

Juvenile Justice System Involvement and Relationship Outcomes in Adulthood



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Abstract

Youth's interactions with the criminal justice system are associated with various negative outcomes in adulthood (e.g., poor educational and income attainment; violent death; and functional impairment). However, it is unclear if contact with the juvenile justice system harms relationship outcomes in adulthood, as has been seen amongst adult offenders. Using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1997), the current study assessed how contact with the juvenile justice system was related to a variety of relationship outcomes. Findings suggest that system-involved juveniles are less likely to enter into marriage, but are more likely to enter into a cohabitating relationship. These findings suggest that juvenile justice contact may prevent marriage formation and ultimately serve as another barrier to reentry. The present study has important policy implications for fostering marriages of former delinquents.

Introduction

An emerging body of literature is beginning to examine the link between criminal offending and relationships. The bulk of these studies consider the

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favorable impact that marriage has upon desistance from crime (Laub, Nagin, & Sampson, 1998). While marriage may contribute to offending desistance, less is known about what impacts the likelihood of attaining these desistance-encouraging factors (e.g., marriage). For example, individuals may face challenges in obtaining employment following incarceration, leading potential partners to perceive them as being “unmarriageable” (Wilson, 1987). Research now suggests that an incarceration history is a barrier to marriage and frequently results in relationship dissolution (Sampson & Laub, 1993), factors that may ultimately contribute to the cycle of reoffending (Larson & Sweeten, 2012).

What remains unclear is whether juvenile justice system contact is associated with similar challenges with relationship formation in adulthood. Historically, criminal records of youth were expunged or sealed, reducing the likelihood of labeling in adulthood (Feld, 1999). However, recent policy changes have resulted in increased public access to delinquency records (Shah, Fine, & Gullen, 2014). Such trends indicate that juveniles may experience long-term labeling as “offenders,” resulting in many of the same challenges in reintegration as adult offenders.

The current study uses the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1997 (NLSY) to assess how juvenile justice involvement is related to relationship outcomes in adulthood. This study extends upon previously conducted research (Huebner, 2005; Mack, 2012) assessing relationship outcomes in adulthood by 1) examining arrests, court appearances, and incarceration as measures of juvenile justice involvement and 2) assessing likelihood of marriage, length of marriage, age of first marriage, likelihood of cohabitation, and age of first cohabitation.

Impact of Incarceration on Relationships

An emerging body of literature is beginning to explore how incarceration and a criminal record impact relationship formation. For example, incarceration may negatively impact life trajectories, such as reducing the likelihood of marrying (Huebner, 2005). Specifically, incarceration may engender long-term negative effects that persist even when static factors (e.g., race) and dynamic factors (e.g., military participation) are controlled for. Research suggests that returning offenders are unlikely to enter back into relationships with former partners with whom they had children (Edin, 2000). Relatedly, formerly incarcerated fathers are less likely to reside with the mothers of their children in a cohabitation or marital relationship (Western & McLanahan, 2000).

One main factor shaping the relationship between a criminal history and relationship formation is employment (Wilson, 1987). The inability of felons

to obtain stable employment may result in female partners perceiving them as “unmarriageable.” Wilson found that “the increasing rate of joblessness among black men merits serious consideration as a major underlying factor in the rise of black single mothers and female-headed households” (p. 83). When women do marry formerly incarcerated men, they tend to “marry down” (e.g., marry someone with less schooling or a lower income than themselves) and benefit less from the relationship (Charles & Luoh, 2010).

Prior research has been limited, as studies tend to focus on the link between incarceration and relationship outcomes that existed prior to incarceration. This research concentrates on the relationship between incarceration and marital dissolution (Apel, Blockland, Nieuwbeerta, & Van Schellen, 2009) or on collateral consequences on relationship quality and family life both during and after incarceration (Turney, 2015). Findings suggest that incarceration increases the risk for divorce among those who were married when they entered prison and reduced relationship quality for those who remain together following incarceration. Despite the emerging body of literature considering relationship formation following criminal justice involvement, research rarely considers the unique experiences of those involved in the juvenile justice system on relationship formation. It remains unclear if those with a delinquency history experience similar relationship challenges due to delinquent labels placed upon them.

Contact with the Juvenile Justice System: Impacts on Future Outcomes

Juvenile justice contact is associated with several negative outcomes in adulthood. Most notably, system contact tends to worsen recidivism outcomes in comparison to juveniles diverted out of the system (Wilson & Hoge, 2013). Researchers have also linked delinquency with future impaired functioning (e.g., ability to perform satisfactorily in school or work environments; severity of substance use; appropriateness of interpersonal behavior) (Abram et al., 2013). Former delinquents also have difficulty securing employment (Baert & Verhofstadt, 2015), reduced incomes (Allgood, Mustard, & Warren, 1999), and worse educational outcomes (Schubert et al., 2010; Sweeten, 2006).

While prior research demonstrates that a criminal history harms relationship formation, partly due to the inability of returning offenders to obtain stable and gainful employment (Wilson, 1987), it may be expected that juveniles would not face similar burdens due to record protections. Historically, those processed in the juvenile justice system were protected from the labeling effects of delinquency records through the process of expungement and/or sealing (Feld, 1999). However, recent changes in

policies have led to greater public access to delinquency histories (Shah et al., 2014). States vary significantly in the types of protections granted to juveniles for sealing and expungement, resulting in juveniles in some states experiencing greater burdens of records. For example, in Washington State, 1 in 10 juveniles who are eligible for sealing actually have their records sealed (Calero, 2013), while in Illinois, only 1 in 333 juveniles' records is sealed (Illinois Juvenile Justice Commission, 2016). With the possibility for juvenile records to be publicly available, there is a potential for juvenile records to impact the lives of former delinquents. As a result, it may now be possible for juveniles to face similar relationship challenges as adults.

Research on juvenile justice contact outcomes has been limited and the findings have varied depending on how the variables were defined and measured. For example, criminal offending is related to delayed entry into marriage for young men (King & South, 2011), but not when accounting for the participants' reported desires to marry. One of the few studies to address relationships of former delinquents focused on a small subset of individuals who were incarcerated in adolescence, but did not find a detrimental impact on marriage (Huebner, 2005). However, Huebner cautioned that "the absence of statistical significance for this relationship should be examined with caution" (p. 295) due to the small sample size. The author then suggested that future research explore this relationship further because "the coefficients for youthful incarceration in the marriage model signal a possible negative relationship between the measures" (p. 295). Therefore, researchers should improve upon previous research by taking various relationship outcome factors into account and ensuring sufficient sample sizes to allow for effects to be examined.

One qualitative study of system-involved juveniles demonstrated many of the challenges faced by reentering youths who are also parents (Nurse, 2002). Fathers frequently found that their children's mothers were no longer dependent upon them, as their partners grew to be self-sufficient during their spouses' incarceration. Upon release, many males found reestablishment of the relationship challenging as incarceration resulted in a redistribution of power dynamics in the relationship. For example, women were aware that they could easily contact their partners' parole officers and have the partner arrested, thereby "dramatically altering the balance of power" (p. 110).

One of the most in-depth studies to-date examining relationship formation of those with a juvenile record explored how contact with the juvenile justice system (i.e., incarceration or arrest) impacted criminal offending desistance related outcomes (e.g., relationships) in emerging adulthood (age 18-24) (Mack, 2012). This study examined over 5,300 males from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. Considering marriage and cohabitation separately is important, as the type of partner

one resides with shapes recidivism patterns (Horney, Osgood, & Marshall, 1995). For example, Horney and colleagues found that a returning offender who lived with a wife had a lower likelihood of recidivism than a returning offender who lived with a girlfriend. Mack found that men who had been detained prior to the age of 18 had higher rates of cohabitation in comparison to both men who had been arrested as a youth and men who had no prior contact with the juvenile justice system. Furthermore, she found that men who had no contact with the justice system as a youth were most likely to be married and entered their first co-residential union at significantly older ages than the other groups. These findings highlight the importance of examining both marriage and cohabitation factors when assessing relationship outcomes. However, Mack's study was restricted to early union formation by focusing only on marriages and cohabitation that occurred prior to age 25. This restricts the opportunity to examine those who put off marriage or cohabitation until later ages.

Potential Explanations for Criminal Justice Contact Impacts on Adulthood Relationships

There are several explanations as to why juveniles may experience challenges in relationship formation. First, these individuals may not be perceived as marriageable to potential partners (Apel et al., 2009). This can be explained through a labeling theory perspective in which the stigma surrounding an individual's deviant label may signal to potential spouses that the individual is not marriageable. Labeling theorists have hypothesized that contact with the justice system operates as a mechanism through which individuals may acquire negative social labels such as "delinquent" or "offender" (Becker, 1991; Lee, Courtney, Harachi, & Tajima, 2015). Consequently, the stigmatization that occurs as a result of these labels can lead to various negative outcomes such as exclusion from conventional social institutions (e.g., education and employment) (Sampson & Laub, 1997). Being labeled as a deviant can also encourage individuals to develop deviant self-concepts (Kroska, Lee, & Carr, 2016). Individuals who are labeled as delinquents have higher rates of recidivism (Lieberman, Kirk, & Kim, 2014), as the label may serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy (Gilman, 2015).

Labeling of a juvenile who has experienced contact with the criminal justice system is related to adulthood outcomes. For example, labeling may lead to poorer educational attainment due to stigmatization and alteration of self-concepts, limitation of conventional educational opportunities, and introduction to delinquent peers (Bernburg & Krohn, 2003; Sweeten, 2006). Labeling the youth as deviant may also impact the delinquent youth's self-

evaluations, leading them to identify more strongly with their criminal identities (Kroska, Lee, & Carr, 2016).

Marriageability may also be reduced as a result of the relationship between previous incarceration and reduction in employment or income (Western, 2002). It is possible that potential partners perceive these individuals as being less marriageable as they may be unable to provide financial stability due to the difficulties they face securing stable employment.

Relatedly, relationship formation has changed over the past few decades, especially the institution of marriage (Cherlin, 2009). Many individuals are choosing to delay marriage or cohabit with their partners as opposed to marrying at all (Copen, Daniels, & Mosher, 2013). Additionally, economically unstable individuals or those in disadvantaged areas may be more likely to forego marriage (Smock, Manning, & Porter, 2005). Thus, it is important to take into consideration that former delinquents may forego marriage and opt for cohabitation instead.

A final explanation may be that individuals who have experienced juvenile justice contact may be less likely to want to enter into marriages or relationships. There is evidence that the link between criminal offending and marriage outcomes is no longer significant after controlling for the respondents' desire to marry (King & South, 2011). Relatedly, researchers find that a history of violent offending may increase the likelihood that potential spouses will have a higher perception of their risk of victimization, thus reducing the marriageability of the offender (Cherlin, Burton, Hurt, & Purvin, 2004). In sum, the experience of juvenile justice contact may have unique consequences for former delinquents as they enter into adulthood. In order to better understand how those with previous juvenile justice contact may differ from the general population on relationship outcomes, the current study explores cohabitation and marriage outcomes of former delinquents.

Current Study

The current study examined the impact of juvenile justice involvement on relationship outcomes in adulthood. The study expanded upon the research of Mack (2012) by incorporating court-involved juveniles into analyses. As juvenile records are losing protections, it is now possible that court-involvement would be more detrimental than an arrest that could simply result in diversion and no criminal record. Thus, it is important to consider if court records impact relationship outcomes differently than arrests. Relatedly, only a small portion of Mack's sample had experienced a juvenile arrest (n=283), while a much larger portion of the current sample was arrested in adolescence (n=1,048). Furthermore, the current study also

included an additional measure of relationships—length of marriage, to serve as an indicator of relationship quality. Finally, Mack failed to control for several important criminal justice variables that would likely shape relationship formation in adulthood (e.g. incarceration or arrest in adulthood). The following research question and hypotheses were addressed in this study:

Research Question: How do individuals who experienced juvenile justice system contact differ in relationship outcomes in comparison to those who did not have contact with the juvenile system?

Hypothesis 1: Those who had juvenile justice system contact will be more likely to cohabit in comparison to those who experienced no juvenile justice contact.

Hypothesis 2: Those who had juvenile justice system contact will be more likely to enter into cohabitation at younger ages than those who have not experienced juvenile justice contact.

Hypothesis 3: Those who had juvenile justice system contact will be less likely to marry in comparison to those who experienced no juvenile justice contact.

Hypothesis 4: Those who had juvenile justice system contact will be more likely to enter into marriage at later ages than those who have not experienced juvenile justice contact.

Hypothesis 5: Those who had juvenile justice system contact will report shorter lengths of first marriages in comparison to those who experienced no juvenile justice contact.

Method

The current study analyzed data from the NLSY97. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics collects NLSY97 data annually to examine the transition of youth into adulthood on a variety of factors (National Longitudinal Surveys, 2006). Data collection began in 1997 and is currently available until 2013. The NLSY sample was selected using a multistage cluster sampling method of U.S. households where residents were aged 12 to 16 in 1997. This dataset is ideal for the current study, as it includes variables for juvenile justice involvement including whether the participants were ever arrested in adolescence, appeared in juvenile court, or were in juvenile corrections, in addition to a variety of relationship outcomes.

The analyses in the current study were restricted to examining males only in order to best replicate the findings of prior research (see Huebner, 2005; Mack, 2012). The relationship patterns of formerly incarcerated persons vary based upon gender (Leverentz, 2006; Wilson, 1987), so it is important to examine relationship formation for males and females separately. Additionally, five participants were excluded because they reported number of years of education as “ungraded,” for a final sample size of 4,593.

The following section will describe each of the dependent, independent, and control variables in depth. Then, each stage of juvenile system contact (i.e. arrest, court, and detention) will be examined separately. For each stage of the system, t-tests of relationship outcomes (e.g. cohabitation and marriage) and type of juvenile contact are presented. Finally, ordinary least squares (OLS) and logistic regression models predicting relationship outcomes based upon each stage of the system are examined.

Dependent Variables

The dependent variables included cohabitation and marriage outcomes. Cohabitation was measured using the variables, *ever cohabitate* (0=never cohabitated, 1=cohabitated) and *age of first cohabitation* (the number of months between the date of birth and the date of first cohabitation)². The cohabitation variables did not include individuals who began cohabitating with their partners if the cohabitation occurred during marriage to that partner. If the respondent reported that they were cohabitating with another partner following their marriage, it was captured in the cohabitation variables. Marriage was measured using the variables, *ever marry* (0=never married, 1=married), *age of first marriage* (number of months between birth and the date of first marriage), and *length of marriage* (number of months between the date of the beginning of the first marriage and the date of the end of the first marriage).

Independent Variables

Three independent variables were used to assess the degree of juvenile justice contact, as more severe contact (e.g. incarceration vs. arrest) may shape the responses of potential partners in relationship formation. The first of these variables captured whether the individual was *arrested as a juvenile* (0=not arrested as a juvenile, 1=arrested as a juvenile) using the survey question “how old were you the first time you were arrested?” Those who reported being arrested under the age of 18 were coded as arrested as a

² The length of first cohabitation was not included in the current study, as participants were only asked the date of first cohabitation and not the end of first cohabitation.

juvenile. *Being in court as a juvenile* (0=not in court as a juvenile, 1=in court as a juvenile) was captured using the question "as a result of these charges did you go to juvenile or adult court?" The focus of the current paper was on juveniles who made contact with the juvenile justice system, so the experiences of those who were transferred to criminal court were not considered. However, all juveniles who experienced a transfer had some contact with the system in adolescence (e.g. arrest). The last independent variable was if the respondent ever served a period of *incarceration in adolescence* (0=not incarcerated in adolescence, 1=incarcerated in adolescence). This was captured using the question of "age of respondent when first incarcerated," with those reporting incarceration under the age of 18 being coded as incarcerated in adolescence.

Control Variables

Several control variables were also included in the analyses that were expected to impact relationship formation. Control variables included criminal justice, contextual, and demographic variables. Criminal justice involvement included the *number of times ever arrested or incarcerated*. Multiple contextual variables that have been found to predict relationship outcomes were included in the models. These included having a *child with any partner* (0=no child, 1=child), residing in an *urban or rural* neighborhood in 1997 (0=rural, 1=urban), *household type* in 1997 (0=all other household types, 1= two biological parent household), *military employment* (0=no military employment, 1=military employment), and *employment prior to relationship* (0=part-time employment or unemployed, 1=full-time employment). Finally, demographic variables included *number of years of education*, *race* (0=White, 1=Black, 2=Other race), *ethnicity* (0=Non-Hispanic, 1=Hispanic), and *age* in 2013.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Forty-one percent of the participants reported being married at least once, while 60% of the sample reported cohabitating at least once (Table 1). Participants cohabitated at younger ages (23 years) than they entered into a marriage (25 years). Of the participants who entered into a marriage, 22% of the marriages ended (e.g. divorce) and the average length of those marriages was 52.30 months.

With regard to the independent variables, 23% of the sample reported having ever been arrested as a juvenile, 13% reported having had been in juvenile court, and 4% reported having been in juvenile corrections.

Considering any criminal justice contact, respondents reported being arrested an average of 1.89 times and incarcerated on average of .27 times. Several contextual factors were also included in the models. Of these, 43% of participants reported having a child, 76% resided in an urban neighborhood during the first wave of data collection, 50% of participants reported living with both biological parents in the first wave of data collection, and only 9.4% of participants reported some type of military employment. Finally, participants reported completing an average of 13 years of education. Nearly 59% of the sample was White, followed by Black (26.0%), and all other races (15.2%), while 21.3% of the sample was Hispanic. In 2013, the final wave of data collection, participants were 30 years old on average.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	N = 4,607		
	% or M	SD	Range
Marriage and Cohabitation			
Ever cohabitate	59.97%	.49	0-1
Age of first cohabitation (in years)	22.94	3.67	12.34 - 33.61
Ever marry	41.18%	.49	0-1
Age of first marriage (in years)	25.02	3.52	15.76 - 34.27
Length of first marriage (in months)	52.30	31.21	1-172
Juvenile Justice Contact			
Arrested (<18)	22.82%	.42	0-1
Juvenile court	12.61%	.33	0-1
Juvenile corrections	3.61%	.19	0-1
Criminal Justice Contact			
Number of times arrested	1.89	4.22	0-68
Number of times incarcerated	.27	.83	0-9
Contextual factors			
Child with any partner	42.52%	.49	0-1
Neighborhood type in 1997 (Urban)	76.04%	.43	0-1
Household type in 1997 (Two biological parents)	50.16%	.50	0-1
Military employment	9.40%	.29	0-1
Demographics			
Years of education	12.96	2.84	2-20
Race			
<i>White</i>	58.76%		
<i>Black</i>	26.07%		
<i>Other</i>	15.17%		
Ethnicity (Hispanic)	21.3%	.41	0-1
Age (2013)	30.29	1.47	28-34

Impact of Youth Arrest on Adulthood Relationships

Table 2 presents a series of two-sample t-tests with equal variances and chi-square results to assess relationship outcomes based on whether or not the participant was ever arrested as a youth. Respondents who had been arrested as a youth were more likely to have cohabitated (72%) than individuals who had not been arrested as a youth (56%). On average, individuals who had been arrested as a youth also entered into cohabitation

relationships at earlier ages (21.96 years) than those who had not been arrested as a youth (23.31 years). Regarding marriage outcomes, those who reported being arrested in adolescence were significantly less likely to have married (35%) in comparison to those who were never arrested (43%). Furthermore, individuals who had been arrested as a youth entered into marriage at an earlier age than those who had not been arrested as a youth. For the individuals who reported being married but eventually separated, there were no significant differences in length of the marriage based upon a juvenile arrest history. Table 3 then presents OLS regressions (age of first marriage, length of first marriage, and age of first cohabitation) and logistic regressions (ever cohabitated and ever married). The models suggested that a juvenile arrest increased the odds of entering into a cohabitation ($p < .10$), but that system-contact did not impact age of first cohabitation (Table 3). Arrested juveniles were also less likely to enter into a marriage in adulthood. This relationship remained even after controlling for factors expected to impact the total number of marriages, including presence of children and criminal justice experience.

Table 2. T-Tests and Chi-Squares on Juvenile Justice Contact

	Arrest		Court		Corrections	
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Ever cohabitate (%)	56.36	71.66***	57.97	72.88***	59.30	74.70***
Age of first cohabitation (Years)	23.31	21.96***	23.19	21.55***	23.04	20.87***
Ever marry (%)	42.82	34.83***	42.25	32.30***	41.27	33.73+
Age of first marriage (Years)	25.15	24.46***	25.09	24.41**	25.05	23.88*
Length of first marriage (Months)	52.88	53.64	52.16	53.19	52.05	58.69

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, + $p < .10$

Impact of Youth Court Involvement on Adulthood Relationships

When comparing relationship outcomes between court-involved and non-court-involved youth, a pattern similar to the arrest models occurred (Table 2). For example, court-involved juveniles were more likely to cohabitate (73%) and enter into cohabitation at younger ages (21.55 years) in comparison to non-court-involved youth, as only 58% cohabitated and they entered into cohabitation at later ages (23.19 years). In contrast, non-court involved juveniles were more likely to have married (42%) in comparison to court-involved juveniles (32%), and did so at later ages. Table 4 presents OLS regressions (age of first marriage, length of first marriage, and age of first cohabitation) and logistic regressions (ever cohabitated and ever married). Similar to the arrest model, there were no significant differences in the length of first marriage. In contrast to the model of arrest and age at

first cohabitation, court-involved juveniles entered into cohabitations at earlier ages, but did not have increased odds of cohabitating. Court-involved juveniles were similar to non-delinquents in their age and length of first marriage; however, they had decreased odds of ever marrying.

Table 3. Regression Analysis of Impact of Juvenile Arrest on Cohabitation and Marriage

	Ever Cohabitated ²			Age of First Cohabitation ³			Ever Married ²			Age of First Marriage ³			Length of First Marriage ³		
	<i>b</i>	S.E. ¹	EXP(B)	<i>b</i>	S.E.	<i>B</i>	<i>b</i>	S.E.	EXP(B)	<i>b</i>	S.E.	<i>B</i>	<i>b</i>	S.E.	<i>B</i>
Juvenile Justice Contact															
Arrest	.19*	.11	1.21	-.30	.19	-.037	-.33**	.11	.72	-.34	.22	-.038	2.19	4.56	.030
Criminal Justice Contact															
# of times arrested	-.084**	.026	1.09	-.023	.023	-.030	.0013	.015	1.00	.059**	.019	.072	-.94	2.08	-.12
# of times incarcerated	.15*	.079	1.16	.024	.096	.0060	-.13*	.068	.88	.17	.15	.034	-.94	2.08	-.026
Contextual factors															
Child with any partner	1.70*	.074	5.49	-1.85*	.14	-.25	2.45*	.082	11.56	-2.18***	.18	-.29	11.53**	3.83	.17
Neighborhood type in 1997 (Urban)	-.15*	.084	.86	.14	.15	.017	-.21**	.089	.81	.56**	.17	.071	.32	3.67	.0048
Household type in 1997 (Two biological parents)	.41*	.073	.66	.38**	.14	.053	.15*	.080	1.16	-.070	.17	-.010	-2.20	3.52	-.035
Military Employment prior to cohabitation or marriage	-.052	.13	.94	.46*	.23	.038	1.21***	.13	3.36	-.51*	.24	-.053	1.90	4.89	.026
				1.39*	.14	.19				.96***	.18	.13	-5.48	4.03	-.088
Demographics															
Years of education	-.0027	.014	.99	.33***	.028	.25	.15***	.015	1.16	.24***	.030	.20	-1.67	.71	-.14
Race (White)															
Black	-.31*	.086	.73	.57**	.17	.069	-.80***	.099	.45	1.15***	.22	.13	1.06	4.72	.013
Other	-.17	.11	.85	.071	.24	.0069	-.49***	.13	.61	-.29	.29	-.029	-5.99	7.60	-.066
Ethnicity (Hispanic)	-.29**	.10	.75	-.13	.21	-.015	-.077	.12	.93	-.46*	.24	-.054	7.07	5.76	.097
Age (2013)	-.0022	.023	.99	.14**	.045	.057	.12***	.025	1.13	.31***	.052	.13	3.06*	1.24	.14
Constant	.14	.69	1.15	14.92*	1.34		-6.54***	.75	.0014	13.46***	1.54		-19.26	35.59	
N	4,332			2,342			4,332			1,681			314		
R²/Pseudo R²	.14			.23			.25			.21			.10		
F ratio				59.70***						35.34***			2.64**		
Wald Chi2	718.69**						1022.5								
	*						4***								

*p<.001, **p<.01, ***p<.05, +p<.10; 1Robust standard errors in all models, 2Logistic regression, 3OLS regression

Table 4. Regression Analysis of Impact of Juvenile Court on Cohabitation and Marriage

	Ever Cohabitated ²			Age of First Cohabitation ³			Ever Married ²			Age of First Marriage ³			Length of First Marriage ³		
	<i>b</i>	S.E. ¹	EXP(<i>B</i>)	<i>b</i>	S.E.	<i>B</i>	<i>b</i>	S.E.	EXP(<i>B</i>)	<i>b</i>	S.E.	<i>B</i>	<i>b</i>	S.E.	<i>B</i>
Juvenile Justice Contact															
Court	-.067	.14	.94	-.49*	.24	-.048	-.29*	.14	.75	-.28	.31	-.024	.53	5.91	.0058
Criminal Justice Contact															
# of times arrested	.10***	.027	1.11	-.017	.023	-.022	-.0021	.016	.99	.056**	.021	.069	-.81	.63	-.11
# of times incarcerated	.14*	.079	1.15	.024	.095	.0062	-.13*	.068	.88	.17	.15	.033	-1.07	2.76	-.030
Contextual factors															
Child with any partner	1.71**	.074	5.51	-1.86***	.14	-.26	2.44***	.082	11.42	-2.19***	.18	-.29	11.44**	3.98	.16
Neighborhood type in 1997 (Urban)	-.14	.084	.87	.14	.15	.017	-.22*	.089	.80	.55**	.17	.070	.42	3.93	.0063
Household type in 1997 (Two biological parents)	-.42***	.073	.66	.38**	.14	.052	.15*	.080	1.16	-.069	.17	-.0097	-2.26	3.54	-.036
Military	-.041	.12	.96	.44*	.23	.037	1.19***	.13	3.30	-.53*	.24	-.055	2.15	4.59	.030
Employment prior to cohabitation or marriage				1.39***	.14	.19				.95***	.18	.13	-5.44	3.91	-.088
Demographics															
Years of education	-.0067	.014	.99	.33***	.028	.25	.15***	.014	1.17	.25***	.030	.20	-1.71*	.76	-.14
Race (White)															
Black	-.32***	.085	.73	.57	.17	.069	-.80***	.099	.45	1.15***	.22	.13	1.14	4.73	.014
Other	-.17	.11	.85	.058	.24	.0056	-.49***	.13	.62	-.30	.29	-.029	-6.23	6.52	-.069
Ethnicity (Hispanic)	-.29**	.10	.75	-.11	.21	-.012	-.067	.12	.93	-.44*	.24	-.053	7.16	5.31	.097
Age (2013)	-.0048	.023	.99	.14**	.045	.057	.12***	.025	1.13	.31***	.052	.13	3.05***	1.21	.14
Constant	.28	.69	.73	14.92	1.33		-6.64***	.75		13.33**	1.53		-18.12	35.39	
N	4,332			2,342			4,332			1,681			314		
R²/Pseudo R²	.14			.23			.25			.21			.10		
F ratio				60.00**						35.14**			2.55**		
Wald Chi2	704***						1019.08***								

p*<.001, *p*<.01, ****p*<.05, +*p*<.10; ¹Robust standard errors in all models, ²Logistic regression, ³OLS regression

Table 5. Regression Analysis of Impact of Juvenile Corrections on Cohabitation and Marriage

	Ever Cohabitated ²			Age of First Cohabitation ³			Ever Married ²			Age of First Marriage ³			Length of First Marriage ³		
	<i>b</i>	S.E. ¹	EXP(<i>B</i>)	<i>b</i>	S.E.	<i>B</i>	<i>b</i>	S.E.	EXP(<i>B</i>)	<i>b</i>	S.E.	<i>B</i>	<i>b</i>	S.E.	<i>B</i>
Juvenile Justice Contact															
Corrections	-.13	.23	.89	-.53	.35	-.029	.14	.24	1.15	-.34	.22	-.038	8.20	10.20	.049
Criminal Justice Contact															
# of times arrested	.10***	.026	1.11	-.026	.023	-.034	-.015	.017	.99	.059**	.020	.072	-.96	.60	-.13
# of times incarcerated	.14*	.079	1.15	.018	.096	.0046	-.13*	.070	.88	.17	.15	.034	-.86	2.71	-.024
Contextual factors															
Child with any partner	1.71***	.074	5.50	-1.86***	.14	-.26	2.43***	.081	11.35	-2.18***	.18	-.29	11.49**	3.97	.16
Neighborhood type in 1997 (Urban)	-.14*	.084	.87	.12	.15	.014	-.23**	.089	.79	.56**	.17	.071	.14	3.94	.0020
Household type in 1997 (Two biological parents)	-.42***	.073	.66	.39**	.14	.054	.16*	.080	1.17	-.070	.17	-.010	-2.12	3.54	-.034
Military	-.041	.12	.96	.45*	.23	.037	1.20***	.13	3.31	-.51*	.24	-.053	2.29	4.58	.032
Employment prior to cohabitation or marriage				1.39***	.14	.19				.96***	.18	.13	-5.48	3.90	-.089
Demographics															
Years of education	-.0064	.014	.99	.33***	.028	.25	.16***	.015	1.17	.24***	.030	.20	-1.69*	.76	-.13
Race (White)															
Black	-.32***	.085	.73	.59**	.17	.071	-.79***	.099	.45	1.15***	.22	.13	1.08	4.71	.013
Other	-.17***	.11	.85	.088	.24	.0085	-.48***	.13	.62	-.29	.29	-.029	-5.80	6.48	-.064
Ethnicity (Hispanic)	-.29**	.10	.75	-.12	.21	-.013	-.078	.12	.92	-.46*	.24	-.054	7.19	5.26	.097
Age (2013)	-.0046	.023	.99	.14**	.045	.058	.12***	.025	1.13	.31***	.052	.13	3.07*	1.21	.14
Constant	.27	.69	1.31	14.75**	1.33		-6.76***	.75	.0012	13.46***	1.54		-18.85	35.25	
N	4,332			2,342			4,332			1,681			314		
R²/Pseudo R²	.14			.23			.25			.21			.10		
F ratio				59.62**						35.34***			2.61**		
Wald Chi2	703.91*						1024.1								
	**						4***								

* $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .05$, + $p < .10$; ¹Robust standard errors in all models, ²Logistic regression, ³OLS regression

Impact of Youth Incapacitation on Adulthood Relationships

The models comparing incapacitated versus non-incapacitated juveniles showed few differences in comparison to the arrest and court models (Table 2). Similar to the previous stages of system involvement, incapacitated juveniles were significantly more likely to cohabit (75%) and cohabit at younger ages (20.87 years) in comparison to non-detained juveniles who were less likely to cohabit (59%) and cohabited at later ages (23.04). When comparing marriage outcomes between incapacitated and non-incapacitated juveniles, the likelihood of ever marrying was no longer significantly different ($p > .05$) between the two groups. Table 5 then presents OLS regressions (age of first marriage, length of first marriage, and age of first cohabitation) and logistic regressions (ever cohabited and ever married). Similar to the previous models, non-incapacitated juveniles married at significantly older ages (25.05 years) than incapacitated juveniles (23.88 years). Finally, the model suggested that incarceration in adolescence had no impact on cohabitation or marriage outcomes.

Discussion

The current study examined the association between contact with the juvenile justice system and relationship outcomes in adulthood. Prior studies assessing relationship outcomes have focused on marriage as the primary outcome measurement. Historically, marriage was an appropriate outcome measure for relationships; however, there has been a shift in relationships with many couples cohabiting prior to marriage and some choosing to forego marriage entirely (Cherlin, 2009). In fact, nearly fifty percent of couples are now cohabiting as opposed to marrying in the United States (Copen et al., 2013). Including cohabitation as an outcome measurement allows for a nuanced understanding of relationship outcomes based upon the current reality of relationships in the United States.

Analyses suggest that system-involved juveniles are more likely to enter into cohabitations at earlier ages in comparison to their non-delinquent counterparts. Former delinquents also appear to be less likely to marry, but appear similar to non-delinquents in their age of marriage after controlling for several relevant factors. An examination of marriages that ended showed that delinquents and non-delinquents did not differ in length of first marriage, an indicator of relationship instability. However, the fact that fewer delinquents were entering into marriages in the first place resulted in a smaller sample that had the opportunity to ever have a marriage cease.

Cumulatively, these findings indicate that juvenile justice system contact is related to individuals foregoing or delaying marriage and instead they are choosing to enter into cohabitation. This finding is consistent with prior research indicating that those with criminal records have a lowered desire to

marry (King & South, 2011) or that potential partners are not seeing them as being “marriageable” (Western, 2002). Court-involved juveniles also began cohabitating at younger ages than non-court involved juveniles, a finding that may be shaped by the financial need of former delinquents. More specifically, a criminal record serves as a barrier to full-time employment (Wilson, 1987), potentially contributing to financial instability. Cohabiting with a partner would likely reduce living costs (e.g. utility bills, rent) if they were shared with a partner. In other words, the financial need of former delinquents may push them into cohabitations, but the perception of former delinquents as non-marriageable may ultimately prevent them from entering into marriages.

One goal of the current study was to determine if the degree of system involvement (i.e. arrest, court, and corrections) was related to worsened relationship outcomes. It was expected that correctional involvement would be indicative of more serious and violent offending, resulting in criminal labels or records that would impact relationship formation, as opposed to arrests or court involvement, which would indicate less serious delinquent acts. Arrest and court-involvement were both related to cohabitation and marriage outcomes, but none of the models showed a significant influence of correctional involvement. However, t-tests indicated that there were significant differences in the cohabitation and marital patterns between incapacitated and non-incapacitated youth. The lack of significant findings may be due in part to the relatively small sample size of incapacitated youth, similar to that of Huebner (2005). While larger percentages of juveniles were arrested (23%) and court-involved (13%), less than 4% of respondents reported being in a juvenile correctional facility.

Policy Implications

The findings from the current study suggest that contact with the juvenile system is associated with a lowered likelihood of entering marriage. This is evidence that juvenile delinquents face a similar barrier to reentry that is well known to prevent adult offenders from reintegrating back into society (Charles & Luoh, 2010). It is possible that potential partners are failing to see individuals with delinquent records as marriageable men due to their limited employment opportunities. While further research is needed to determine the exact reason why delinquents are less likely to enter into marriage, if employment challenges are at the root of this relationship, this would be further evidence of the need to prevent the loss of juvenile record protections (Shah et al., 2014). Emerging research now suggests that when juveniles have stronger delinquency record protections, they have more successful adult outcomes. Most notably, Litwok (2014) found that when juveniles resided in states where their delinquent records were automatically

expunged, they had significantly higher incomes than juveniles residing in states where a formal application process was required. In contrast, several states now allow for juvenile records to be accessed by the public (e.g. potential future partners) and/or potential employers, even in the case of misdemeanor offenses (Shah et al., 2014). While juvenile record protections began to erode as the juvenile justice system grew increasingly punitive, such findings highlight the importance of continuing to protect delinquency records, either through automatic expungements at the state level or preventing the public from access.

For juveniles residing in states lacking automatic expungements, it is important that upon reentry, these former delinquents are informed of the process of sealing or expungement at several stages of the juvenile justice system. Currently, there are no national standards for which juveniles learn of the sealing or expungement process, nor are there time standards for informing juveniles of the process (Shah & Rosado, 2015). While most states provide an avenue for sealing and expungement, Shah and Rosado argued that “the mere existence of sealing and expungement statutes is not enough...youth must be informed about their rights to keep their records out of the public eye” (p.61). Relatedly, juveniles should also be trained in how to respond to employers who may learn about a delinquency history in a background check (Pham, Unruh, Waintrup, Sinclair, Johnson, & Alverson, 2017).

Relationship formation, especially marriage, is critical to desistance from crime (Sampson & Laub, 2003), which highlights the importance of ensuring that juveniles can successfully form relationships in adulthood. System-involved juveniles may receive rehabilitative services at various stages of system-contact, making system contact an opportune time to educate juveniles on relationship formation and other critical long-term objectives. In fact, relationship treatments have been successful in a juvenile detention setting. For example, one program implemented in juvenile detention reportedly improved juveniles’ knowledge of communication, violence, and anger management (Ball, Kerig, & Rosenbluth, 2009). Expanding upon relationship programming during detention or while under community supervision could promote relationship skill building that is critical for this lesser considered aspect of reentry.

Limitations

While the current study expanded upon prior research (Huebner, 2005; Mack, 2012), there are several notable limitations. First, while the database chosen for these analyses was beneficial due to its size and its inclusion of longitudinal data, it lacked some variables that had been controlled for in previous studies. For example, location of the respondent is not publicly

available for the NLSY97 dataset and resultantly, was unable to be controlled for. This limitation restricts these findings to be specific to this sample and not a full replication of previous researchers' findings.

Our sample was also limited in multiple ways. First, this sample included a small subset (only 166 total participants) who reported being in juvenile corrections, which may have contributed to the non-statistically significant findings for this group. Second, an all-male sample was chosen due to the restricted size of the subset of delinquent females in our database and to best replicate the findings of prior research (see Huebner, 2005). However, it is important to consider the unique experiences of females as labeling effects on adult criminal offending differ depending upon gender (Lee, Courtney, Harachi, & Tajima, 2015). Relationship formation following incarceration is particularly challenging for females, as they commonly enter into relationships with former offenders, suggesting the quality of the relationship may be poor (Leverentz, 2006). Due to the evidence that relationship patterns of formerly incarcerated persons vary based upon gender (Leverentz, 2006; Wilson, 1987), we chose to examine males separately from females. Further research should extend this research to assess females as well.

A final limitation to this study was the inability to effectively measure relationship quality. Unfortunately, our model indicating length of first marriage was limited by a small sample size, so we were unable to draw many conclusions from it. We were also unable to measure other indicators that may be more relevant to relationship quality (e.g. happiness, arguments, financial stability) than just simply entering into a marriage or cohabitation. Being part of a marriage does not necessarily equate to positive life circumstances and in many cases, people may experience poor relationship quality within marriages (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Determining relationship quality is particularly important for a criminal sample, as the negative consequences of incarceration (e.g. employment) are known to deteriorate relationship quality (Conger et al., 1990).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the current study demonstrated that contact with several stages of the juvenile system was associated with a reduced likelihood of marrying in adulthood and an increased likelihood of entering into a cohabitation. Juvenile court contact was also related to a lower age at first cohabitation. While the growing trend across the United States is to cohabitate as opposed to marrying, these trends differed when comparing respondents with and without juvenile system contact. These findings indicated that potential partners could view former delinquents as poor choices in partners, as they may face barriers and stigmas that would not be

present among non-delinquents. Former delinquents may also be more apt to enter into cohabitations, as they grant them greater financial stability without the high degree of commitment required by marriage. A large body of research suggests that marriage is an important factor in reducing recidivism, but it remains unclear how cohabitations may shape subsequent recidivism. Nevertheless, any barriers placed upon former delinquents to reintegrate themselves back into society can ultimately contribute to subsequent reoffending, so it is critical that all efforts are made to foster effective reintegration.

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