

**UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF MASS IMPRISONMENT:  
EFFECTS OF PATERNAL INCARCERATION ON CHILD SCHOOL READINESS\***

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## **ABSTRACT**

Though sociologists have examined how mass incarceration affects social stratification, remarkably little is known about how it shapes racial disparities in educational outcomes. Analyzing the Fragile Families Study and its rich paternal incarceration data, I ask whether children with fathers who have been in prison are less prepared for school both cognitively and behaviorally as a result, and whether racial disparities in imprisonment explain some of the gap in white and black children's educational outcomes. Using a variety of estimation strategies, I show that experiencing paternal incarceration by age 5 is associated with lower behavioral school readiness. While the main effect of incarceration does not vary by race, boys with incarcerated fathers have substantially worse behavioral skills at school entry. Because of the higher exposure of black children to incarceration, mass incarceration facilitates the intergenerational transmission of male behavioral disadvantage, and plays a role in explaining the persistently low achievement of black boys. By bringing literature on educational inequalities into dialogue with the growing body of research on the consequences of imprisonment for families and communities, this study contributes to a better understanding of the role mass incarceration plays in the persistence of educational disparities and the intergenerational transmission of inequality.