

Formerly incarcerated black men with family in jail or prison are more likely to be obese

April 27 2018



Tony Brown. Credit: Jeff Fitlow

Black men who have been incarcerated and have a close relative in jail or prison are three times more likely to be obese than other black men, according to new research from a sociologist at Rice University.

"How Incarceration Influences Native-Born Black Men's Risk of Obesity" will appear in an upcoming issue of the journal *Ethnicity & Disease*. The study used data from the 2001-2003 National Survey of American Life, which includes a nationally representative sample of 1,140 [black men](#). The research team examined the rate of incarceration among these men and their family members and adjusted for factors such as age, income, education, health insurance and physical activity.

Lead author Tony Brown, a professor of sociology in Rice's School of Social Sciences, found that the higher risk of obesity for black men who were incarcerated at some point in their lives was associated with having a close family member incarcerated. The odds of being obese decreased by 42 percent for men who had been incarcerated but had no close family members incarcerated. Obesity was defined as a [body mass index](#) of 30 or greater.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the [obesity rate](#) for black men in the United States is 37.9 percent.

Brown said one possible explanation for the study's findings is that previously incarcerated black men with no family in jail or prison may be motivated to make a fresh start and embrace healthful habits, whereas

black men with criminal records and close family members in jail or prison may be subject to stressors (such as physical separation from a loved one, problems adjusting to life on the outside, and empathy for their incarcerated [family](#) member), which may cause them to overeat.

"We think our work clearly demonstrates that mass incarcerations scar lives – and results in higher rates of obesity for black men – because of the myriad traumatic events that take place during and after incarceration, and because already vulnerable families experience collateral consequences," Brown said.

Brown said the research findings demonstrate that former and familial [incarceration](#) cannot be discounted when examining risk for [obesity](#) among black men. In addition, he noted that the study establishes that women and children connected to incarcerated black men are not the only people who suffer health consequences when [family members](#) are in jail or prison.

More information: Tony N. Brown et al. How Incarceration Influences Native-Born Black Men's Risk of Obesity, *Ethnicity & Disease* (2018). [DOI: 10.18865/ed.28.2.69](https://doi.org/10.18865/ed.28.2.69)

Provided by Rice University

Citation: Formerly incarcerated black men with family in jail or prison are more likely to be obese (2018, April 27) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-04-incarcerated-black-men-family-prison.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.
