

The Effects of Mass Incarceration in the Local Community

Derrick L. Lloyd

Beulah Heights University

Dr. Angelita Howard

July 12, 2018

Abstract

The United States leads the world in incarceration of its citizens. African Americans make up 60% of the incarcerated. The removal of black men from the home has intergenerational consequences for the families and community. Children of the incarcerated has added stressors when the loved one is removed. Similar to the adult prisoner having an albatross stigma placed around their necks, the children of the of incarcerated also have an albatross stigma placed around their necks as well. The stigma of prison limits the inmate job prospects. This effects the post incarcerated because most of the black men imprisoned are uneducated and unskilled prior to incarceration and upon released from prison. The employment market has become even more narrowed. The financial losses have the now single parent working to make ends meet. When the loved one is imprisoned, the entire family is imprisoned as well.

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The United States is the world's leader of incarceration of its citizens. The United States house 25% of the worlds prisoners, but only make up 5% of the world's population (Tyler & Brockman, 2017). The population of people impacted the most by the America's culture of imprisonment are African Americans men who are 6.5 times more likely to be incarcerated than white men and 2.5 time more likely more than Hispanics (Clear, 2007). Those who reside in the poorer inner-city communities and areas where African Americans live at or below the poverty line has a much higher rate of incarceration than their white counterparts.

According to Alexander (2012), the majority of drug convictions are young black men from the inner city. Alexander (2012) continues to makes the analogy of comparing the incarceration rate of young black men to the laws of the Jim Crow era making people of color invisible citizens while increasing the prison population. The result of the mass incarceration of African American males gave birth to intergenerational consequences such as restricted social acceptance, negative stigma, and parental incarceration (Smith, 2017).

After the enslavement of Africans, America moved to control the African American population through mass incarceration. African Americans found themselves being taken away from their families and locked away for long periods of time for doing nothing more than walking down the street or not having a job. Incarceration of black men was made easy through the Black Codes then Jim Crow (Graff, 2015). During the Civil Rights Movement, many of the absurd policies designed to affect the population in the black community was ruled unconstitutional through various legal decisions. (Pettit & Sykes, 2015). The legal system and lawmakers went through a period of rebranding after the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Pettit & Sykes, 2015). The new rebranded policy appealed to poor white Americans with a law and order rallying cry that would be a benefit to White communities and adversely affect the Black community (Pager, 2007). The law and order policy became legal

forced segregation in the American society by the mere fact that incarceration legally segregated black men from society more than white men (Graff, 2015).

The prison system and the inner-city have both become symbols of marginalization for African Americans. According to Wacquant (2008), the prison systems and the ghetto has evolved into functional islands of segregation. In the inner city many residents are not able to escape the harsh realities of their living conditions, sometime these conditions are created when one or both parents enter into the criminal justice system (Tyler & Brockman, 2017). The family become imprisoned in their communities where they call home but society calls the ghetto. As the families in the communities create a family bond centered around several common factors, the inmates simultaneously create a community bond and a sense of family they had in their community pre-incarceration. However, the prison system restricts the social development of the inmates; the anti-social development accompanies the inmate post-incarceration as they attempted to re-enter and assimilate into society.

Alexander (2012), stated the new law and order policy became the new Jim Crow to punish people of color. This follows a pattern in the United States of regulating race and poverty through mass incarceration (Smith, 2012). The effects of the new mass incarceration policy were designed to neutralize the inner-city communities by limiting or disqualifying post incarcerated individuals from receiving educational funds, lowering employment, and being excluded from welfare benefits and other federally funded social programs (Smith, 2012).

Political disenfranchisement is one of the greatest miscarriages of justice resulting from mass incarceration. When an inmate loses their right to vote, the voting disenfranchisement limits the voting power from one class while giving power to another voting class. Smith (2012), reports that in 1976 there were approximately 1.2 million disenfranchised felons in the United States (p.473). That number increased to around 5.4 million in 2004. In the same year, 2004, the state of Florida disenfranchised over 1 million residents due to incarceration (Smith, 2012).

Consequentially, the majority of the inmates in the prison system with felonies are young black males. Due to the lack of political representation, lawmakers are elected to offices that are from areas that has nothing to do with the inner city. These policy makers were pressured by their constituents to make laws governing the inner city, without even seeking input from the residents on community safety or way of life issues (Clear, 2007). Currently, there are eleven states that bar former felons from ever having their voting rights restored (Pettit & Sykes, 2012).

Prison and Crime. According to Clear (2012), state and federal lawmakers formulated a theory to reduce crime in heavy populated urban areas. The theory suggested the more people that is incarcerated in high crime populations will be directly proportionate to the rate of crime reduction in the same area (Clear, 2012). The federal government remove parole for federal inmates. There were harsher sentences for minor drug offense that primarily impacted young poor African American males. According to Alexander (2012), the sentencing disparities between black males and their white counterparts was a 7 to 1 ratio for various forms of cocaine. This mean the 1 gram of powdered cocaine would be sentenced to an average of 1 year in prison, whereas the possession of 1 gram of crack cocaine would receive a mandatory minimum sentence of 7 years in prison (Alexander, 2012; Pettit and Sykes, 2015). In the 1980's crack was sold and consumed by a majority of African Americans in poor communities. Between 1980 and 2000, the incarceration rate among African American males grew by 370% in the United States (Stringer, 2013).

The increase in the rate of incarceration was not directly proportionate to the reduction in crime. The rate in the targeted areas continued to rise (Clear, 2012). Lawmakers then determined that prisoner's time incarcerated was too easy. They assumed that a deterrence program is what would help reduce the recidivism rate (Clear, 2012). This theory suggested the time in prison should be so horrific and uncomfortable the inmates would have two reactions: 1) they would not

commit another crime for fear of being sentenced to prison again. 2) they would tell their friends, family, and community about the horrible condition as a deterrence (Clear, 2012). This theory did not reduce the recidivism rates. The result is the theory did nothing to address the revolving prison doors, it only incarcerated member from the poor community without any plans to rehabilitate the inmate. The goals were and still remains horrific imprisonment.

Former President Bill Clinton played politics when he signed Crime Control Bill in 1994 also known as the Clinton Crime Bill, making it the toughest crime bill in recent history (Palmiotto, 1998). This crime bill had an immediately impact on the black community with lasting impact on today's communities and families. Clinton removed educational funding for inmates who utilized the time in prison to further their education. Many of the occupational skills training were removed as well while inmates received minimum physical and mental health care (Palmiotto, 1998). The harshest sentencing guidelines was the three strikes policy that gave many black men life sentences without parole, most due to a third non-violent felony drug conviction (Olser & Bennett, 2014).

Former President Barack Obama attempt to reverse the sting of mass incarceration by attempting to enact prison reform. However, prior the President Obama's reelection in 2012 the population for prisons and jails was 2.2 million people (Pettit & Sykes, 2015). The lingering effects of the Clinton Crime Bill decimated black communities. In many cases the father who was the bread winner of the home was removed and imprisoned. The trend of father's trying to parent from prison grew as the prison population increased (Clear, 2012). The economic strain on the family became more sever, leaving more families impoverished and more children growing up with psychological and emotional issues (Western, Braga, & Kohl, 2014).

In California, adult criminals encouraged youth as young as 10 years old, to commit major crimes. These youths found themselves at a young age with life in prison for selling drugs or burglary (Palmiotto, 1998). California currently has the largest prison population of young

black men doing life without parole because the Clinton Crime Bill removed a judge's discretion in sentencing, replacing it with color blind sentencing guidelines. This has left families wondering how to process the fact their young child will be imprisoned forever. The families are forced to deal with grief and loss from losing a loved one to incarceration (Mauer & Huling, 1995).

Effects on the family. The average number of men and women sentenced to prison or jail annually is around 700,000 (Clear, 2007). As of the year 2000, more than 1.5 million children had either one or both parents incarcerated (Clear, 2007). The removal of family members from the community into the prison system causes social disruption in the lives of their family. The consequences are especially deleterious on the children who has a parent incarcerated (Turney, 2017). The stress of losing a parent to the prison system has a lasting impact on the child's social, mental, and emotions development. Ofonedu, Percy, Harris-Britt, and Belcher (2013), conducted a survey with school children between ages of 12-17 years old living in impoverish communities regarding their mental health and the stressors they have to endure. The results revealed the students are exposed to community violence, gang activity, drugs, and poverty.

When one parent is incarcerated, the loss the child experience may change the trajectory of their social development. In the impoverish communities, the children become susceptible to the vices that threaten the community such as violence, gangs, and drugs (Shaw, 2018).

Ultimately, those who become involved with the negative vices in the community, increases their chances of being inducted into the same prison system that removed one or both the parents from the home. Ofoendu, et.al (2017) studied the effects of emotion distress in children from impoverished areas. The findings indicated that African American youth do not exhibit depression as their white counterparts. The African American youths in Ofoendu, et.al (2017), survey was documented with symptoms of aggressiveness, lashing out, and being argumentative

when they are depressed. As a result, many black youths be either undiagnosed or under diagnosed with depression of other mental health issues. Since the education system has not been trained to recognize this issue from black children suffering from intergenerational consequences that contribute to their mental health issues, they are not dealt with accordingly. The children are simply referred over to the principal or law enforcement for punishment.

Children may experience financial instability and insecure housing because of the loss of one or both parents to incarceration (Shaw, 2018). Children may not be responsible for carrying some of the financial burdens of the family, but they are the primary recipients of the family's economic downturn. The intergenerational consequence of parental incarceration is homelessness (Shaw, 2018). The other detrimental effects, experienced by the children of an incarcerated parents, has been documents to include the child is more likely to be placed in special education, be retained in elementary school, have more absences then their white counterparts, and failing academic performance in high school (Turney, 2017). Three out of five African Americans who drop out of high school are five times more likely to spend time in prison (Clear, 2007). An elevate African American dropout rate can be contributed to the intergenerational consequence of parental incarceration.

Children are classified into two categories, low risk or and high risk of parental incarceration. The risk factors indicate the child may experience emotional and behavioral consequences once the parent is taken from the home and placed in the system. According to Turney (2017), there is a parallel between parental incarceration and the child's behaviors problems. This correlation is especially evident when the child lived with the father prior to incarceration. If the father was active in the child's life while providing economic and emotional stability, this child may experience severe intergenerational consequences of behavior and

emotional issues. Turney (2017), identifies the child as being at low risk if their parent would be a less unlikely candidate for prison.

When the father has provided minimum financial and emotional support, and the child's is already plagued with instability, they are experiencing chronic stressors that put them at higher risk for intergenerational consequences. Turney (2017), stated the child in the high-risk category is already disadvantaged due to their "neighborhood environment, poverty, and instability" (p. 364).

The removal of one of the parents to incarceration disrupts the entire family structure (Clear, 2007). There is a loss of emotional support and relationship losses causing a destabilizing of the home (Clear, 2007). Women who were in a relationship with men pre-incarceration, usually move on from the relationships with the inmate. The children now have an added stressor of the mother moving on with their lives (Smith, 2017). The economic stain on the relationships forces many mothers to work multiple jobs to make ends meet, to cover the loss caused by the income that once came from the incarcerated mate prior to prison.

The mother has a choice to remain imprisoned in the community she live with her children and their father or attempt to make an effort for a better quality of life for herself and her children (Clear, 2007). There is a growing dynamic in the family structure in the poor community. The structure has become a female single parent headed household. The greatest contributor to this family structure was cause by the active incarceration of family members that has removed black men from the home and housed them in prisons (Clear, 2007). The child is forced to adapt to social norms without a father figure or visiting a father figure who is imprisoned.

Reentry. During the time incarcerated inmates receive minimum counseling and skills training. The inmates are void of human and social capital when being released back into impoverish areas (Clear, 2007). The goal upon release is to have the inmate assimilate back into

back into the community as functioning members of society. However, the experiences of prison leave many inmates changed so much so they are not suited for the labor market or relationships (Pager, 2007; Clear, 2007).

Marriage is not a major factor in the poor community. The incarceration of black men reduces those prospects of marriage for both men and women (Clear, 2007). According to Clear (2007), studies have shown that post incarcerated men would prefer to cohabitate with women instead of marrying those women. The same studies have shown these unconventional arrangements has led to family dysfunctions (p.98).

Pager (2007) suggests the effects of prison changes the inmate in ways that make them less willing or able to hold down a job (p.31). Any conviction leveled against African American men hangs an albatross around the neck of the post incarcerated. The labor market views all black men as criminals first. White men with criminal records were considered for employment before black men without a criminal record and the same qualifications (Pager, 2007; Smith, 2012). For those who do fear the stigma of prison attempt to concur the job market. The majority of post-incarcerated citizens find the stigma of a prison record more than they can handle. Tyler and Brockman (2017), defines stigma as “a process in which elements of labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination co-occur together in a power situation that allows the components of stigma to unfold” (p.545). There is already a stigma of criminality or thuggish proclivities already given to African American men, now the stigma of being a black male coupled with having a criminal record “has a detrimental impact on the chances of being hired” (Smith, 2012). Many are uneducated and unskilled prior to entering and prison as well as their return to society. As of 2008, more than 50% of incarcerated whites and more than 60% of black inmates do not have a high school diploma. In the total prison population 60% of the inmate are classified as functionally illiterate (Tyler & Brockman, 2017).

The stigma effect goes beyond the labor market and excludes black men for a variety of social institutions (Pager, 2007). The stigma of being in prison cause the inmate not to seek assistance from agencies that have the resources could assist the men become stable in society (Smith, 2012). Social agencies have tried to study and capture data from the post- incarcerate but have found this has been a difficult task because “they are hard to locate” (Western, Braga, & Kohl, 2014). Therefore, the resources are underutilized, and the post incarcerated usually revert back to the activities that caused them to be imprisoned. This behavior will keep the revolving doors of prison constantly rotating.

Health. During their time in prison as well as post-incarceration, most inmates share three common stressors: 1) uneducated and unskilled, 2) poor 3) physical and mental and mental health issues. Due to the socioeconomic status of the inmates prior to incarceration many did not have any health care, entering prisons with a variety of health issues. Clear (2007) quoting *The World Fact Book* reports that inmates are three to four times more likely to have speech and hearing impairments. They are twice as likely to have HIV and two to five times for likely to be diagnosed with a mental illness (p.60). During the time in prison, inmates have reduced sexual relationships due to reduced male to female ratio (Clear, 2017). The rate of homosexual relationships increases during prison which have fare reaching implications (Schnittker, Uggem, Shannon, & Mcelrath, 2015). Even as Schnittker, et.al (2015), reports that many inmates receive more health treatment in prison then post incarceration, the author also reports that inmates do not have an increase in HIV testing. Many prisons do not provide HIV testing prior to entry, during, and before release into society. It is possible that inmates contract the HIV virus during incarceration and transfer this disease community (Schnittker, et.al, 2015).

Inmates not having insurance has an affects the community as well. Medical professionals move their practice away from these areas because they are not able to absorb the

cost of treating the uninsured (Schnittker, et. al, 2015). If there is not a medical facility in the area, then others in the community have to travel much further to receive medical treatment.

It wasn't until the institution of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), also known as Obamacare that the post incarcerated received medical insurance. Prior to Obamacare many inmates did not have health insurance because they did not qualify for Medicaid or Medicare (Tyler & Brockman, 2017). The issue of uninsured has a ripple effect through the family of the inmate as well as the community. A majority of medical insurance policies are issued through employers. If the incarcerated carried medical insurance for their families, then once the job was terminated the family would be without health insurance (Schnittker, et.al, 2015).

During their time in prison, inmates who has never had insurance of failed to seek medical help, receive more medical treatment then they have ever received. Schnittker, et.al (2015), states the mortality rate of inmates decline while incarcerated. The inmates are treated for all mental and physical illnesses. The Sentencing Project reports

Once they are released, many are returned to the poor communities they were removed from, without any continuity of care. This is the dichotomy of healthcare received by the inmates. The condition is restrictive in prison but inmate is healthy as long as they are incarcerated. Once released, the inmate's health declines due to the lack of access to healthcare.

Conclusion. The effects of mass incarceration on the community as such a lasting impact on the communities. Families are ripped apart and those remaining are left to pick up the pieces. The removal of a family member from the home causes stress in children as well. Studies have shown the inmate experiences the stages of grief and loss when incarcerated, most are having symptoms of PTSD when they are released. Children also have to deal with the same grief and loss of losing someone to going to prison. Children have to deal with the normal stressor of living in impoverished communities, now they have the added stigma of having an incarcerated parent.

Educators are not equipped to recognize the mental health issues a black teenager may be exhibiting from intergenerational consequences of incarceration. Students have been known to act out, become aggressive, or argumented. Ofonedu, et. al (2017), reports this is contrary to the depressive symptoms that white students experience. Ofonedu, et.al (2017) also stated the experiences of inner-city kids may contribute to the differences between black youth and white youths.

Inmates are forced to parent from behind bars. The visitation with the incarcerated father may be extremely difficult for the child. If the father is the person in prison, then the mother is forced to cover where the income of the father has terminated. Mothers are then required to focus on making ends meet, which usually means they work multiple jobs and making the child a latch key kid (Smith, 2012).

Eventually the visits to the inmate are reduced or terminated, the mother moves on with her life, sometime moving from the community into something that may be better for the family. The moving of the family may be good for the mother, the child does not have another added stressor, which may cause chronic stressor.

The incarceration rate is especially high in the poor communities. The War on Drugs was instituted to reduce the crime in the communities where large amounts of crack cocaine was being consumed. The crack epidemic was a lucrative business for gangs and drug dealers, which started a turf war and many civilians became innocent victims (Schnittker, et.al, 2015). The policy makers created laws to address the inner-city communities. According to Alexander (2012), the laws created were reminiscent to the Jim Crow. Black men were incarcerated at 6.5 times the rate of white men. Studies juxtaposed the sentencing of black men versus white men being sentenced for crack versus cocaine. The studies reveal a 7 to 1 sentencing disparity between the black and white men.

A majority of the inmates entering the prison system are poor and uneducated. A majority of inmates both African American and White do not have a high diploma or GED pre-incarceration. Another alarming fact the mass incarceration that effects the communities is the number 12% of African American males are in prison and they account for 40% of the incarcerated population (Clear, 2017; Tyler and Brockman, 2017). The Sentencing Project reports 1 in 3 black men will be spend time in prison as compared to 1 in 6 white men.

When law makers were trying to reduce crime in the community, they also instituted a deterrence program aimed at making prison so bad that inmates would become model citizens never to return to prison. Due to the persona of the inmate is to never exhibit to true emotions, many prisoners never address their losses or other issues. Turnkey (2017), suggest that many inmates, especially African Americans, are released with undiagnosed PTSD.

The inmate has many issues they face once released. African American inmates carry with them a societal stigma solely due to their race and socio-economic status. The post incarcerated inmate has the added stigma for a prison record. This stigma decreases the chances of receiving a call back for interviews while simultaneously excluding the post incarcerated from society.

Tyler and Brockman (2017), stated that in the year 2004, 9% of state and federal prisoner report an episode of homelessness prior to incarceration, a rate of four to six times the rate of homelessness in general population. When the post incarcerated are released it is usually back to their poor communities without a stable home. The post incarcerated lives on the couch of friends and family.

During the period of incarceration, the inmate as access to more health care inside then they had prior to incarceration or on release. During the inmate's time in prison, the state or federal government keeps the inmate in good physical health. Once released, most inmates are lacking in insurance coverage. Tyler and Brockman (2017), suggest that inmates should receive

three testing during their time prison 1) on entry to document any health issues 2) during incarceration due to the increase unprotected homosexual relationships 3) prior to release back into society.

Inmates who are released from prison have a tendency for become hard to engage after release. They do not access the social programs designed to help them become stable citizens.

Smith (2017) suggest that the agencies should created a plan to capture the data need to for comprehensive study and also connect the inmates to the programs such as reentry and counseling.

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