The Intergenerational Stability of Punishment: Paternal Incarceration and Suspension or Expulsion in Elementary School

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ABSTRACT

Objectives. Drawing on life-course and social exclusion perspectives of punishment, we examine the association between a father’s incarceration and his child’s risk of suspension or expulsion in elementary school. We also assess the extent to which early delinquency and other child behavior problems explain this association.


Results. The odds of suspension or expulsion for children whose fathers were incarcerated are greater than the odds for other children (35% to 93% greater, depending on the specification of incarceration). This association is only partially explained by higher levels of early delinquency and other child behavior problems following paternal incarceration.

Conclusions. Extending the “school-to-prison pipeline” conceptualization of the relationship between school discipline and incarceration, our findings suggest an additional way these two systems of punishment are linked. A father’s incarceration is associated with greater risk of his child being suspended or expelled, and our findings suggest there are potential mechanisms beyond that of early delinquency or other behavior problems driving this association.