

Spring 5-1-2019

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Recommended Citation

Hinson, Meg, "The Unrecognized Role of Parental Incarceration on In-School Suspension Rates" (2019). *Sociology Honors Projects*. 56.
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The Unrecognized Role of Parental Incarceration on In-School Suspension Rates

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April 30, 2019

ABSTRACT

Due to the rise of mass incarceration in the United States, a large number of children now have incarcerated parents. While research shows an array of compounding disadvantages of parental incarceration that reverberate through children's lives, little discussion has gone into how the incarceration of a parent might feedback to how students experience school discipline. My research addresses this gap by analyzing a statewide Minnesota student survey to examine possible explanations for why students who experience parental incarceration also experience higher rates of in-school suspension. High in-school suspension rates persist through expected controls and intervention techniques, showing a unique effect of parental incarceration. Alarming, I find that when a student who experiences parental incarceration and a student who has never experienced parental incarceration perform the same deviant behavior, the student who experiences parental incarceration is almost twice as likely to be suspended. Supplemental analysis through interviews with school administrators shows that schools are unaware of the existence of this student population. The lack of awareness of administration, coupled with the child and family's unwillingness to disclose a stigmatizing identity, ensures that a student's deviant behavior will not be fully explained to administration nor addressed by them, beginning to illustrate how the school punishment system fails students who experience parental incarceration.

As of 2016, the United States incarcerates citizens four times more frequently than in the 1970s (The Sentencing Project 2018:1). The modern incarceration system bears its heritage from slavery, and thus harms certain populations, notably communities of color and communities of low-socioeconomic status, significantly more than others (Blackmon 2012:5). The systematic increase in incarceration results in more individuals being taken out of their communities, with no thought to the people and dependents they may be leaving behind. Those children are then cycled through an education system that doles out increasingly harsh punishments (Wald and Losen 2003). Consequently, the school-to-prison pipeline continues to grow (Heitzeg 2016:9). Minnesota reports that 16% of its students experience parental incarceration by 11th grade (Minnesota Student Survey Interagency Team 2016). That's about the same number of students as report having asthma by 11th grade (Minnesota Student Survey Interagency Team 2016). With the increase in incarceration comes the parallel increase in parental incarceration experienced by children (Wakefield and Wildeman 2014), leading to a feedback loop between the incarceration system and school punishment regimes.

Parental incarceration has consistently deleterious effects on children (e.g. higher rates of aggression, suicide attempts, and substance abuse) that schools are not effectively addressing (Shlafer et al. 2013). Parental incarceration is the forcible removal of a parent from a child's life by the justice system to place the parent in prison or prolonged jail stays. This prevents the parent from providing economic, emotional, and social support for the child. While the institute of prisons clearly harms the child, it appears that schools also perpetuate a harm, as students who experience parental incarceration are 18.4% more

likely to be suspended (Johnson 2009:189). Suspension is also a known indicator of future incarceration (Wald and Losen 2003). The confounding harm on students who experience parental incarceration indicates an interaction between prisons and schools that has not been explained yet. The negative effects of parental incarceration travel down through the family and harm the child, a harm which manifests itself in the largest institution in a child's life- school.

Scholars recognize schools as a significant institution in the trajectory of students' future in the literature on the school-to-prison pipeline. The way schools treat students can set them up for a positive trajectory of success, or one of failure. It is not a coincidence that suspension rates for Black students are multiple times higher than the suspension rates of white students (Greene 2018). In 2000, 1.2% of white children experienced parental incarceration, compared to 9.3% of Black children (Western 2006:138). The United States' legacy of racism has been built into the institution of schools and incarceration to create a systemic and reproducing harm against Black students (Greene 2018). Black students are more likely to experience parental incarceration *and* to face the racially targeted discipline measures of the school-to-prison pipeline. An analysis of parental incarceration is necessary to understand the transmission occurring between the carceral system and schools (Wald and Losen 2003). Previous scholars have found that the harm of parental incarceration causes students to express more punishable behavior (Davis and Schlafer 2017). When the student expresses that behavior, the school aggressively punishes them, in-line with the school-to-prison literature. While the carceral system clearly transmits harms to students through parental

incarceration that lead to greater harms against the student within schools, the structure of this system has not yet been fully explored to illuminate how historical harms are reproduced to punish these students.

The role of the school-to-prison pipeline for students who experience parental incarceration indicates a more complicated exchange between the institution of prisons and schools taking place. I find that it is not simply that schools are designed to punish students in such a way as to lead to future incarceration, but that the current harms of parental incarceration are fed from the institution of prisons into schools through children. These children then perform negative actions due to the harm they have felt from parental incarceration, and schools are built to punish that behavior. Since no government body tracks the number of children who experience parental incarceration, the exact population of children with a parent incarcerated remains unknown (Krupat 2007). The lack of a recognized community makes it challenging to address these children's unique needs or the harms they are facing, yet it is clear both the institution of prisons and schools are creating harms (Krupat 2007).

Due to the internalization and increased aggression demonstrated by children of incarcerated parents, scholars predict that students who experience parental incarceration will perform negative behaviors more and thus experience a higher rate of school discipline and punishment that ultimately leads to a higher rate of incarceration. Once a school suspends a student for disciplinary reasons, it is exceptionally hard to reenter school (Wald and Losen 2003:5). 66% of youth currently in a correctional facility experienced parental incarceration, a number significantly higher than the 16% of the

general population who experience parental incarceration, indicating that parental incarceration and the risks associated with it connect to the probability of future incarceration for the child (Minnesota Student Survey Interagency Team 2016).

Why are students who experience parental incarceration being suspended more, and how are schools involved in that process? To explore this question, I develop an analysis of the interaction between the identity of experiencing parental incarceration and punishment within schools. Through a logistic regression analysis of the individual restricted access responses to the *Minnesota Student Survey* of 2016, administered by the Minnesota Department of Education, I find that four hypothesized explanations—demographics, access to resources, exhibiting the expected punishable behaviors due to the harms of parental incarceration, and in-school stigma—do not entirely account for the high suspension rates. Alarming, I find that even when controlling for demographics and resources, when a student who experiences parental incarceration and a student who has never experienced parental incarceration perform the same deviant behavior, such as skipping school, the student who experiences parental incarceration is almost twice as likely to be suspended. A clear harm stemming from parental incarceration is present. The need to address this disparity becomes even more pressing as I show that students who experience parental incarceration are an invisible identity to their school administration, and thus are not having their needs met, but are also not being acted against with active stigma. The lack of recognition of the identity of students who experience parental incarceration combined with their consistently high rates of suspension through predicted controls indicates that the school punishment system is

harming students who experience parental incarceration to a severe degree. My research adds to the growing literature on this rarely discussed community by substantiating the unique character of parental incarceration as a harm on students and analyzing how schools interact with the institution of prisons to ensure the perpetuation of systemic harms.

PRISON TO SCHOOL FEEDBACK LOOP

Wald and Losen find that the most significant predictor of whether or not a juvenile female will become incarcerated is arrest or suspension during middle school (2003). Students who experience parental incarceration are more likely to be suspended. This indicates that not only does parental incarceration harm children, but it does so in a way that motivates schools to punish students, generating a cycle of incarceration from parent to child that the ineffective resources schools currently use exacerbates.

The reverberations of parental incarceration down to the students indicates that rather than a one-way passage, the school-to-prison pipeline functions as a feedback loop. The existing literature on the school-to-prison pipeline addresses how the institution of the school sets up students for future incarceration, and the literature on children of incarcerated parents demonstrates how parental incarceration generates punishable behavior in children. The connection between these two systems has yet to be addressed adequately.

I will explore how schools have learned to punish the behaviors that the state's incarceration of parents motivates. As parents continue to be incarcerated at ever

increasing rates in the United States, children will continue to exhibit the deviant behavior consistently shown to be a result of the incarceration of a parent. By continuing to focus punishment, and not support or intervention, on this deviant behavior, the school system increases the likelihood that children will follow in their parent's footsteps. Intergenerational cycles of imprisonment continue to exacerbate racial and socio-economic disparities within incarceration, which are then perpetuated within schools (Wakefield and Wildeman 2014). The prison to school feedback loop has not yet been adequately addressed in the literature and indicates a space of significant possible intervention on the part of schools.

CONFOUNDING DEMOGRAPHICS

Nationwide, it is estimated that seven percent of children have experienced parental incarceration, and this estimated number is likely significantly lower than the reality (Murphey and Cooper 2015:1). A Black child has a greater likelihood of enduring parental incarceration before their first birthday than a white child before their 14th (Wakefield and Wildeman 2014:34). The school-to-prison pipeline highlights how inequalities in incarceration consistently follow the lines of race and class in the U.S. and are affected by experiences in the educational system (Wald and Losen 2003: 9). The inequality of incarceration has been connected to inequalities in educational access and school policies. Schools with more racial minorities consistently enforce harsher discipline norms that place students on a trajectory for future deviance and punishment (Wald and Losen 2003). Suspension is one of the strongest youth indicators for future

incarceration (Wald and Losen 2003:11). The school-to-prison pipeline posits that students of color and low socioeconomic status are targeted by the institution of schools to place them on a path to prison by suspending them more frequently.

Hypothesis 1: Factors of race and socioeconomic status cause the disparity in suspension rates.

SCHOOLS AS AN INSTITUTION WITH STUDENTS WHO EXPERIENCE PARENTAL INCARCERATION AS (invisible) ACTORS

Schools act as a “meso-level regime” that can determine a child’s trajectory and are also influenced by policy implementation (Foster and Hagan 2015). The incarceration of a parent can have significant negative results for a child, which can set a child up for a negative trajectory in one’s academic and social life if resources are not available to correct course (Haskins 2017). Foster and Hagan note that “trajectories have momentum and direction, so that adolescents arrested in the context of families with official crime histories may have too few conventional opportunities to alter the course of their lives,” indicating that suspension may be even more harmful for the students who experience parental incarceration (2007:403). Not only does parental incarceration harm already vulnerable children, but few resources are accessible to support these children through strife. For these reasons, ensuring schools have appropriate systems in place to support students experiencing parental incarceration will lead to better results for that student, particularly in the context of the school-to-prison pipeline.

Importance of Parents in School

Parental involvement in children's education has significant positive results for students across race and socioeconomic lines (Bogenschneider 1997). Further, the positive effects can often be heightened by a lack of resources- low socio-economic families have the greatest increase in child improvement with the involvement of parents in school- emphasizing the need for schools to establish and maintain parental contact when the school has a significant population of socioeconomically disadvantaged families (Bogenschneider 1997:729). Students self-report greater satisfaction with and success in middle school when their parents are involved in school (Gould 2011). While access to extracurricular activities and other resources has long term positive pay offs for students (Swanson 2002), middle schools often fail to implement effective afterschool programming that students can attend without direct involvement from a parent in terms of the need for child supervision and transportation (Polatnick 2002). High school engagement with parents creates more support for students.

The effort of schools to maintain open and productive pathways of communication helps parents take appropriate steps for individual children, and helps the school hear the needs of children through their advocates, the parents (Marzano 2003:47). Yet consistently, schools implement single-direction communication, such as flyers or newsletters, to which parents cannot respond (Bogenschneider 1997:738) or schools create high commitment parent organizations that are rarely accessible to non-middle-class white families (Tokheim 2008). Schools consistently struggle to acknowledge the actual circumstances of their students, generating ineffective policies (Bhargava and

Witherspoon 2015). Further, the negative interaction with the institution of prisons can cause parents to avoid involvement with school as well (Haskins and Jacobsen 2017).

This system avoidance reduces a parent's contact with the school and indicates a heightened unwillingness to share potentially damaging information with the school. The harms that parents face at the hands of the prison system demotivate their involvement with schools, reducing the parents' ability to support their children within schools.

The Potential for Resources

Recognizing the importance of schools as an institution for children with the harms faced demographically by students, scholars have analyzed numerous school-based interventions for suspension. Extracurriculars have been shown to be effective at minimizing the likelihood that a student will express punishable behaviors (Himelfarb et al. 2014). The effectiveness of extracurriculars indicates that schools that provide easy and open access to various activities after school are supporting their students and helping their students avoid negative behaviors. Positive relationships with trusted adults can also reduce negative behavior. When a student feels they can trust a teacher, they are more likely to seek help when they need it (Klem and Connell 2004). Further, punishable behavior in the classroom can be reduced by access to extracurriculars (Himelfarb et al. 2014) and positive relationships with a teacher (Klem and Connell 2004:1).

Hypothesis 2: Access to resources mediates the disparity in suspension.

THE UNIQUE HARMS OF PARENTAL INCARCERATION

The harms of parental incarceration may be heightened or mitigated by preexisting factors and harmful institutions, but at this point scholars have clearly found a unique negative effect of experiencing parental incarceration. Geller et al. control for existing adverse factors in a child's life to analyze the results from the Fragile Family and Child Well Being survey, with the unequivocal result that paternal incarceration has direct negative effects on a child (2011). While pre-existing conditions affect the likelihood of parental incarceration, incarceration also exacerbates pre-existing harms due to the loss of the main income in a family, loss of family stability, and emotional duress (Wakefield and Wildman 2014; Foster and Hagan 2007; Swisher and Shaw-Smith 2015). Parental incarceration creates many of the struggles of other forms of parental loss, such as death, military deployment, or divorce, as well as challenges faced by communities that are vulnerable due to other adversities. While parental incarceration can share many of the challenges of other parental separations, in recent years research has shown that parental incarceration carries particular harms, even when factoring in other adverse life factors such as race and low-socioeconomic class (Geller et al. 2011; Foster and Hagan 2007; Boss 2015; Miller 2006).

La Vigne analyzes Murray and Farrington's studies to show that paternal incarceration has an independent effect on antisocial behavior, substance abuse, mental health, and school failure (2008). These are all punishable behaviors that, if exhibited at higher rates, would result in a greater likelihood of suspension from the school. Swisher and Shaw-Smith prove an alarmingly high effect of paternal incarceration on delinquency in both genders, but most notably daughters who experienced paternal incarceration

expressed a 26.3% higher rate of delinquency (2015). This delinquency extends to a higher rate of use of substances, from alcohol and marijuana to hard drugs (Davis and Shlafer 2017).

It should be noted that exceptions exist: the harm of maternal incarceration is contested (Wildeman and Turney 2014), and the incarceration of physically abusive fathers has been shown to have some positive consequences for children by reducing exposure to violence (Swisher and Shaw-Smith 2015). Maternal incarceration has been shown in some studies to result in the child being placed in foster care more frequently, indicating a potential greater harm for the child (Clarke 2001). Ultimately, the historically high rate of incarceration we currently live in coupled with the increase of incarceration for non-violent crimes indicates that parental incarceration will harm more than benefit children as non-abusive parents are incarcerated (Wakefield and Wildeman 2011).

Hypothesis 3: The unique harms of parental incarceration motivate expressions of negative behavior by the students.

The Unique Stigma of Incarceration

Stigma is uniquely potent for children who lose a parent to incarceration, as others are unlikely to be sympathetic to children's loss and may shame children for their parent's actions, further harming the child. Adults and teachers have been shown to express significant stigma towards children with incarcerated parents, believing that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree (Wildeman and Walsh, O'Brien et al. 2017). This stigma

reproduces the targeted practices and racial biases of the incarceration system (Western 2006:37). Dallaire et al. conducted an experiment with 73 teachers where one group of teachers was told a fictitious student was new to class due to maternal incarceration, and another group was told other reasons for the child's arrival. The teachers told the child's mother was incarcerated rated the child less competent than the other group (2010). Such stigma creates a self-fulfilling prophecy for these students as teachers anticipate poor behavior and interpret all behavior with a negative lens. School, the major institution of a child's life, as well as general society instill a sense of shame into children who experience parental incarceration, increasing the trauma experienced by the child and providing no means of support (Miller 2006). When all of the expected protective supports in place for children (caregivers, teachers, friends) reinforce the trauma and stigma of parental incarceration, children are demotivated to share their issues related to the incarceration of their parent.

Considered invisible victims, the children of incarcerated parents' needs are not met by a school system that pushes to implement policies that do not recognize or accommodate them. The exact population of children who experience parental incarceration is not known, because no governmental body tracks this information (Krupat 2007). The lack of a recognized community makes it challenging to address these children's unique needs (Krupat 2007). Further, the students may not be inclined to identify themselves as part of this community due to anticipated stigma (Nesmith and Ruhland 2011:106). Due to negative societal messages, people fear revealing the incarceration of a loved one due to the backlash that will result, motivating children not

to tell others of their identity with parental incarceration. Societal messages of ignorance and hate regarding incarceration motivate students to keep their identities hidden.

Hypothesis 4: Teachers and administrators act with stigma against students who experience parental incarceration, resulting in a higher suspension rate for those students.

METHODS

My research follows a multi-method approach using both regression analysis and semi-structured interviews. The quantitative portion processes three hypothesized causes: demographics, resources, and unique harms of parental incarceration. The qualitative interviews allow me to begin to explore a fourth hypothesis: stigma. To test these hypotheses, I first examine data from a statewide student survey to determine whether students who experience parental incarceration do experience higher rates of discipline, and if so what accounts for that disparity? I supplement the quantitative analysis with interviews with middle school administrators and counselors to discuss the process of suspending a student to identify where in the system students with incarcerated parents are not receiving appropriate intervention.

The qualitative analysis draws on data I examine from the 2016 Minnesota Statewide Student Survey, distributed by the Minnesota Department of Education and taken by individual students in 5th, 8th, 9th, and 11th grade every three years. There were 168,733 responses in 2016. The fifth-grade surveys do not include the questions on

parental incarceration; thus the 62,629 fifth-grade responses are excluded, leaving a total of 106,104 cases in my analysis. The survey is voluntary for both schools and students. As a survey voluntarily filled out by 13-18-year-olds, there is a chance for false or joke responses, though within the data there were no perceivable red flags. Further, the large number of responses to the survey minimize the impact such false responses may have on the data. All schools within Minnesota are invited to take the survey by the Minnesota Department of Education, whether public, private, charter, alternative, or tribal. I have chosen Minnesota as my site of research because its low prison population claims to mitigate effects on the community, when in reality the harm remains quite severe. In Minnesota, Black students are 338% more likely to be suspended (Greene 2018). Further, the perception that the prison population is low and thus only those who “truly deserve it” are in prison may motivate greater stigma amongst educational staff, a preexisting and harmful phenomenon (Dallaire et al. 2010).

The dependent variable in the regression analysis is whether the student experienced in-school suspension (ISS) in the past year. Suspension is a behavior highly connected to future incarceration (Wald and Losen 2003). It is also a behavior known to occur more in students who experience parental incarceration (Martin 2017). By analyzing what factors increase or mitigate the likelihood of suspension, I address how parental incarceration has a unique effect on suspension rates outside of the expected factors (demographics and resources). In-school suspension was selected because it occurs at a higher rate than out-of-school suspension (Minnesota Student Survey Interagency Team 2016). Suspension is an action by the educational institution against a

student, allowing me to assess how the institution of schools are interacting with students who experience parental incarceration, in contrast to harms such as bullying that arise within peer groups.

Two focal independent variables are past-parental-incarceration and present-parental-incarceration, compared to those students who have never experienced parental incarceration. Students could indicate both past and present parental incarceration. I treat each as a separate independent variable status.

Because the dependent variable is dichotomous, I use logistic regression, using nested models to first assess the broad correlation between children of incarcerated caregivers and suspension and then to attempt to account for any differences in the suspension rates. I first analyze the association between suspension and control variables of demographic characteristics including: race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic level. These variables test my first hypothesis-is the high rate of suspension actually just a factor of race or class? To test my second hypothesis- is it a lack of access to intervening resources that causes the high suspension rate? -I apply control variables that address punishable behaviors (physical bullying, social bullying, use of alcohol, use of marijuana, use of crack, and skipping school) while applying factors that are commonly reported as interventions for students at risk of suspension. These factors include a trusted adult one can talk to, trusting your teachers, athletics, music, and other activities (Himelfarb et al. 2014). Then, for my third hypothesis, I test to see if the unique harms of parental incarceration motivate students who experience parental incarceration to act out

more than other students by creating interaction variables with the past- and present-parental incarceration variables and punishable behavior variables.

To begin to understand the strength of the fourth hypothesis, I conduct interviews with middle school administrators and counselors to qualitatively build on the data to assess how aware school systems are of students experiencing parental incarceration, what resources they devote to these students, and whether any stigma exists against these students within the schools. I interview four school administrators (three principals, one assistant principal) and one middle school social worker. I conduct these interviews in November-February 2018-2019 using a semi-structured design that allowed me to ask the same guiding questions of each interviewee while providing room to explore the unique nature of each administrator's academic and punishment system. I interview middle school administrators because the majority of students report experiencing parental incarceration before 8th grade (Minnesota Student Survey Interagency Team 2016), and the disciplinary actions one faces in middle school strongly indicate the likelihood of future incarceration, making it an institutional space that defines one's future trajectory (Rucker 2009). I chose to interview administrators in counties with high incarceration rates, large urban populations, and high rates of racial diversity, since these factors can also play a role in high suspension rates. The interviews provide a clearer perspective on the complicated nature of the school punishment regime and are necessary to understand why even well-intentioned administrators are unable to provide adequate support to their students who experience parental incarceration within the current system. The interviews

also illuminated the suspension process and where in that process students who experience parental incarceration may fall through the cracks.

This multi-method approach creates an overall view of the ways that students currently enter the school disciplinary system. Through analysis of the restricted-use individual response Minnesota Student Survey dataset and interviews with professionals in middle school administration and social work, I develop an understanding of what behaviors motivate suspension, and what information gaps prevent effective school support for these students.

RESULTS

Through an analysis of the Minnesota Student Survey in conjunction with interviews with middle school administrators, I find that my hypotheses do not fully address the disparity, though they do begin to indicate the harmful extent of this disparity and shed light on what could be causing the disparity. Demographics (hypothesis 1) must be recognized when discussing this issue, as Black students are suspended more frequently. Behavior (hypothesis 3) had the unexpected result of showing that even when students who experience parental incarceration perform the same deviant action as a student with no experience of parental incarceration, the student with parental incarceration is more likely to be suspended. Interviews to discuss stigma begin to reveal the lack of awareness of the population of students who experience parental incarceration to administration and how this invisible status prevents empathetic treatment of these students. However, even after accounting for all of these factors, there remains an unexplained gap in the rate of

suspension by experience with parental incarceration. While all four hypotheses matter and could be improved upon to better the lives of students who experience parental incarceration, my research question requires further investigation to be effectively answered. What causes students who experience parental incarceration to be suspended at disproportionately high rates if demographics, access to resources, the unique harms of parental incarceration, and stigma are not the sole causes?

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the 106,104 responses. These show that 2% of students are currently experiencing parental incarceration and 10.7% have experienced parental incarceration in the past. 4.2% of the students report one or more instance of in-school suspension.

The initial regression analysis of in-school suspension to parental incarceration, past or present, indicates a significant association between these variables (p-value <.001). Transforming these regression results into a predicted probability, students currently experiencing parental incarceration are four times more likely to be suspended than peers that never experience parental incarceration (Figure 1). The data consistently shows that a harm is occurring against these students. But why?

Hypothesis 1: Demographics

My first hypothesis asked if the increased rate of suspension was caused by an identity factor in the students' lives that I was not accounting for. Table 2 shows the nested logistic regression models. I find that while there are certainly demographic correlations- students of color are at greater risk of targeted harm in their schools, for example- these factors alone do not entirely explain the high rate of suspension.

To determine if the demographic hypothesis was accurate, I added variables for race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Taking into account background factors such as race and socioeconomic level, the coefficient between parental incarceration and suspension drops by a third of its value but continues to be quite significant, as seen in Model 2. I measure socio-economic level with the variable “free or reduced lunch,” a federal category public schools must provide that students 130% or more below the poverty level are eligible for, as are any students whose families use Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (MN Department of Health). This data indicates that background factors account for a portion of the reasons that students who experience parental incarceration become suspended, but this population remains uniquely at risk of suspension.

Two variables account for students of color- race, and ethnicity, which includes Hispanic identities. I code 1 for students of color, and 0 for white and Asian students.¹ Ethnicity is notably higher than race, indicating that the Hispanic population is important to consider when formulating interventions. While both ethnicity and race are important variables when considering why a student who experiences parental incarceration is being suspended, neither of these variables adequately explain the high rate of suspension.

All of the expected demographic influences do play a role in the association between parental incarceration and the likelihood of suspension, indicating the truth

¹ Asian identity was not included in the race or ethnicity variable due to the decreased likelihood of their presence in prisons at 2.7% (MN DOC) in contrast to their overall population in Minnesota of 4% and rising (Boyd 2013).

behind the racial and class-based targeting discussed in the school-to-prison pipeline, yet these explanations do not fully account for the high rate of suspension.

Hypothesis 2: Resources

Since demographic factors cannot fully explain the cause of the high suspension rate, I hypothesized that the anticipated interventions to reduce suspension do work with students who experience parental incarceration, but those students simply do not have access to such resources. Access to resources had no effect on the rate of suspension, indicating that extracurriculars and trusted adult relationships are not strong enough interventions for students who experience parental incarceration. To assess the effectiveness of these methods for students with incarcerated parents, I add variables for extracurriculars and trusted teacher relationships into the regression analysis.

Model 3 adds examples of negative behavior, and then resources that have the potential to mitigate the likelihood of being suspended. The negative behavior variables include skipping school, bullying (physical, threatening, and social), and substance abuse. These behaviors do correlate to in-school suspension and account for a portion of students who experience parental incarceration that receive in-school suspension. These students thus engage with many punishable behaviors, and interventions should be developed for those actions. Yet the commonly discussed interventions of extracurriculars or talking with a parent or teacher did not reduce the risk of suspension.

I also add 'Grades' as a possible variable indicating punishable behavior. Students who act out in class often receive poorer grades (Himelfarb et al. 2014). Grades were

counted as 1 if the student received mostly As or Bs, and as 0 for everything else. The regression results indicate a strong correlation between grades below a B and in-school suspension net of all demographic and behavioral measures. This factor does account for a portion of the students who experience parental incarceration that are suspended, indicating that in-class behavior merits closer investigation when considering interventions and the suspension process. However, the persistent significance of parental incarceration status with suspension, even when accounting for the predictable punishable behaviors, indicates that there is either a behavior schools are not entirely accounting for that leads to suspension for students who experience parental incarceration, or a way that schools engage with students that leads to higher suspension for these students.

I hypothesized that including variables about extracurriculars would reduce the likelihood of suspension due to the effectiveness of the intervention. Any involvement more than once a week in the activity generated an answer of 1 - a majority of the student body participates in an extracurricular, notably sports, while a minority of the students experience ISS. Variables to account for students trusting parents and teachers are included as well. None of these variables changed the likelihood of a student experiencing parental incarceration becoming suspended. The model shows negative correlation between activities and suspension in the table, indicating that for the overall student population the majority of those with access to these resources are not suspended, which makes statistical sense since the majority of students are involved these resources while a minority are suspended. Yet the inclusion of resources does not change the

statistical likelihood of a student who experiences parental incarceration being suspended. I conclude that my hypothesis does not adequately address the question of why students who experience parental incarceration face higher suspension rates.

Hypothesis 3: Extreme Performance of Negative Behavior

Since my second hypothesis of school resources proved to have little effect on the likelihood of suspension, I predicted that perhaps the unique harms of parental incarceration motivate expressions of punishable behavior at exceptionally high rates in students. While the harms of parental incarceration are real and students do act out more because of it, students also continue to be punished more for the same behavior that their peers do. I create interaction variables and predicted probability charts to determine if students with incarcerated parents are uniquely more likely to be suspended for deviant behaviors.

The interactions between students who experience parental incarceration and behaviors that increase risk of in-school suspension are displayed in table 3 to determine if the population of students experiencing parental incarceration are more likely to exhibit these behaviors, and thus more likely to be suspended for them. By using the results of models 5-9 in predicted probability statistics, a clear and jarring result arises- students currently experiencing parental incarceration are more likely to be suspended than their peers when both groups exhibit a wide range of punishable behavior (substance use, physical bullying, skipping school) *and* when they do not. As seen in figures 1-4, probability of suspension decreases for all three categories when the student does not

express the punishable behavior yet remains consistently higher for students currently experiencing parental incarceration. The probability of suspension is much closer between past-parental-incarceration and never-parental-incarceration, indicating unique factors for students who are currently experiencing parental incarceration. This indicates a significant association between parental incarceration status and increased probability of being suspended. The results of the regression table, however, indicate that the expression of these punishable behaviors does not entirely account for the increased suspension rate. While demographics do influence the rate at which these students are suspended, and the harm of parental incarceration does increase the likelihood that these students will express punishable behavior, these factors alone do not entirely account for the increased likelihood of suspension of students with an incarcerated parent.

Through the survey the students could indicate both current and previous parental incarceration. In the main analysis, I did not treat these categories as mutually exclusive. 4% of students who experience parental incarceration experience both current and previous parental incarceration- this is less than 1% of the total respondents. To ensure that this group was not affecting the results, I reanalyzed the data classifying student with both current and previous parental incarceration as only experiencing current incarceration. These models showed increased association between parental incarceration- past and present- and suspension across the board. This robustness check further corroborates the results that parental incarceration significantly increases a student's likelihood of experiencing suspension.

As a final robustness check, I created a model with dummy variables for all but the most populous county of Minnesota, Hennepin. Some counties have consistently higher suspension rates than others. While suspension rates vary between districts as well as between counties, the county level is the lowest level aggregation in the data available (MN Department of Human Rights). I used a logistic regression probability equation to compare the likelihood of suspension with and without counties. Without county level controls, the predicted probability for those who have not pushed anyone and are currently experiencing parental incarceration is 1.96 times that of students who have not pushed anyone and have never experienced parental incarceration. Adding county level fixed effects, the ratio is reduced from 1.96 to 1.889. The coefficients remain statistically significant and in the same direction. Therefore, the disparity in suspension is not caused by some areas of Minnesota both suspending students more and having higher rates of students with an incarcerated parent. This robustness check shows that within counties, students who experience parental incarceration are twice as likely to be suspended as a peer who has never experienced parental incarceration, regardless of that county's punishment system or rate of parental incarceration.

Hypothesis 4: Stigma

Oakwood² is a suburban middle school in a district that borders both high socioeconomic white neighborhoods and low socioeconomic neighborhoods with a higher density of people of color. This combination of a core group of parents that have the time and

²A pseudonym

resources to devote to their children, combined with the high population of minority students who the state provides grants for, generates a significant resource pool for Oakwood. When asked if students are ever sent to the principal's office for poor behavior, and if this ever resulted in suspensions, the administrators replied negatively. Oakwood is fortunate enough to have behavioral specialists that are the first line of defense when a student acts out in class. The administrators consistently emphasized that the learning happens in class, and thus removing a student from the classroom is an absolute last resort (Interview 1). When a student first starts misbehaving, the behavioral specialist pulls the student aside and helps the student get back on track in class.

Even so, Oakwood middle school has a high rate of suspension, about 2.5 times the state average for 8th grade (Minnesota Survey Agency Team). Oakwood's inability to battle Minnesota's trend of climbing suspensions, particularly for students of color, indicates a profound need to find new and innovative ways to invest resources to support these students. Simply having a behavioral specialist refocus the student when bad behavior arises does not address the root cause of that behavior. Students must feel capable and safe to share potentially stigmatizing information with the staff in order to be able to develop effective intervention plans. The fact that students are not sharing experiences of parental incarceration with administrators indicates that students do not realize how common it has become to experience parental incarceration and continue to fear stigma for this identity. The lack of shared community within this identity further isolates students and creates shame around their experience.

The regression analysis shows a persistent suspension gap for students who experience parental incarceration that cannot be explained by demographic, behavioral, or social support characteristics. Further, the interaction models show that students who currently have a parent incarcerated are more likely to be suspended for a particular behavior than a peer with no- or past-experience of parental incarceration who does the same behavior. Since it is neither demographics nor the student's behavior that causes the suspension disparity, I hypothesized that stigma against children with incarcerated parents within the institution of schools resulted in a higher rate of suspension for those students. I tested this hypothesis through interviews with middle school administrators to gain an understanding of the system of punishment for students and if this could be enacted with stigma. These interviews revealed that schools lack a basic knowledge of the population of students who experience parental incarceration. While profoundly limited in scope, these interviews begin to show how the inability to empathize with a student's troubles prevents the administration to act as a mediating force in punishment, producing the disparity in suspension rates.

Throughout interviews, school administrators and a social worker describe the systems of intervention in place within public schools to support students. When a student first starts acting out, there are behavioral specialists, counselors, or social workers on site to intercept the student's behavior and reorient the student towards success (Interview 1). When I inquired how that reorientation happens, the social worker discussed calling parents and getting to the root of the problem (Interview 2). Once, a mother told the social worker that she had just been released from prison and was settling

back in at home, throwing a wrench into her child's life. The social worker used this information to create a better support plan for the student. A principal had multiple experiences with students experiencing parental incarceration and would actively talk to and engage the students affected to ensure they were feeling supported (Interview 4). When an administrator became aware of parental incarceration, they actively sought resources and supports for that student, just as they would any other student experiencing a difficult situation. Whether the student was working with an IEP (Individual Education Program), going through a phase, or had experienced parental incarceration, the overall administrative mindset remained "it's gonna be our job to love them when they're not very lovable" (Interview 4). These interviews revealed a lack of active stigma from the administration to the students. Yet it was also clear that the majority of students experiencing parental incarceration were not receiving support.

When asked what factors influence the decision to suspend, a principal discussed how a student that was acting particularly surly and gruff with staff was given space and support instead of punishment for his actions, because his mother had called in to say she had gotten into a serious car accident and it had deeply upset him (Interview 1). A parent who had just been released from incarceration was actively working with the social worker to build support systems for their child through that tumultuous time (Interview 2). The systems within schools are malleable to the needs of the student and the family, including the punishment system. One principal described the process to decide how to punish a student as a "a sliding scale" that would slide to more or less punishment depending on the context of the student and the behavior (Interview 3). The ability of

families to provide the school with context for the students' behavior significantly increased the school's sensitivity to the child, as well as their ability to formulate appropriate intervention plans for the child.

All administrators interviewed relied completely on caregivers and the student to provide information any relevant information about the student's life. Once a caregiver or student supplied the relevant information, it would be passed amongst the administrators, counselors, and teachers at monthly meetings (Interview 1, 2, 3, 4). At Oakwood, this monthly meeting functioned as a check in on any students. It was a space where concerns about a student could be addressed and plans amongst the entire team created to ensure success for that student (Interview 1). In this way, all the relevant support resources can collaborate to ensure the best outcome for the student. This demonstrates an ability to provide effective intervention and support for students, but that support remains contingent on the school having the relevant information. Due to anticipated stigma, students are not likely to share that they experience parental incarceration, and neither are caregivers. The inability to access this deeply relevant information from students creates a significant barrier to providing effective and appropriate interventions for students who act out due to parental incarceration.

My interviews reveal that regardless of any stigma that does exist within a school, students who experience parental incarceration are, as a population, invisible to school administration. When administrators were aware of the context of a student's behavior, they could mediate the disciplinary measures used. Yet none of the administrators were aware of the extent of the population of students with incarcerated parents. One social

worker felt that the rate of suspension for students who experience parental incarceration is “not any more than other students who get suspended” (Interview 2). Based off of my analysis, this perspective is inaccurate and potentially harmful to the students. When no one in the school knows you experience parental incarceration, they cannot act with stigma directly against you for that identity. However, that does not mean that students do not feel stigma and prejudice within schools exhibited by staff and faculty.

Two measures that the survey data cannot analyze are the attitudes of the students, and the stigma the students may fear from administrators. Students with an incarcerated parent may be unlikely to disclose their experience with parental incarceration due to anticipated stigma (Nesmith and Ruhland 2011:106). The societal narrative around incarceration remains deeply negative and full of stigma, motivating those who have incarcerated loved ones to keep quiet about their experience so as not to endure the stigma they anticipate would occur if they were to share (Nesmith and Ruhland 2011:106). When neither the caregivers nor the students are willing to disclose to the school the root cause of the problem, the school cannot develop an intervention to fully address the student’s problem. In a society where people who experience incarceration lack basic access to work, wages, and their right to vote, the children and caregivers who experience incarceration of a loved one have a legitimate fear of stigma. Schools built as if no student will ever experience parental incarceration have implemented systems that will fail students. Effective systems of information sharing must be implemented in schools to overcome this information barrier.

My research also did not extend to interviews with teachers. As the first line of defense with a student, a teacher's stigma may generate the initial system of punishment. While teacher stigma should be investigated farther, my interviews indicate a strong communication system between teachers and administrators. It seems unlikely that a teacher would not mention a parent's incarceration, even disparagingly, in such meetings. However, if teachers do not believe parental incarceration has any effect on the student and thus does not explain the student's behavior, it is feasible that a teacher would not disclose.

CONCLUSION

The harms of parental incarceration have become abundantly clear over the last ten years, but the way those harms directly interplay with the school-to-prison pipeline and a student's school performance to demonstrate a prison to school feedback loop has not yet been fully addressed. I have shown that students who experience parental incarceration are at a higher risk of in-school suspension. I found that the high rate of suspension is not purely a consequence of demographics (hypothesis 1) and that the expected interventions do not have an effect on the rate of suspension (hypothesis 2). While parental incarceration does harm children, students who are currently experiencing parental incarceration are still more likely to be suspended for their behavior than students who have past or no parental incarceration experience (hypothesis 3). Alarming, this trend of high suspension persists even when students who experience parental incarceration perform the same negative action as another student who has never experienced parental

incarceration. The high suspension rate cannot even be explained by active stigma against those students from school teachers and administrators due to the invisibility of the experience of parental incarceration within schools (hypothesis 4).

Interviews with middle school administrators indicated that pre-suspension intervention tactics revolve around addressing the root cause of a student's behavior through conversation with the student and caregivers and developing a plan from there. The anticipated stigma students with incarcerated caregivers live with leads them to not share this aspect of their lives, preventing the school from being able to formulate an effective intervention plan to help these students. An administration-level awareness of the possibility of parental incarceration as a factor in a student's behavior could potentially improve the school's ability to address this factor, particularly in schools where the student population has a higher probability of experiencing parental incarceration. Yet my regression analysis and predicted probability charts show that schools are actively punishing students who experience parental incarceration more frequently than they are students who exhibit the same behavior but do not experience parental incarceration. Students who experience parental incarceration are more likely to be punished even though the school is not aware of their identity.

As institutions, both prisons and schools have developed to perpetuate harm against students who experience parental incarceration. By incarcerating parents, the incarceration system removes a vital resource for children and generates severe and distinct harms. Those harms are then transmitted through the institution of schools, as students' identities go unrecognized and their needs are not being met. Schools hold

significant power over a student's life. A suspension can harshly alter a student's opportunities. The school system's inability to recognize this population of students and effectively support them functions to perpetuate the inequalities of the incarceration system. If either the school or incarceration system seeks to claim to protect children and communities, they must work to recognize students who experience parental incarceration and develop systems to support them.

Future research should investigate more deeply the process of suspension within schools and what would lead schools to punish students who experience parental incarceration more frequently- are the intervention methods used for students less effective without the involvement of a parent? Do students who experience parental incarceration perform punishable behavior more frequently? As the core of their problems is not addressed, these students continue to perform negative behavior without effective intervention. A possible solution is to motivate staff and faculty to act without stigma regarding the student's identity so that students can feel safe to share even stigmatizing information with the school. As research develops to support students with incarcerated parents, the differences in behavior indicated by students currently experiencing parental incarceration and students who have experienced it in the past should be considered and addressed accordingly. Ultimately, to truly provide effective and productive educations for all, the modern American school system must reckon with the racist institution it works within and develop an institution that supports and listens to the communities it serves.

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Table 1-Descriptive Statistics of 8th, 9th, and 11th grade students from the Minnesota Student Survey

	Mean
<i>Dependent Variable</i>	
Experience In-School Suspension for one day or more	2.9%
<i>Independent Variable</i>	
Current Parental Incarceration	1.4%
Past Parental Incarceration	10.7%
<i>Control-Background Factors</i>	
School Resource Officer on Campus	52.6%
Age (13 years and older)	75.2%
Qualifies for free and reduced lunch	68.8%
Race (non-white and non-Asian)	18.1%
Grades (1=Mostly Cs, Ds and Fs)	18.1%
Ethnicity (includes Hispanic identities)	25.8%
<i>Control-Punishable Behavior</i>	

Skip less than a full day of school one or more times	12.8%
Full Skip day one or more times	7.6%
Push another student	8.1%
Threaten another student	7.6%
Exclude friends	12.3%
Alcohol consumption one or more times	13.9%
Marijuana use one or more times	8.6%
Crack use one or more times	1.1%

Control-Interventions

Sports activity once or more a week	49.8%
Activities such as theater once or more a week	15%
Tutoring once or more a week	6.6%
Leadership activity once or more a week	4.5%
Music Lessons once or more a week	11.9%
Physical Activity Lessons once or more a week	19.7%
Community Orgs once or more a week	4%
Religious activity once or more a week	8.2%

Do you feel your parents care? (1=quite a bit, some, a little, not at all, 0=very much)	21.9%
Do you feel other relatives care? (1=quite a bit, some, a little, not at all, 0=very much)	38.6%
Do you feel your friends care? (1=quite a bit, some, a little, not at all, 0=very much)	54.9%
How much do teachers care? (1=quite a bit, some, a little, not at all, 0=very much)	87.9%
Teachers are interested in me (1=disagree)	71.6%
Talk to Father (1=yes)	70.9%
Talk to Mother (1=yes)	85.5%
<i>N</i> number of responses	106,104

Table 2-Logistic Regression Models of Risk of In-School Suspension for Students in 8th, 9th, and 11th grade from 2016 Minnesota Student Survey

	Children Experience Parental Incarceration Model 1	Background Model 2	Negative Behavior Model 3	Activities; Care; Talk Model 4
<i>Background Factors</i>				
Current Parental Incarceration	1.63*** (.071)	1.17*** (.073)	0.519*** (.081)	0.515*** (.081)
Past Parental Incarceration	1.145*** (.042)	0.749*** (.044)	0.208*** (.047)	0.191*** (.048)

School Resource Office	----	0.017 (.043)	.028 (.046)	.032 (.046)
Year	----	0.465*** (.051)	0.756*** (.055)	0.757*** (.055)
Free Lunch	----	-0.723*** (.044)	-0.42*** (.046)	-0.412*** (.047)
Race	----	0.293*** (.078)	0.253** (.083)	0.234 (.083)
Ethnicity	----	0.632*** (.077)	0.385*** (.081)	0.391*** (.082)
Grades	----	---	-1.118*** (.045)	-1.07*** (.046)
<i>Punishable Behavior</i>				
Skip School	----	----	0.834*** (.052)	0.811*** (.052)
Full skip day	----	----	0.495*** (.054)	0.476*** (.054)
Push	----	----	0.721*** (.057)	0.71*** (.058)
Threaten	----	----	0.632*** (.056)	0.614*** (.056)
Exclude friends	----	----	-0.125* (.059)	-0.136* (.06)
Alcohol	----	----	0.19** (.056)	0.163* (.057)
Marijuana	----	----	0.566*** (.059)	0.535*** (.059)
Crack	----	----	0.571*** (.099)	0.549*** (.1)
<i>Interventions</i>				
Sports	----	----	----	-0.061 (.047)
Activities	----	----	----	-0.278*** (.072)
Tutoring	----	----	----	0.237** (.074)
Leadership	----	----	----	0.349** (.103)
Music Lessons	----	----	----	-0.202 (.075)

Physical Activity Lessons	----	----	----	-0.006 (.063)
Community Orgs	----	----	----	0.365** (.104)
Religious	----	----	----	-0.091 (.084)
Feel your parents care?	----	----	----	0.047 (.057)
Feel other relatives care?	----	----	----	-0.08 (.056)
Feel your friends care?	----	----	----	-0.08 (.049)
How much do teachers care?	----	----	----	-0.186** (.055)
Teachers are interested in me	----	----	----	-0.177*** (.047)
Talk to Father	----	----	----	-0.039 (.047)
Talk to Mother	----	----	----	-0.118 (.052)
Constant	-3.997	-3.363	-3.829	-3.402
-2 Log Likelihood	23958	22889	19583	19477
<i>N</i> number of responses	106,104			

Block 0 -2 Log Likelihood= 25118

Standard errors are in parentheses

*=p<.05

**=p<.01

***-p<.001

Table 3- Interactions between Parental Incarceration and Negative Behaviors

	Parental Incarc- Push Model 5	Parental Incarc- Threaten Model 6	Parental Incarc- Skip Model 7	Parental Incarc- SkipFull Model 8	Parental Incarc- Marijuana Model 9
Current Parental Incarc	0.567*** (.096)	0.56*** (.102)	0.509*** (.133)	0.414*** (.112)	0.55*** (.107)
Past Parental Incarc	0.275*** (.054)	0.312*** (.056)	0.426*** (.066)	0.371*** (.058)	0.321*** (.056)
Skip School	----	----	0.97 (.061)	----	----
Full skip day	----	----	----	0.656 (.066)	----
Push	0.861*** (.071)	----	----	----	----
Threaten	----	0.798*** (.069)	----	----	----
Marijuana	----	----	----	----	0.739*** (.073)
Current Incarc-Push	-0.161 (.17)	----	----	----	----
Past Incarc-Push	-0.353*** (.103)	----	----	----	----
Current-Threaten	----	-0.113 (.162)	----	----	----
Past-Threaten	----	-0.426*** (.098)	----	----	----
Current-Skip	----	----	-0.008 (.165)	----	----
Past-Skip	----	----	-0.454*** (.089)	----	----
Current-Skip Full Day	----	----	----	0.184 (.16)	----
Past-Skip Full Day	----	----	----	-0.5*** (.093)	----
Current-Marijuana	----	----	----	----	-0.124 (.16)
Past-Marijuana	----	----	----	----	-0.442*** (.097)

Constant	-3.445	-3.456	-3.507	-3.471	-3.458
-2 Log Likelihood	19464	19458	19451	19447	19456
<i>N</i> number of students	106,104				

All other variables from Model 7 are in these models but are not displayed to make this table easier to read. The removed variables remained constant from the original table and did not show any impact from the introduction of these variables.

Figure 1- Predicted Probability of Suspension Based on Parental Incarceration Status (Model 1, Table 2)

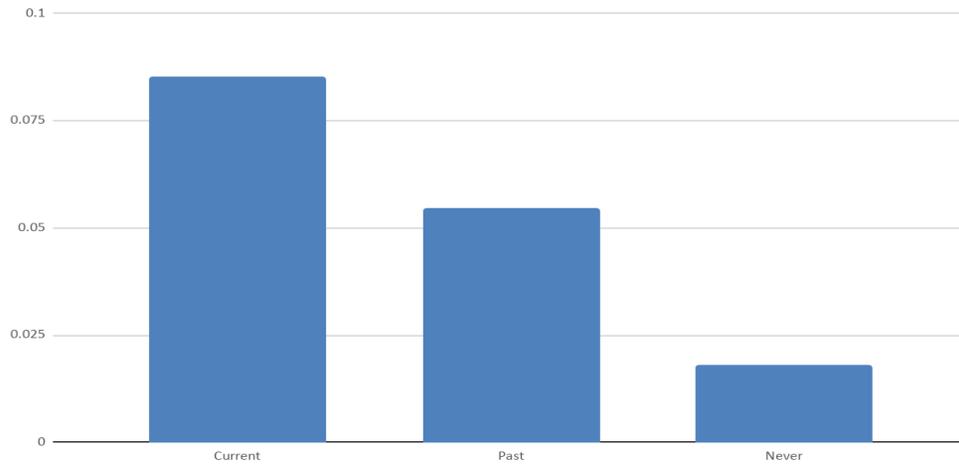


Figure 2- Predicted Probability of Suspension Based on Parental Incarceration Status and Having Pushed Another Student (Model 3, Table 2)

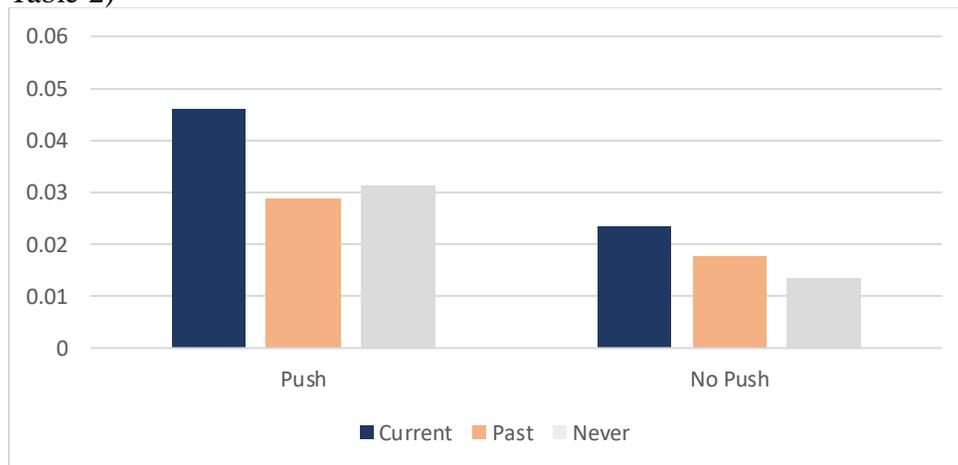


Figure 3- Predicted Probability of Suspension Based on Parental Incarceration Status and Having Skipped School (Model 3, Table 2)

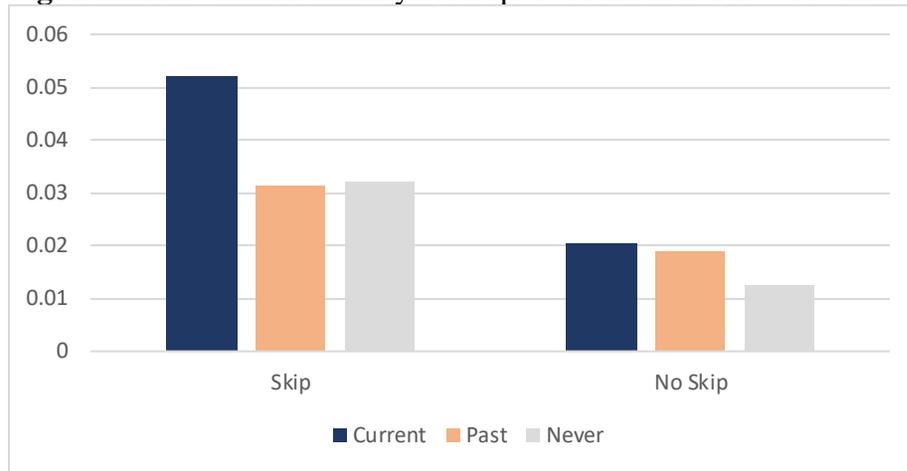


Figure 4- Predicted Probability of Suspension Based on Parental Incarceration Status and Having Used Marijuana (Model 3, Table 2)

