

# Wealth doesn't protect US blacks from greater chance of incarceration

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The chances of incarceration in America are always higher for blacks than for whites or Hispanics, regardless of their level of wealth, according to a new study led by Khaing Zaw of Duke University in the U.S. In addition, blacks and Hispanics who had previously served jail time were significantly poorer than their white counterparts.

The study<sup>1</sup> corroborates previous research that describes the close connection between race, prison time and [wealth](#), both before and after incarceration. It is part of the special March issue<sup>2</sup> of Springer's journal *Race and Social Problems* on race and wealth which is freely available online.

Zaw's team analyzed the data from the 1979 cohort of the National Longitudinal Study of Youth, which gathered data between 1979 and 2012 from 12,686 [young men](#) and women. When first interviewed in 1979, the respondents were between 14 and 22 years old. Since 1985, the study has also included data on the wealth of the individuals and their families.

The researchers looked at young men and women who had not yet served jail time by 1985. The respondents' personal net worth and their likelihood of being incarcerated at some stage during the study period were taken into account.

"Americans who experience incarceration come from a lower wealth background compared to those who do not," Zaw said. "When it comes

to wealth and incarceration outcomes, the disadvantages of being black or Hispanic compound the disadvantages of poverty."

The findings indicate that although higher levels of wealth were associated with shorter jail stays, the likelihood of incarceration still was higher for blacks at every level of wealth compared to whites. At some wealth levels, the likelihood of Hispanics doing jail time was even lower than it was for whites. The data also show that as the wealth of black women grows, their chances of being incarcerated decline and were similar to the chances of whites and Hispanics.

Even though the obvious racial disparity does shrink as levels of wealth grow, it is never fully eliminated. According to Zaw, this might be because of other economic factors, such as the wealth of extended family members, or factors such as education, job experience and social connections.

"To the best of my knowledge, this is the first study to look at the impact of prior wealth on the odds of [incarceration](#) and to demonstrate that wealth does not provide the same degree of insulation from imprisonment for black and Hispanic males as it does for white males," said co-author William A. Darity. Darity is a professor of public policy, African and African American studies and economics at Duke University.

**More information:** Khaing Zaw et al. Race, Wealth and Incarceration: Results from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, *Race and Social Problems* (2016). [DOI: 10.1007/s12552-016-9164-y](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12552-016-9164-y)

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