

The Intergenerational Effects of Parental Incarceration*

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PRELIMINARY DRAFT

Abstract

We estimate the effects of parental incarceration on youth crime, childbearing, and educational attainment using administrative data from Sweden. Our empirical strategy exploits exogenous variation in parental incarceration from the random assignment of criminal cases to judges with different incarceration tendencies. We find that parental incarceration has no detectable impact on educational attainment, but leads to a significant increase in criminal convictions and, for females, teen childbearing. The effects are concentrated among youth from low-income families, who are 13.2 percentage points more likely to have a criminal conviction and 8.0 percentage points more likely to have a child during their teen years. Incarceration also decreases parental earnings, increases parental welfare receipt, and increases the probability that youth live with only one biological parent.

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