Parental imprisonment: Effects on children’s delinquency through the life-course in England and Sweden

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Institute of Criminology
University of Cambridge, England
## Overview of 4 studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Bedford Prison Study</th>
<th>Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development</th>
<th>Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development</th>
<th>Project Metropolitan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Child Outcome</strong></td>
<td>Numbers/ living circumstances</td>
<td>Mental Health</td>
<td>Delinquency</td>
<td>Delinquency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Method</strong></td>
<td>150 male prisoners. Survey</td>
<td>411 boys. Longitudinal study</td>
<td>411 boys. Longitudinal study</td>
<td>15,117 children. Longitudinal Study</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Effects of parental imprisonment

- Parental imprisonment
- Other childhood stresses
- Pre-existing risk factors
- Crime
Cambridge Study (England)

- 411 boys, working-class, born 1953
- Main interview ages: 8-10, 14, 18, 32, 48
- Parents, Teachers, Boys, Official Records
- Ages 8-10: IQ, daring, school attainment, poor parenting, mental health parents, poor marital relations, family size, family SES, family income & parental convictions and imprisonment
Cambridge Study

Ten antisocial-delinquent outcomes

- Antisocial personality (14, 18, 32)
- Self reported delinquency (18, 32)
- Convicted (10-16, 17-25, 26-40)
- Poor life success (32)
- Imprisoned (by 40)

Aims

– Risk compared to other forms separation
– After controlling for other risks
# Cambridge Study

## Method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Separated parental imprisonment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>227</td>
<td>No separation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>Separated hospital/ death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>Separated other reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Parents imprisoned only before boys’ births</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Statistically control for background childhood adversities
Cambridge Study: Antisocial outcomes

Number of antisocial outcomes, ages 14-40

- No Prison, not separated: 2.2
- No Prison, separated a: 2.2
- No Prison, separated b: 3.5
- Prison (before boy's birth): 4.2
- Prison (boy 0-10): 6.7
Parental imprisonment (0-10) still predicts even after controlling for other childhood adversities
Project Metropolitan (Sweden)

- 15,117 children, born 1953, Stockholm, Sweden
- Official records until age 30
- Criminal records of children
- Criminal records of parents
Project Metropolitan

Aims

- Replication
- Girls
- Middle-upper class
- Different social context

Outcome

- Criminal records of children from ages 19 to 30
## Project Metropolitan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>283</td>
<td>Children of imprisoned parents (0 to 19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14,589</td>
<td>Children of unconvicted parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>245</td>
<td>Children of imprisoned parents (before child’s birth)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Statistically control for background parental criminality
Project Metropolitan: Dose-response relationship

Number of times parents incarcerated (before offspring 19)

Mean offences of offspring (aged 19 to 30)

- 0 times: 0.77 (n=14,589)
- 1 time: 1.82 (n=316)
- 2 times: 2.07 (n=86)
- 3-4 times: 2.29 (n=66)
- 5+ times: 4.98 (n=60)
Results: Delinquency in Sweden

- Parental imprisonment predicted girls’ and boys’ delinquency
- Predicts different types of crime with similar strength
- No differences by social class of child

Controlling for parental criminality, effects of parental imprisonment disappear!
Effects of parental imprisonment

Parental imprisonment

Other childhood stresses

Pre-existing risk factors

Crime

Parental crime/ antisocial behaviour
## Close comparison of samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children:</th>
<th><strong>ENGLAND</strong></th>
<th><strong>SWEDEN</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year of birth</td>
<td>1953</td>
<td>1953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residency</td>
<td>London (capital)</td>
<td>Stockholm (capital)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social class</td>
<td>Working-class</td>
<td>Working-class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>Crime 19-30</td>
<td>Crime 19-30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Parental imprisonment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boy aged 0 to 19</th>
<th>n = 29</th>
<th>n = 92</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>versus before boy’s birth</td>
<td>n = 17</td>
<td>n = 72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Parental criminality

| Parental convictions | up to boy 19 | up to boy 19 |
Comparing England & Sweden: Crime

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crime 19 to 30</th>
<th>ENGLAND (controlling for parental criminality)</th>
<th>SWEDEN (controlling for parental criminality)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Odds ratio</td>
<td>Partial odds ratio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.1**</td>
<td>3.2*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Odds ratio = comparing boys with imprisoned parent (0 – 19) and boys whose parents were imprisoned only before boy’s birth.

Partial odds ratio = after controlling for parental criminality

* *p < .10, **p < .05
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social context</th>
<th>ENGLAND</th>
<th>SWEDEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average length of prison sentences</td>
<td>Longer</td>
<td>Shorter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison policies</td>
<td>Less family friendly prison policies</td>
<td>More open prisons, home leave, conjugal visits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile Justice</td>
<td>Similar to adult criminal courts</td>
<td>Child welfare committees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social support systems</td>
<td>Developing welfare state</td>
<td>“Cradle to grave” social/financial support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punitive attitudes</td>
<td>Less liberal</td>
<td>Liberal: “Swedish prisoner remains a citizen”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Main conclusions

- Parental imprisonment strongly predictive of crime in later life in England and Sweden.
- In England parental imprisonment = possible cause of criminal behavior.
- In Sweden parental imprisonment ≠ cause of criminal behavior.
Parental imprisonment across 3 generations

• Cambridge Study: Future research
  - 500 brothers
  - 519 sisters
  - 600 children
• Compare with similar study in the Netherlands
• Replicate among siblings in 1950s
• Replicate among children in contemporary England
• Compare between England and the Netherlands