The Intergenerational Effects of Parental Incarceration*

Will Dobbie† Hans Grönqvist‡ Susan Niknami§ Mårten Palme¶ Mikael Priks‖

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Abstract

We estimate the effects of parental incarceration on youth crime, childbearing, and educational attainment using exogenous variation from the random assignment of judges in the Swedish court system. Our approach allows us to recover the causal effects of parental incarceration for cases where judges disagree on the appropriate sentence. The incarceration of a parent in childhood has no detectable impact on educational attainment, but leads to a significant increase in teen criminal behavior and, for females, teen childbearing. We find suggestive evidence that these effects are driven by lower parental earnings, higher parental welfare receipt, and a lower probability of living with both biological parents.

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†Princeton University and NBER. Email: wdobbie@princeton.edu

‡Uppsala University. Email: hans.gronqvist@nek.uu.se

§Stockholm University. Email: susan.niknami@sofi.su.se

¶Stockholm University. Email: marten.palme@ne.su.se

‖Stockholm University. Email: mikael.priks@ne.su.se