petersilia and Travis recognize that the household's intimacy can expose family members to violence and abuse.

Does the negative effect of incarceration on marriage at least serve public safety by separating women from dangerous men with prison records? Answers to this question should distinguish different categories of criminal offenders. In particular, men convicted of violence may be more dangerous than drug offenders. This argument is often made in relation to the war on drugs which, critics claim, introduced sentencing and policing policies that incarcerated many drug users and small-time drug dealers who posed little risk to public safety (e.g., Tonry 1999; Mauer 2000). Consistent with this view, there is evidence that releasing drug offenders—but not violent or property offenders—would save money on corrections because the economic cost of their offending is so low (DiIulio and Piehl 1995).

I investigated this issue by returning to the Fragile Families survey. The Fragile Families 12-month survey asked mothers whether the father of her child "ever cut, bruised or seriously hurt [her] in a fight." The interviewer then recorded if injuries were sustained before, during, and after pregnancy. To probe differences between crime types, the data also categorize ex-inmates by their most recent offense, distinguishing drug offenders from those who were convicted of violence or other offenses (mostly property and public order offenses). Violence against mothers was relatively rare, with 3.3 percent reporting injuries prior to pregnancy, 2.3 percent reporting injuries during pregnancy, and 4.0 percent reporting injuries in the year after the child was born (Figure 6.10). Domestic violence was much more common among men who had been incarcerated. Among formerly-incarcerated men, 6 percent had

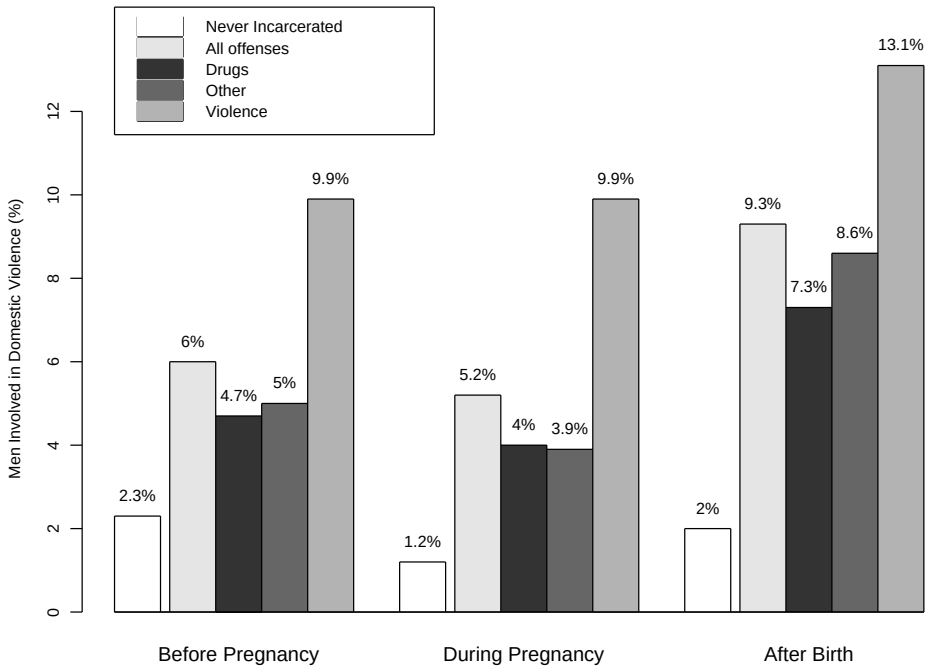

Figure 6.10. Percentage of men assaulting their partners, by incarceration status, Fragile Families Survey.

assaulted the mothers of their children before pregnancy, 5.2 percent engaged in domestic violence during pregnancy. After pregnancy, the rate of violence increased to 9 percent. Violent offenders were also more likely to assault their partners than drug offenders. After the birth of the child, for example, 13.1 percent of men incarcerated for violence assaulted their partners compared to 7.3 percent of drug offenders. In short, formerly-incarcerated men were involved in domestic violence at a rate about four times higher than the rest of the population.

Maybe low marriage rates among formerly-incarcerated men at least make women safer by reducing their exposure to violence. Complicating this pic-

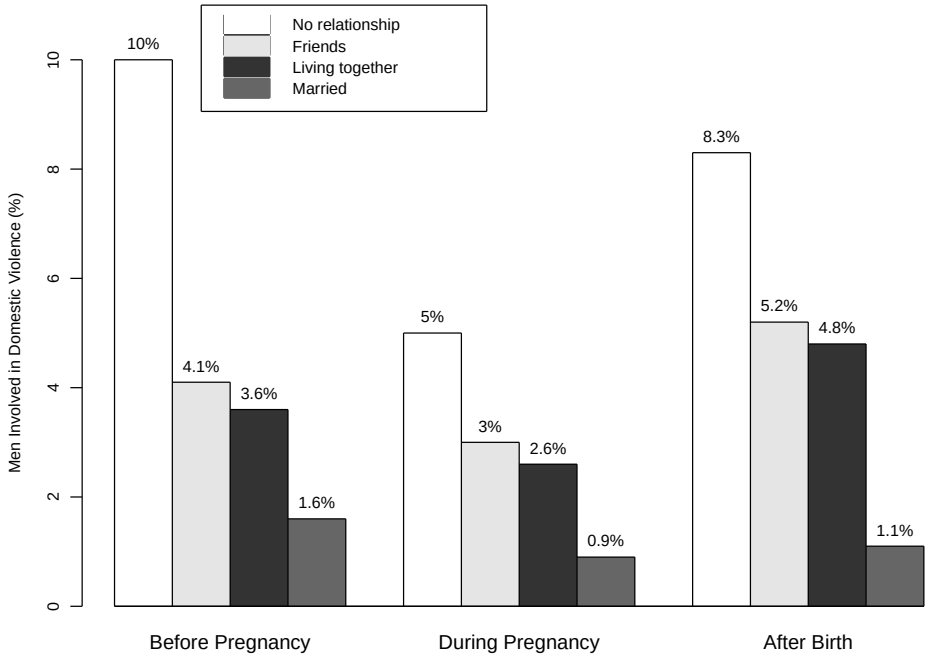

Figure 6.11. Percentage of men assaulting their partners, by relationship status, Fragile Families Survey.

ture, however, women who have the weakest connections to their partners are at highest risk of violence (Figure 6.11). A woman is 8 to 10 times more likely to have been assaulted by a partner with whom she has no ongoing relationship, than if she is married. The direction of causality here is rather muddy. Coresidence may be associated with a low level of victimization because women have left abusive men. However, women who are permanently separated—separated both at the time of their child's birth and one year later—are at higher risk of violence after birth (6.7 percent) than women who separate after the child is born (3.2 percent). Here, the data's message seems clear: Women remain at high risk of being assaulted, even after they have left their violent partners.

The effects of incarceration on domestic violence can be compared to the effects of marriage. With data from several points in time we can try to estimate the effects of marriage and cohabitation on domestic violence after a child's birth, controlling for a man's history of violence during and prior to pregnancy. Controlling for a man's history of violence helps us specify the violence-preventing effect of marriage. Accounting for a man's violent history guards against the possibility that low levels of spousal abuse in married couples is due to the high risk of dissolution in couples with violent men.

Table 6.3 shows the baseline probability of domestic violence for a 25 year-old black man with a history of spouse abuse. The effects on domestic violence are expressed as the changes in the baseline associated with incarceration, marriage, and cohabitation. With no control variables, violent offenders are estimated to be more likely to assault new mothers than drug offenders. Violent offending is associated with an additional 9.3 percentage point chance of violence, while drug offending adds 4.6 percentage points.

The rate of violence is 1.6 points lower in married couples, offsetting high rates of spouse abuse among ex-inmates. Adjusting for whether a man assaulted his partner before and during pregnancy helps account for the high risk of separation in marriages with abusive men. With this adjustment, the probability of domestic violence is 7.5 to 10.7 percentage points higher among ex-inmates, while marriage is associated with a reduced likelihood of domestic assault of 5 percentage points. These figures suggest that marriage can reduce the high levels of violence among drug offenders by about two-thirds, and the high level of violence among violent offenders by about one-half.

What is it about marriage that appears to reduce the risk of domestic violence? Robert Sampson and John Laub (1993) suggest that it is not marriage itself but a strong "spousal attachment" that restrains men from crime. The Fragile Families survey offers several measures of the quality of an intimate relationship reflecting spousal attachment. Mothers were asked whether their partners often showed affection[2] and how long a couple has been together. When controlling for husband's affection and the length of the relationship, married women's risk of violence shrinks substantially, and there is no longer a statistically significant difference in the risk of violence between married and unmarried couples. The results suggest that relationships which are long-lasting, in which men show affection, are unlikely to be marked by violence. High-quality relationships, rather than marriage itself, deflects the chances of domestic violence.

How can we interpret these results? The risk of intimate partner violence is much higher among separated women than married women. Marriage, it seems, is a marker for high-quality relationships in which both partners are

[2]Other variables recording whether husbands were encouraging or critical were also available and they produced results similar to those reported.

Table 6.3. Effects of incarceration, marriage, and cohabitation on the probability of domestic violence by new fathers, one year after the birth of their child, Fragile Families Survey.

		Adding Controls For:	
	No Controls	Prior Violence	Relationship Quality
Chance of domestic violence for never-incarcerated 25 year-old black man with a history of violence	2.6%	9.3%	7.8%
Effect on Probability of Domestic Violence:			
Incarceration for violence	9.3	10.7	9.6
	(3.5)	(5.5)	(6.5)
Incarceration for drugs	4.6	7.5	6.5
	(3.4)	(6.9)	(7.3)
Incarceration for other offenses	5.7	10.1	9.2
	(2.1)	(4.9)	(5.8)
Cohabiting in prior year	-.2	-.8	.1
	(.8)	(4.0)	(4.0)
Married in prior year	-1.6	-5.0	-3.1
	(.6)	(3.2)	(3.6)

Note: All models control for father's race and ethnicity and age. Figures in parentheses show the statistical error of the prediction, approximately equal to 1.65 times the predictive standard error.

strongly committed to each other. These measures of relationship quality explain a significant fraction of the effect of marriage on domestic violence. Because incarceration appears to undermine such high-quality relationships, low marriage rates among ex-offenders offers little support for the idea that women who have separated from men with criminal records are necessarily at lower risk of violence. Indeed, by undermining the development of high quality relationships, imprisonment may increase women's exposure to violence in the long run.

The penal system's influence seeps through the kinship networks of incarcerated men and women. Where men are only weakly attached to families and communities, their imprisonment affects few but themselves. We've seen evidence however, that incarcerated men have extensive family connections. Although their marriage rates are only half as high as those outside the penal system, incarcerated men are just as likely as others to have children. As a result, over 2 million children, and 1 in 10 black children under age 10, had a father in prison or jail by the end of the 1990s. The prison boom also magnified the effects of incapacitation and joblessness that drives the shortage of marriageable men in poor urban neighborhoods. Despite their low marriage rates, survey data show that imprisonment further reduces the marriage prospects of poor and minority single men. Marriage interrupted by incarceration are very unlikely to survive. In national samples, the aggregate effect of incarceration on overall marriage rates is small. In the mostly minority urban sample of the Fragile Families survey, the aggregate effect of incarceration is larger, underlining the concentrated effect of the prison boom on the poor in inner cities. Have reduced marriage rates among ex-inmates

necessarily made their partners and children worse off? Ex-inmates are more likely to assault their partners than other men, but this likelihood is reduced if they develop strong and longlasting relationships. Unfortunately then, the effects of imprisonment may be self-defeating to some degree. By eroding the familial bonds that curb violence, imprisonment undermines the conditions for desistance.

There is also a larger context to this story. Over the last two decades, poverty researchers have linked the growth in the numbers of female-headed families among African Americans to the failure of urban labor markets. Chronic joblessness among low-skill black men tightened the supply of men with the means to support families in inner city neighborhoods. In the era of mass imprisonment, the penal system has joined the labor market as a significant influence on the life chances of young low-education black men. The evidence in this paper suggests that the influence of the penal system ranges beyond the negative effects of imprisonment on men's wages and employment. Imprisonment has also inhibited the formation of stable two-parent families in the low-income urban communities from which most of the penal population is drawn. Stable families provide the poor with a valuable means of improving welfare. Families pool resources, socialize and supervise children, and provide networks of mutual aid. From this perspective the prison boom has diminished a valuable social resource already in short supply in America's inner cities.

Appendix

Marriage Rates and Children of Incarcerated Fathers

The number of children of incarcerated fathers was calculated using the *Surveys of Inmates of State and Federal Correctional Facilities* (1979, 1986, 1991, 1997) and *Surveys of Inmates of Local Jails* (1978, 1983, 1989, 1996). Inter-survey years were interpolated. Estimates are slightly low because the surveys only count an inmates first six children. Data from the March Supplement of the Current Population survey (1980–2000) were used to estimate the total number of minor children in the population. Marriage rates for the prison and jail population were estimated with the 1997 *Survey of Inmates of State and Federal Correctional Facilities* and the 1996 *Surveys of Inmates of Local Jails*.

Analysis of the NLSY

Estimates of the effects of incarceration on first marriage and divorce in the NLSY are calculated from a discrete-time event history model. Using life table methods, predicted probabilities of marriage and divorce in each year are used to calculate the prevalence of marriage and divorce by age 40 (for marriage) or after 18 years (for divorce). Estimates of statistical error are generated from normally-distributed linear predictions of the annual risk of marriage or divorce. Simulation methods yield confidence intervals for the overall marriage and divorce and rates. To obtain the marriage and divorce rates reported in this chapter, models were fit separately for blacks, whites, and Hispanics.

Quasi-likelihood logistic regression results for the full NLSY sample event history models are given in Table A.1. All predictors are dummy variables unless indicated.

Analysis of the Fragile Families Survey

Data from the Fragile Families study came from the baseline and 12-month follow-up interviews. The measurement of incarceration combining mothers and father's reports is detailed in Western, Lopoo, and McLanahan (2004). Quasi-likelihood logistic regression estimates of the odds of marriage at the follow-up interview among couples unmarried at baseline, and the odds of separation at follow-up among couples married or cohabiting at baseline are

Table A.1 Logistic regression coefficients (quasi-likelihood standard errors) for a discrete time event history model of divorce and first marriage, NLSY 1979–2000.

	First Marriage				Divorce			
	(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)	
Intercept	-3.936	(.207)	-4.274	(.213)	-1.842	(.313)	-1.714	(.312)
Now incarcerated	-1.773	(.367)	-1.502	(.370)	1.246	(.275)	1.059	(.278)
Was incarcerated	-.158	(.132)	.013	(.135)	.423	(.342)	.238	(.343)
Education (years)	-.003	(.013)	-.007	(.014)	-.117	(.014)	-.114	(.014)
Midwest	.099	(.090)	.098	(.091)	-.222	(.110)	-.219	(.110)
South	.538	(.084)	.522	(.084)	.024	(.099)	.035	(.099)
West	.258	(.092)	.258	(.093)	-.012	(.110)	-.023	(.110)
Black	-1.009	(.078)	-.948	(.079)	.450	(.085)	.414	(.085)
Hispanic	-.162	(.088)	-.140	(.089)	.080	(.103)	.083	(.102)
Drug user	-.378	(.062)	-.384	(.062)	.614	(.072)	.625	(.072)
Delinquency	.059	(.104)	.102	(.105)	.344	(.108)	.335	(.108)
Catholic	-.177	(.071)	-.186	(.071)	-.157	(.085)	-.159	(.085)
Very religious	.029	(.058)	.019	(.058)	-.011	(.067)	-.002	(.067)
Pre-martial birth	.583	(.075)	.583	(.075)	-	-		
Employment (weeks)	-		.014	(.002)	-		-.009	(.002)
Incarcerated pre-marriage	-		-		-.025	(.195)	-.075	(.196)
Age at first marriage	-		-		-.026	(.011)	-.019	(.011)
Non-marital birth	-		-		.153	(.078)	.152	(.078)
Martial birth	-		-		-.557	(.072)	-.560	(.072)
Person-years	20401		20401		21681		21681	
Persons	2041		2041		2762		2762	

Table A.2. Logistic regression coefficients (quasi-likelihood standard errors) for the analysis of marriage and separation, Fragile Families Study of child Wellbeing.

	Marriage (1)		Separation (2)	
Intercept	-3.687	(.935)	-.524	(.418)
Father's characteristics				
Incarcerated	-.805	(.347)	.801	(.125)
Age (years)	-.029	(.027)	-.046	(.013)
Less than HS	.295	(.347)	-.046	(.144)
Some college	.771	(.358)	-.043	(.152)
College degree	.598	(.677)	-.469	(.311)
Affectionate	.750	(.356)	-.196	(.151)
Critical	.607	(.632)	.574	(.334)
Compromises	.411	(.279)	-.507	(.119)
Heavy drug/alcohol use	-.758	(.463)	.276	(.142)
Hit mother	-.016	(.743)	-.298	(.381)
Worked last week	.590	(.403)	.197	(.161)
Mother's characteristics				
Age (years)	.033	(.034)	.002	(.016)
Less the HS	-.388	(.344)	.346	(.144)
Some college	-.123	(.349)	-.183	(.155)
College degree	-.446	(.771)	-.976	(.314)
Couple's characteristics				
Black	-.444	(.362)	.739	(.142)
Hispanic	.665	(.406)	-.321	(.172)
Mixed	-1.133	(.005)	1.277	(.300)
First birth	-.584	(.307)	.104	(.131)
Sample size	1125		2303	

reported in Table A.2. Results for a logistic regression on domestic violence is reported in Table A.3.

Table A.3. Quasi-likelihood logistic regression coefficients (standard errors) for a model of domestic violence in the year after a child's birth, Fragile Families Study of Child Wellbeing.

	(1)		(2)	
Intercept	-3.363	(.466)	-3.274	(.580)
Incarceration for violence	1.801	(.264)	1.235	(.332)
Incarceration for drugs	1.165	(.352)	.910	(.425)
Incarceration for other offense	1.330	(.215)	1.191	(.244)
Cohabiting at child's birth	-.066	(.197)	.114	(.236)
Married at child's birth	-1.008	(.380)	-.481	(.434)
Father's age (years)	-.013	(.014)	-.017	(.017)
Father black	.045	(.266)	.235	(.317)
Father Hispanic	.221	(.282)	.394	(.332)
Assault during pregnancy	-		3.090	(.332)
Assault before pregnancy	-		1.802	(.323)
Father is affectionate	-		-.438	(.238)
Length of relationship (years)	-		-.092	(.035)
Sample size	3344		3344	

References

Anderson, Elijah. 1999. *Code of the Street: Decency Violence and the Moral Life of the Inner City.* New York: Norton.

Baker, Robert L. and Birgitte R. Mednick. 1984. *Influences on Human Development: A Longitudinal Perspective.* Boston, MA: Kluwer.

Blau, Francine D., Lawrence M. Kahn, and Jane Waldfogel. 2000. "Undestanding Young Women's Marriage Decisions: The Role of Labor and Marriage Market Conditions." *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*53:624–47.

Braman, Donald S. 2003. *Doing Time on the Outside: Incarceration Family life in Urban America.* Ann Arbor MI: University of Michigan Press.

DiIulio, John and Anne Morrison Piehl. 1995. "Does Prison Pay? Revisited: Returning to the Crime Scene" *Brookings Review* 13:30–34.

Edin, Kathryn. 2000. "Few Good Men: Why Poor Mothers Don't Marry or Remarry." *The American Prospect* 11:26–31.

Edin, Kathryn, Timothy J. Nelson, and Rechelle Paranal. 2004. "Fatherhood and Incarceration as Potential Turning Points in the Criminal Careers of Unskilled Men." pp. 46–75 in *Imprisoning America: The Social Effects of Mass Incarceration*, edited by Mary patillo, David weiman, and Bruce Western. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Ellwood, David and Christopher Jencks. 2004. "The Growing Differences in Family Structure: What Do We Know? Where Do We Look For Answers?" In *Social Inequality*, edited by Katherine Neckerman. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

Farrington, David P. 1989. "Early Predicotrs of Adolescent Aggression and Adult Violence." *Violence and Victims* 4:79–100.

Frazier, E. Franklin. 1939. *The Negro family in the United States*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Goffman, Erving. 1963. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Hairston, Creasie Finney. 1989. "Men in Prison: Family Characteristics and Family Views." *Journal of Offender Counseling Services, and Rehabilitation* 14:23–30.

Hairston, Creasie Finney. 1995. "Fathers in Prison." Pp. 31–40 in *Children of Incarcerated Parents*, edited by Katherine Gabel and Denise Johnston. New York: Lexington Books.

Liebow, Elliott. 1966. *Tally's Corner: A Study of Negro Streetcorner Men*. Boston, MA:Little, Brown.

Lichter, Daniel T., Felicia B. LeClere, and Diane K. McLaughlin. 1991. "Local Marriage Markets and the Marital Behavior of Black and White Women." *American Journal of Sociology* 96: 843-867.

McLanahan, Sara and Lynne Casper. 1995. "Growing Diversity and In-

equality in the American Family." Pp. 1–46 in *State of the Union, America in the 1990s: Social Trends*, edited by Reynolds Farley. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Myrdal, Gunnar. 1966 [1944]. *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*. Volume 2. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Nurse, Ann M. 2002. *Fatherhood Arrested: Parenting from Within the Juvenile Justice System*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.

Office of Policy Planning and Research, U.S. Department of Labor. 1965. *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*. Washington DC: Department of Labor.

Petersilia, Joan. 2003. *When Prisoners come Home: Parole and Prisoner Reentry*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Sabol, William J. and James P. Lynch. 2003. "Assessing the Longer-run Consequences of Incarceration: Effects on Families and Employment." In *Crime Control and Social Justice: The Delicate Balance.*, edited by Darnell Hakins, Samuel L. Myers Jr., and Randolph Stone. Westport CT: Greenwood Press.

Sampson, Robert J. and John H. Laub. 1993. *Crime in the Making: Pathways and Turning Points Through Life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Sullivan, Mercer. 1989. *"Getting Paid:" Youth Crime and Work in the Inner City*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Travis, Jeremy. 2004. *But They All Come Back: Facing the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry*. Washington DC: Urban Institute Press.

Warr, Mark. 1998. "Life Course Transitions and Desistance from Crime." *Criminology* 36:183–216.

Western, Bruce. 2002. "The Impact of Incarceration on Wage Mobility and Inequality." *American Sociological Review* 67:477–98.

Western, Bruce, Len Lopoo, and Sara McLanahan. 2004. "Incarceration and the Bonds Between Parents in Fragile Families." Pp. 21–45 in *Imprisoning America: the Social Effects of Mass Incarceration*, edited by Mary Patillo, David Weiman, and Bruce Western. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Wilson, William Julius. 1987. *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass and Public Policy*

Zimring, Franklin E. and Gordon Hawkins. 1995. *Incapacitation: Penal Confinement and the Restraint of Crime*. New York: Oxford University Press.