

Parental Incarceration:
Does Having Minor Children Have an Effect on Recidivism?

by

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ABSTRACT

Many parents are incarcerated, and most are eventually released. Parents that have to return home from prison may encounter difficulties adjusting to being a parent on the outside. Two competing criminological theories – social control and strain – build the framework for two pathways after release from prison – desistance or recidivism. The principal question of this study examines how being a parent to a minor child has an effect on the reentry pathways, and an interaction between being a parent and gender tests the differences between mothers and fathers. Existing studies have produced mixed results with some studies suggesting that minor children are a protective factor, and some suggesting the struggles of returning parents. Research has also shown that incarcerated mothers and fathers experience their incarceration differently, and it is surmised that this would have an impact on their reentry. Data used in this study were obtained through structured interviews with 952 inmates housed in the Arizona Department of Corrections in 2010 (n= 517 males (54%); n= 435 females (46%)). Logistic regression models show that having at least one minor child does not significantly impact the reentry outcomes for parents as compared to nonparents. In addition, the interaction between minor children and gender was also not significant – there were no differences between mothers and fathers. The statistically insignificant findings most likely show the cancelling effects of two distinct pathways for reentry. Implications of the findings are discussed below.

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Introduction

Half of the inmate population in the United States are parents to minor children (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Most inmates are eventually released from prison, but what is unclear is how being a parent influences reentry outcomes in either a positive or negative way (Bales & Mears, 2008; Visher, 2011). Two competing criminological theories, social bond and general strain theory, describe two distinct paths for reentering parents, and recent research seems to confirm each of these two paths. Social bond theory posits that individuals who develop and maintain social bonds are likely to desist from crime (Hirschi, 1969; Sampson & Laub, 1993). Strain theory posits that individuals who experience strain and relieve their strain in a negative way are likely to commit crime (Agnew, 2001). In one path, children can offer parents a source of positive change through increased emotional attachment, leading to desistance from further criminal activity (La Vigne, Naser, Brooks, & Castro, 2005). The other path suggests that parents have a difficult time providing care for their children and are more likely to recidivate (Arditti & Few, 2006).

While there has been considerable research investigating the effects of parental incarceration on children, research is limited for the reciprocal relationship (Kruttschnitt, 2011; Reed & Reed, 1997; Werner-Lin & Moro, 2004). The research that has examined the effects of children on reentering parents supports the two distinct pathways mentioned. Fathers who spend time with their children after release from prison are more likely to desist from crime (Visher, 2011). On the other hand, providing care for children and navigating the barriers of reentry could increase the parent's risk of recidivism (Brown & Bloom, 2009). This research does not, however, examine the differences in

reentry experiences between mothers and fathers. Mothers are more likely to feel guilty while incarcerated because they are unable to fulfill their obligations of being a mother (Arditti & Few, 2008). On the other hand, fathers are more likely to distance themselves from their children (Arditti, 2012). Given that mothers are the primary caregivers of children, it is likely that mothers would be more influenced by their children as compared to fathers (Alarid, Burton, & Cullen, 2000)—in either direction: caregiving as a protective factor or caregiving as a strain.

The broad purpose of this study is to examine how having children can affect the reentry outcomes of parents. Specifically, this study seeks to explore if having minor children can lead to desistance or recidivism for parents being released after prison. In addition, mothers and fathers are compared to determine how each parents' experiences influence their outcomes. The data used in this study were collected from the Children of Incarcerated Parents project conducted by the Arizona Criminal Justice Commission (Rodriguez, Stevenson, & Tasca, 2001). The purpose of this project was to arrive at a reliable estimate of the number of children of parents currently incarcerated in the state of Arizona, and 517 incarcerated men and 435 incarcerated women were interviewed with regard to their parenting status. The research using these data is important because of the significant number of parents in prison, and the 1.59 million children they leave behind (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Through this research, theory and policy can be better informed as to how the parent-child relationship effects reentry outcomes.

Theoretical Framework

Social control and strain theory help explain why reentry outcomes might be different for incarcerated parents as compared to incarcerated individuals without

children to care for. In addition, as discussed in the next section, mothers and fathers experience their incarceration differently, which could also impact reentry outcomes. How do their experiences shape their reentry to their family? For some parents, children can be a source of inner strength, but for others, having to care for children when released might prove to be a source of persistent stress. A parent's attachment and commitment to their children could likely be a protective factor, but the added strain coupled with maladaptive coping could lead to crime.

Informal Social Control - Social Bonds

One theory that would explain why parents would *desist* from crime is informal social control. Hirschi (1969) posited that social bonds provide informal social control that regulates an individual's behavior in society. The stronger the social bonds, the less likely the individual will commit crime. Hirschi (1969) proposed four different types of bonds: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. The bond of *attachment* referred to an individual's emotional connection to social constructs such as family and work (Hirschi, 1969). *Commitment* is the logical investment an individual makes, while *involvement* is the duration of the bond. *Belief* refers to how an individual follows social norms and rules (Hirschi, 1969). Hirschi (1969) studied a sample of juveniles and found that juveniles who had strong bonds to their parents were less likely to commit delinquent acts. However, what was not studied was the bonds of parents to their children.

Since Hirschi's theory was developed on a sample of juveniles, it was not clear if social bonds could explain adult desistance from crime. Sampson and Laub (1993) examined longitudinal data on delinquent boys allowing them to study adult social bonds. They found turning points in adulthood that seemed to explain desistance from crime

such as a good marriage and job, which also increased the men's social capital (Sampson & Laub, 2003). Specifically, the men in the study did not want to risk losing their stable employment and marriage because of a criminal act. What was not mentioned in the data was how having children could signify a turning point due to the attachment and commitment a parent would have for their children. Thus, parents with a good and stable family and job would fear risking everything by committing crimes.

Both Hirschi's and Sampson and Laub's theories were developed around males, and it is less clear whether they could explain female desistance. In order to extend the social control research for female desistance, Alarid and colleagues (2000) surveyed a sample of felons participating in a boot camp program. Results indicated that mothers were more likely to provide all of the financial support for their children, while also making less money than men (Alarid et al., 2000). In addition, Alarid and colleagues (2000) found that attachment to parents provided females less of a chance to commit crimes compared to men, suggesting that females hold great importance of relationships with others. However, the researchers did not include attachment to children in their data, even though they were examining social bonds among young adults. Given the importance of relationships with parents in social control theory, it seems logical to think that a parent's attachment to their children would also have similar effects, especially for mothers.

There have been very few studies that have examined social control theory for parents and their attachment to their children. However, Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph (2002) tested gender differences in social control theory while also including a variable measuring attachment to children. The study found that neither a good job,

marriage, or being attached to children had an effect on desistance from crime for either males or females, suggesting that children may not directly have an effect on successful reentry outcomes. Instead, through qualitative data, they proposed that individuals have “cognitive transformations” that lead to desistance (Giordano et al., 2002). Thus, an individual's agency potentially plays an important factor in desistance, even when they do not have strong social bonds. Further, it was found that females were more likely to discuss how their children played a role in their transformation, while males tended to view the family as whole (Giordano et al., 2002).

Strain Theory

Some parents may benefit from having children, but some may find it difficult to be a parent with a criminal history. Agnew (1992) developed general strain theory as an explanation for why individuals commit crime. He posited three specific types of strains with the first one being the inability to achieve positively valued goals. The second strain is the presence or threat of removal of positively valued stimuli, and the third is the presence or threat of negatively valued stimuli (Agnew, 1992). Each of these strains can produce a variety of negative emotions such as anger and frustration. The recency, duration, and strength of the strain has an impact of the negative emotion and how the individual copes with the strain. Individuals relieve the negative emotion through coping in a variety of ways, but maladaptive coping can lead to crime and delinquency (Agnew, 1992). However, it was difficult to determine the specific types of strains and negative emotions that lead an individual to resort to crime and delinquency.

In order to bridge the link between strain and crime, Agnew (2001) proposed that the strains that are most likely connected to crime were strains that were unjust, provided

incentive to engage in criminal activity, high in strength, and had low social control. Since Agnew's goal was to develop a general theory that would explain crime for most individuals, his theory can be applied to different situations. It is quite possible that parents who have been incarcerated already have maladaptive coping skills and resort to crime to relieve negative emotions. The added strain of caring for a child could compound strains involved in reentry, thus leading to the parent recidivating.

Having children to care for sometimes results in parents committing crime to support their children (Daly, 1989; Zeitz, 1981). Two mothers in Zeitz's (1981) study of women and white-collar crime had no prior criminal record, but they committed fraud to give their children the life and medical care they thought their children deserved. Research has even found that the added strain of parenting can increase drug use (Liu & Kaplan, 2001; Thompson & Petrovic, 2009). Thompson and Petrovic (2009) found that parents who just had their first child were more likely to use drugs, and this effect was greater for fathers as compared to mothers. Both of these examples show that parenting can cause strain and in effect increase deviant behavior.

Research has also examined how strains might differ between males and females (Broidy, 2001; Broidy & Agnew, 1997). Broidy and Agnew (1997) have found that males and females experience different types of strains, and also that they tend to cope differently to the strains. While males might cope through the use of violence, females are more likely to use drugs to relieve the strain (Broidy & Agnew, 1997). Child-rearing might be a type of strain unique to mothers; a mother unable fulfill her obligations of being a mother while in prison and during reentry will most likely experience considerable strain. This is supported by studies that find that mothers have more

disciplinary infractions after their children have visited them in prison as compared to other female inmates without children (Casey-Acevedo, Bakken, & Karle, 2004). For fathers, they may be able to cope by emotionally detaching themselves from their children; thus, the strain of not being able to parent effectively will have no effect while in prison or during reentry.

Incarcerated Parents

Prison is not a fun and cozy place. Research has suggested that the prison environment can change the behavior of individuals for the worse (Haney, 2012). Haney (2012) suggests that inmates go through “prisonization,” which is an inmate adapting to prison life, and correspondingly adjusting to normal life. This can have a profound effect on parents since they need to be loving and caring when their children visit, but then need to adjust to become hardened for prison life (Arditti, 2012). While both mothers and fathers adapt to the same prison life, they adapt in different ways.

Mothers

Female prisons are often overcrowded since there are usually very few prisons in each state for females (Braithwaite, Treadwell, & Arriola, 2005). There is also a greater risk of sexual exploitation from correctional officers (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003). Being a mother in prison is even harder because of separation from children, since mothers are often considered the primary caretaker of children (Alarid et al., 2000). Mothers feel guilty of their imprisonment because they are unable to provide the best care they want for their children (Arditti & Few, 2008). They also look forward to being reunited with their children, but they often have conflict with other family members when they have been released (La Vigne, Brooks, & Shollenberger, 2009). These deleterious

effects of imprisonment and expectations of providing good care for their children could impact reentry outcomes for mothers, in that they could be more likely to return to prison.

Fathers

Men in prison have to display a sense of masculinity and emotional coldness (Arditti, 2012). For fathers, this presents a problem since they want to be warm to their children - especially if they only get to visit them once in a great while. Fathers in prison are often caught in a dilemma; the mother of their children may restrict access or completely disallow contact with their children. Mothers are considered the “gatekeepers” of a father’s children (Nurse, 2002). If the father has children with multiple mothers, the father may choose the mother he has the least problems with, and is then essentially left with losing contact with his other children (Nurse, 2002). Losing contact with children while behind bars and switching roles may have an impact on how fathers reenter the community, in that they are more at risk for returning to prison.

Previous Literature

The theories presented above suggest that having children to care for after release from prison could either be a positive influence leading to desistance or a negative influence leading to recidivism. Desistance and recidivism are two different sides of the same coin. Desistance focuses on how individuals refrain from committing crime, even if they have a criminal past (Nakamura & Bucklen, 2014). On the other side, recidivism focuses on the particular risk factors associated with continuing into criminal behavior. The literature discussed below demonstrates how children can both be a risk factor for recidivism and a protective factor for desistance.

Desistance

Social bonds with a child can lead to desistance from crime. Visher (2011) found that fathers who have been recently released from prison developed an attachment to their children. Specifically, fathers who spent time with their children after being released desisted from crime (Visher, 2011). A similar study found an increase in attachment to children when the parent maintained contact with their children while in prison, and the increased attachment lead to desistance (La Vigne, Naser, Brooks, & Castro, 2005). Respondents in the Urban Institute's *Returning Home* study were asked about their family which may have lead respondents to provide information about their parents and grandparents, and not specifically about their relationship to their children (La Vigne et al., 2005; Visher, 2011). In addition, the two studies only focused on fathers and did not include mothers in the study. There was also no discussion on the *quality* of the relationship before and after incarceration. It is possible that parents who already had strong relationships with their children before incarceration could maintain the relationship through contact and visitation. Once the parent was released, an already strong relationship would have biased the results of the study; thus it would be important to examine the quality of the parent-child relationship when studying desistance of parents.

Research has shown that fathers who had a close relationship with their children upon release were likely to desist from crime (Bahr, Armstrong, Harris, & Fisher, 2005). Fathers who lived with their wife and children after release from prison were more likely to desist (Visher & Travis, 2003). While most research has been focused on fathers, there has been recent interest in incarcerated mothers. In-prison nurseries have been found to

increase the likelihood of desisting from further crime (Goshin, Byrne, & Henninger, 2013). Goshin and colleagues (2013) posit that having a safe environment within the prison fosters emotional attachment to their newborn children and provides an opportunity to change. However, simply being a parent does not have a direct effect on reentry outcomes, and instead it initiates a desire to change within the parent (Robbins, Martin, & Surratt, 2009). Prisons can be structured to make sure mothers become attached and committed to their children, while also providing mothers an opportunity for a cognitive transformation. Mothers who had contact with their children while incarcerated were more likely to desist from crime when released from prison (Barrick, Lattimore & Visser, 2014). The existing research certainly suggests that children can be a protective factor for parents' reentry into the community.

Recidivism

While the previous studies found support for desistance, other studies have found that children can be a risk factor for recidivism. Bales and Mears (2008) found that parents who were visited by their children in prison were in fact more likely to recidivate. It was suggested that the parents struggled with the reality that they are unable to be a successful parent while behind bars (Bales & Mears, 2008). Since the parents have already shown that they may cope with negative emotions through crime, as evidenced by their criminal activity, the added strain of constantly being reminded they cannot care for their children along with the different experiences of mother and fathers, could shape reentry outcomes.

Recently released inmates have to navigate the barriers of reentry (Bushway & Reuter, 2002; Lipsey, 1995; Western, Kling, & Weiman, 2001). A barrier unique to

parents reentering the community is the termination of parental rights. Parents who do not have a responsible caretaker to care for their children while they are incarcerated risk losing their parenting rights because their children have been placed in foster care for too long (Petersilia, 2009). Coupled with trying to find stable work and housing, taking care of a child might cause considerable strain on parents released from prison and risk reoffending (Arditti & Few, 2006; Brown & Bloom, 2009). These studies support strain theory, suggesting that being a parent can be stressful. Parents who already have maladaptive coping skills, and a propensity towards crime, may be more likely to recidivate once released from prison.

Current Study

The purpose of the current study is to examine if there is a relationship between being a parent and the risk of recidivism. Children can be a source of strength, while at the same time hinder successful reentry outcomes, as is evident in the theories and studies examined above. Do children act as a protective factor or a risk factor when a parent is released from prison? Does this relationship matter whether you are a mother or a father?

Data

The data used in this study were collected through the Children of Incarcerated Parents (COIP) project. The purpose of that project was to determine how many children have incarcerated parents in the Arizona Department of Corrections (ADC). In collaboration with researchers from Arizona State University (ASU), a structured interview was given to inmates starting February 2010 to May 2010. The interview asked questions pertaining to the inmate's children.

The sample was drawn from two facilities in the ADC. The ADC Alhambra facility is considered the gateway to other correctional facilities within the state since all male inmates are processed and classified in this facility. This location is ideal for drawing a representative sample of all male inmates under the custody of the ADC. Female inmates were interviewed at the Perryville facility because it is the only location for female inmates in the state. On each day of the interviews, interviewers used simple random sampling; they selected every ninth inmate from a list compiled by correctional officers.

The number of inmates approached for an interview were 554 males and 451 females.¹ Out of the inmates approached, 53 (5.3%) refused to participate. There were also data collection errors such as wrong inmate data that resulted in 37 cases being dropped from the initial sample that were interviewed for a total sample size of 915 inmates.

Dependent Variable - Recidivism

The dependent variable in this study is whether or not released inmates recidivated. For the purposes of this study, recidivism is measured by reincarceration in Arizona at any point since release. The initial dataset did not include measures for reincarceration. Release and reincarceration dates were obtained using the online Inmate Data Search provided by the ADC. The release date was operationalized as the first date the inmate was released since February 2010, and reincarceration date was

¹ Initial researchers found there was slight overrepresentation of male American Indians, and slight underrepresentation of male Latinos in the sample. However, it was found not to be an issue since overall, the sample was representative of the entire ADC population for both males and females based on racial and ethnic backgrounds.

operationalized as the first reincarceration date after release. Since the interviews were done at the beginning of an inmate's sentence, some of the inmates have not been released. This resulted in 78 cases being dropped from the sample, leaving 837 inmates that have been released from prison. Inmates in this study that have been released and then reincarcerated, whether because of new offenses or technical violations, are considered to have recidivated. The dependent variable *recidivism* is coded as a dichotomous variable (1=recidivated, 0=released and not reincarcerated). Of those who were released, 298 (35%) inmates have since recidivated.

Independent Variable - Minor Children

The independent variable is operationalized as an inmate having at least one child under the age of 18 years of age at the time of the interview. The independent variable, *minor children*, is coded dichotomously (1= at least 1 minor child, 0= no children under the age of 18). Out of 837 inmates, 525 (63%) have at least one minor child.

Control Variables

In a meta-analysis of predictors for recidivism, Gendreau, Little and Goggin (1996) found that gender, age, race, and prior criminal history are salient predictors. Included in this study are measures of race/ethnicity, gender, age, and the number of prior felonies. Race has four categories, White (43%), Black (14%), Native American (8%), and Latino (35%). *Black*, *Native*, and *Latino* are dummy variables with *White* being the reference category. *Female* is coded as 1 for females (46%) and 0 for males (54%). *Age* is the current age of the inmate as of December 2015 with a mean of 40.52 years of age.

The number of *prior felonies* is a continuous variable ranging from 0 to 13 with a mean of 2.63 felonies. ²

The most recent offense category, level of completed education, and marital status are also included in the data analysis. *Recent offense* was dummy coded *other offense* (20%), *property* (32%), and *drug* (30%) with *violent* (18%) as the reference category. *G.E.D or equivalent* is a dichotomous variable measure level of completed education with 1 coded as having at least a G.E.D or equivalent level of education (36%), and 0 as no G.E.D or equivalent (64%). *Married* is dichotomous and coded as 1 for married (14%) and 0 for not married (86%). *Time at risk* is a continuous variable measured in the number of days from the time of release to the time of reincarceration with a mean of 1181.97 days. If there was no reincarceration date, the end time was calculated as the number of days since release to December 1st, 2015 – the last day of data collection. The descriptive statistics of each variable are presented below in Table 1.

Analytic Strategy

In order to handle missing values for the variables *prior felonies* and *G.E.D or equivalent*, list-wise deletion is used for each model. A bivariate analysis is conducted between key independent and dependent variable to test for significant associations (see Table 2 below). Tests for multicollinearity included VIF (mean=1.33), condition number (17.76), and a bivariate correlation matrix (see Table 3 below). Logistic regression is used because the dependent variable is dichotomous, the results are displayed below in Table 4. Model 1 includes all of the control variables, and Model 2 adds the dependent

² There are 101 missing values for *prior felonies* due to data collection errors. List-wise deletion was used to handle the missing values in the logistic regression analysis.

variable to test the first research question. In order to test the second question of gender differences, an interaction between *minor children* and *female* is included in Model 3.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics (N= 837)

	Mean	SD
Recidivism	.35	.48
Minor children	.63	.48
Female	.46	.50
Age	40.52	9.86
Violent	.18	.39
Other offense	.20	.40
Property	.32	.47
Drugs	.30	.46
Black	.14	.35
Native American	.08	.28
Latino	.35	.48
White	.43	.50
Prior felonies	2.63	2.38
G.E.D or equivalent	.36	.48
Married	.14	.35
Time at risk	1181.97	699.15

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics by Gender

Variables	Males n=452		Females n=385		Total n=837
	n	%	n	%	n
Recidivism***	197	66.11	101	33.89	298
Minor children***	259	49.33	266	50.67	525
Violent	89	58.17	64	41.83	153
Other offense***	114	67.86	54	32.14	168
Property*	130	48.87	136	51.13	266
Drugs*	119	47.60	131	52.40	250
Black	70	60.34	46	39.66	116
Native American	32	46.38	37	53.62	69
Latino	171	58.36	122	41.64	293
White*	179	49.86	180	50.14	359
G.E.D or equivalent	175	57.76	128	42.24	303
Married	58	49.57	59	50.43	117

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 3 Bivariate Correlations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. Recidivism	--															
2. Minor children	.04	--														
3. Female	-.20***	.14***	--													
4. Age	-.07	-.17***	.06	--												
5. Violent	-.05	-.05	-.08*		--											
6. Other offense	-.07*	-.03	-.13***	.00	-.23***	--										
7. Property	.08*	.06	.08*	-.14***	-.32***	-.33***	--									
8. Drugs	.03	.00	.07	.21***	-.20***	-.33***	-.45***	--								
9. Black	.05	.00	-.06	.07	.00	-.07*	.00	.06	--							
10. Native American	-.01	.04	.04	.01	.00	.13***	-.09*	-.03	-.12***	--						
11. Latino	.02	.09*	-.07	-.13***	.08*	-.02	-.02	-.03	-.29***	-.22***	--					
12. White	-.05	-.12**	.08*	.07*	-.08*	.00	.07	.00	-.35***	-.26***	-.63***	--				
13. Prior felonies	.09*	.02	.23***	.27***	-.15***	-.09*	.11**	.09*	.07*	-.09*	-.10**	.09*	--			
14. G.E.D. or equivalent	-.13***	-.07*	-.03	.12***	.07	.06	-.08*	-.02	.04	.07	-.23***	.15***	.01	--		
15. Married	-.07*	.13***	.04	.11**	-.02	-.03	.01	.03	.01	-.04	-.02	.04	.06	.01	--	
16. Time at risk	-.65***	.01	.18***	.07	-.05	-.10**	-.05	.00	-.04	-.05	-.04	.05	-.14***	.06	.11**	--

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Results

Bivariate analyses revealed that gender was significantly associated with recidivism ($\chi^2(1) = 27.30, p < .001$), minor children ($\chi^2(1) = 12.36, p < .001$), other offense ($\chi^2(1) = 16.24, p < .001$), property ($\chi^2(1) = 4.13, p < .05$), drugs ($\chi^2(1) = 5.88, p < .05$), and White ($\chi^2(1) = 4.34, p < .05$). Specifically, as compared to men, women recidivated less, had more minor children, were less likely to have been convicted of an “other” offense and more likely to have been convicted of a drug or property offense, and were more likely to be white.

Table 4 Effects of Minor Children on Recidivism

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	<i>b</i>	(SE)	<i>b</i>	(SE)	<i>b</i>	(SE)
Age	-.01	(.01)	-.01	(.01)	-.01	(.01)
Other offense	.51	(.37)	.49	(.37)	.52	(.37)
Property	.95**	(.33)	.93**	(.33)	.94**	(.33)
Drugs	.84*	(.34)	.82*	(.34)	.85*	(.34)
Black	.25	(.32)	.22	(.32)	.25	(.32)
Native American	.12	(.41)	.09	(.42)	.12	(.42)
Latino	-.10	(.25)	-.13	(.25)	-.09	(.25)
Prior felonies	.05	(.05)	.05	(.05)	.05	(.05)
G.E.D or equivalent	-.68**	(.24)	-.69**	(.24)	-.68**	(.24)
Married	-.28	(.33)	-.34	(.33)	-.31	(.33)
Time at risk (logged)	-1.85***	(.16)	-1.86***	(.16)	-1.86***	(.16)
Female	-.57**	(.22)	-.61**	(.23)	-.95*	(.37)
Minor children	--	--	.25	(.23)	.01	(.30)
Minor children * Female	--	--	--	--	.53	(.46)
Intercept	12.06***	(1.14)	11.89***	(1.15)	11.91***	(1.15)
	LR $\chi^2=359.16$ ***		LR $\chi^2=360.36$ ***		LR $\chi^2=361.72$ ***	
	Psuedo R ² =.37		Psuedo R ² =.38		Psuedo R ² =.38	

Note. Entries are unstandardized coefficients (*b*)

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

The first model in Table 4 represents all of the control variables with the independent variable – minor children – omitted. Ex-offenders whose recent offense was

property ($b=.95$, $se=.33$, $p<.01$) or drug ($b=.95$, $se=.34$, $p<.05$) related were more likely to recidivate compared to those who recently committed a violent offense. Recently released offenders that had obtained a G.E.D. or equivalent, were significantly less likely to recidivate ($b=-.68$, $se=.24$, $p<.01$) compared to offenders that had not received a G.E.D. The longer an ex-offender was at risk to recidivate, the less likely they were to recidivate ($b=-1.85$, $se=.16$, $p<.001$), suggesting that most offenders who recidivated did so early after their release. Females in the sample were less likely to recidivate ($b=-.57$, $se=.22$, $p<.01$) compared to males.

In the second model minor children is added to the control variables, and it is not significant. Recently released inmates with at least one minor children were not statistically different compared to other inmates without minor children. As in Model 1, both property ($b=.93$, $se=.33$, $p<.01$) and drug ($b=.82$, $se=.34$, $p<.05$) related offenses were significant and in the same direction. The time at risk ($b=-1.86$, $se=.16$, $p<.001$) and level of education obtained ($b=-.69$, $se=.24$, $p<.01$) were also significant. Again, females were less likely to recidivate compared to males ($b=-.61$, $se=.23$, $p<.01$).

An interaction between minor children and females was added to Model 3 to test for differences between mothers and fathers. Both the independent variable and the interaction were not significant; mothers and fathers were not statistically different from each other. Again, property ($b=.94$, $se=.33$, $p<.01$), drugs ($b=.85$, $se=.34$, $p<.05$), and the time at risk ($b=-1.86$, $se=.16$, $p<.001$) were significant and in the same direction as in the previous models. As in the previous models, females ($b=-.95$, $se=.37$, $p<.05$) and ex-offenders with at least a G.E.D. ($b=-.68$, $se=.24$, $p<.01$) were less likely to recidivate.

All of the variables remained relatively stable across the models. The coefficient for females increased slightly in Model 3, while also decreasing in significance level. The key independent variable – minor children – was not significant across Model 2 and Model 3. It is important to note that an ex-offender’s race and age were not significantly related to recidivism. In addition, the number of prior felonies and being married were also not significant. Ex-offenders whose recent offense was classified as other were not significantly different compared to ex-offenders whose recent offense was classified as violent.

Discussion

While there has been considerable research on the effects of parental incarceration on children, there has not been enough research investigating the effects of children on incarcerated parents (Kruttschnitt, 2011; Reed & Reed, 1997; Werner-Lin & Moro, 2004). It is important to study this because about half of the inmate population are parents to at least one minor child, and eventually most will be released (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Are the reentry experiences of parents different from nonparents? Both social bond and strain theory support two distinct pathways, desistance and recidivism, respectively. On one pathway, prior research suggests that parents are able to build upon their emotional attachment with their children to desist from further criminal activity (Visher, 2011). While on the other pathway, prior research also suggests that having to care for a child once released from prison is too much strain for the parent, which can increase the likelihood to recidivate (Brown & Bloom, 2009). The purpose of this study is to compare the reentry outcomes between parents and nonparents, and to see if these

outcomes also differ between mothers and fathers. Based on the results, it appears that reentry outcomes of parents are more nuanced than previously studied.

The results of this study indicate that parents with minor children are not statistically different from other adult inmates with respect to reentry outcomes. In addition, mothers and fathers are not statistically different in their reentry outcomes either. These findings support Giordano and colleagues in that attachment to children is not significant, and there are no differences between mothers and fathers. However, through their qualitative research they found that children were often associated with a “hook for change,” meaning the individual realizes the importance of properly raising children and desires to change their deviant behavior in order to be a good parent to their children (Giordano et al., 2002). Mothers were more likely to focus on their children for a hook for change as compared to fathers whom were to focus on the family as a whole; both parents expressed feelings of not wanting their children to follow in their footsteps (Giordano et al., 2002). It is very likely the statistical analyses failed to capture the nuances of an individual’s desire to change. Further analyses of reentering parents should consider including measures that would influence an individual’s agency.

While parents are not *statistically* different compared to other adults in this study, prior research and theory seems to indicate two distinct pathways unique to parents that have minor children. Children can be a positive influence through social bonds, and children can also be a source of strain. It is very likely the results of this study show the two theories cancelling each other out, leaving a finding of no effect. Since this study does not examine the quality of the parent’s relationship with their children before, during, and after incarceration, it is unclear how this would affect the results. Future

research should focus on teasing out the specific conditions that would either increase or decrease the risk of recidivism. Based on the previous literature and theory, research should focus on the quality of the parent-child relationship and how parents cope with the stress of raising child after being incarcerated.

The findings of this study could also be a result of parents that are older, and the parents in this study could have both minor and adult children. Since minor children is measured as the parent having *any* children under 18 years of age, it is unclear if the results would have changed if parents were in the process of raising their first child. Previous research suggests that having the first child would have a greater impact on the parent since they may be unprepared and/or lack experience to raise a child (Thompson & Petrovic, 2009).

It should also be noted that the measure of recidivism used in this study is rather broad. Specifically, there is no distinction between technical violations and new offenses. It is possible that the demands of being a parent, sustaining employment, and navigating the barriers of reentry would increase technical violations for parents compared to other adult ex-offenders. In addition, it is unclear how employment and support from other family members would influence the outcomes of parents' reentry. Despite the limitations, this study contributes to the scant knowledge of reentering parents because it addresses some of the limitations of previous research. In particular, this study narrowed the focus of family relationships to the specific parent-child relationship, and it also examined the reentry differences between mothers and fathers.

While the findings of this study are not statistically significant, it could be surmised that both social bond and strain theories are at work. If the results are indeed

showing a cancelling effect, then it would confirm that both theories can explain reentry outcomes for parents. Instead of both theories competing to explain further crime among parents, both theories could be integrated to develop a deeper understanding of how parents reenter their families after being released from prison. Cullen (1994) provides a compelling argument by integrating social control and strain under the theory that increased social support will reduce crime. An individual's social support network can garner not only support, but also informal social control; the impact of strains are lessened because of the ability to seek help from others (Cullen, 1994). It could be argued that recently released inmates have to rebuild their social support network, and being a parent adds another dimension to rebuilding this network. Further research should investigate how recently released inmates' social support network influences reentry outcomes and how being a parent impacts their social support (see Wright & Cesar, 2013).

It is important to realize potential policy implications of this study, as the correctional system could be developed to address the needs of parents. Cullen (1994) also proposes that recidivism will decrease if correctional systems provide necessary support for inmates. For example, in-prison nurseries provided mothers an opportunity to develop a relationship with their newborn child (Goshin, Byrne, & Henninger, 2013). Visitation programs can be developed to foster and maintain a good relationship between parent and child while the parent is in prison to reduce the likelihood that parents become "viscerally aware of their inability" (Bales & Mears, 2008, p. 314) to be a successful parent while in prison (see Tasca, Wright, Turanovic, White, & Rodriguez, 2016). Parents can learn to properly care for children through parenting classes both inside and

outside the prison. It would also be important to maintain continuity of support for parents so they can still have resources available when reentering the community. By providing appropriate services to parents, parents could focus on the care of their children, and at the same time their children will also benefit from the increased support, lessening the collateral consequences of parental incarceration. Most broadly, a nonsignificant finding of parenting on recidivism in the current study should not necessarily close the book on the importance of children in the reentry process. Instead, it serves as a call to better understand the relationships between parents and children—and how to improve those relationships through programming and policy—in order to ensure that parents have the best chance to succeed upon release from prison.

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