

# Kids with incarcerated dads more likely to be held back a grade

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While proud classmates bring parents to school for Career Day, kids with imprisoned dads incur a double whammy: They are significantly more likely to be held back to repeat a grade, a Cornell and University of California, Irvine, study has found.

"Children's test scores and adjustment problems are always factors in grade retention, but teachers also have some discretion, ultimately deciding who will advance and who is held back. Grade retention in first, second and third grades can have profound, life-course consequences for these kids," said Anna R. Haskins, assistant professor of sociology in Cornell's College of Arts and Sciences.

"Our study indicates that one of the potential reasons children with incarcerated fathers are retained is due to teachers' perceptions of children's academic proficiency. We're not pointing fingers at teachers; some may not even know whose fathers are in jail and whose are not," said Haskins, a former elementary school teacher who went back to graduate school to explore the intergenerational social consequences of mass incarceration in America.

"There are meaningful differences between grade-retention rates for children with and without incarcerated fathers, and understanding the reasons for these differences is essential," Haskins said. Together with UC-Irvine's Kristin Turney, she published the analysis in the journal, *Sociology of Education*, as "Falling Behind? Children's Early Grade Retention after Parental Incarceration."

The authors say their findings "not only highlight another way in which the large-scale incarceration of men limits the potential of their children, but also draw attention to the interconnected nature of three of America's most powerful social institutions – the family, the educational system and the penal system." They call for holistic policies "that acknowledge the ways families, schools and prisons are linked – to prevent the cyclical reproduction of inequality across generations."

At Cornell Haskins teaches two sociology courses: Mass Incarceration and Family Life, and Controversies About Inequality. This summer, she also guest lectured to incarcerated men at the maximum-security Auburn (New York) Correctional Facility through the Cornell University Prison Education Program, many of whom have children in school back home.

Data for the Turney-Haskins study came from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study by Princeton and Columbia universities.

**More information:** "Falling Behind? Children's Early Grade Retention after Parental Incarceration" is available online:

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Provided by Cornell University

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