

## Parental Incarceration Takes Its Toll on Young Adult Offspring

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Ten percent of the cohort included teens whose mother, father, or both had been incarcerated before the teen turned 18 years.

What is the effect of having an incarcerated on the health of teenagers? Heard-Garris et al. ([10.1542/peds.2017-4314](#)) studied these adolescents as they became young adults and sadly found that if one or both parents had been incarcerated, there was an increased likelihood of receiving fewer preventive health care services, having more prescription drug abuse, and having ten or more sexual partners. If a mother were incarcerated, there was also an increased likelihood that their young adult child would use the emergency department more and engage in illegal injection drug use. Were you aware of what parental incarceration might mean for your patients as they age?

To provide further insight into this study, we asked UCLA health policy experts Drs. Elizabeth Barnert and Paul Chung to add an accompanying commentary ([10.1542/peds.2018-1923](#)). They speculate on what the mechanisms might be contributing to the association between parental incarceration and adverse health behaviors of offspring as they became young adults, especially differences in outcomes if the parent were maternal or paternal. Barnert and Chung also offer suggestions as to what we can do to help, ranging from something as basic as asking about parental incarceration to advocating for policies that do not separate parent and children (something that we have been advocating for in regards to our southern border). After reading this important study and commentary, you may want to do even more to monitor these at-risk older children more carefully and look for ways to improve their strength, resiliency, and access to programs that might proactively prevent the unhealthy consequences in offspring that are associated with a parental incarceration.

- [The Impact of Parental Incarceration on the Physical and Mental Health of Young Adults](#)
- [Changing Risk Trajectories and Health Outcomes for Vulnerable Adolescents: Reclaiming the Future](#)
- [Emergency Department and Hospital Use Among Adolescents With Justice System Involvement](#)
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