“Paternal Incarceration and Family Functioning: 
Variation Across Federal, State, and Local Facilities”

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Fragile Families Working Paper: 15-03-FF

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we extend research on the association between paternal incarceration and family functioning using unique data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCW) that identifies whether fathers are currently incarcerated in a local jail, a state prison, a federal prison, or an unknown type of facility. The analysis proceeds in three stages. In the first, we show there are few observable differences between fathers incarcerated in a local, state, or federal facility and those incarcerated in an unknown facility type. In the second, we show descriptive differences in family functioning between families of incarcerated fathers and other families by facility type. In the third, we test the association between facility type and family functioning using a series of fixed effects models. Although the fixed effects analyses are somewhat underpowered, the results show strong associations between facility type and two outcomes, including the probability (1) the mother and father have separated and (2) the mother has found a new romantic partner. However, there is no clear pattern by facility type across the outcomes. These results make it difficult to conclude that the association between paternal incarceration and family functioning varies across facility types, but further rigorous tests are sorely needed.