

INCARCERATION AMONG NON-CUSTODIAL PARENTS: IMPLICATIONS FOR WELFARE & CHILD SUPPORT PROGRAMS

PAMELA CAUDILL OVWIGHO, PHD
CATHERINE E. BORN, PHD
CORRENE SAUNDERS, BA



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THE POLICY ISSUE

- The public child support system can be viewed as our country's largest "child welfare" program.
- Child support is a critical work support for families leaving TANF. However, child support collections are typically lower for TANF cases.
- In addition, despite steady improvements in current support collections, child support arrears remain large and continue to grow.
- Even with strong enforcement tools in place, arrears collection rates remain low.

THE POLICY IMPLICATION: NEW APPROACHES ARE NEEDED

- Arrears may be the single biggest challenge facing the child support program.
- States are testing strategies to reduce current arrears balances & to prevent the build-up of additional arrears.
- In particular, there has been growing interest in arrears prevention & reduction strategies for incarcerated obligors.

INCARCERATION & PARENTING:

- The number of prisoners in federal or state adult correctional facilities increased by 79% between 1990 and 2000.
- The vast majority of prisoners are male.
- At least three-fifths of them are parents.
- It is estimated that 7 million children have a parent in prison or jail or under parole or probation supervision.

IMPLICATIONS FOR WELFARE & CHILD SUPPORT PROGRAMS

- While in prison, most parents will not be able to pay their child support obligations & will accumulate arrears.
- After release, ex-offenders face a number of challenges to securing employment.
- High current support obligations and/or large arrears balances may discourage obligors from participating in the formal economy or deteriorate already fragile family relationships.

POLICY OPTIONS

- Suspend or reduce child support orders to a minimal amount when a non-custodial parent enters prison.
- Provide inmates with education and services related to child support issues.
- Provide reintegration & employment services for ex-offenders.

BUT . . .reliable data about the proportion of the child support caseload affected by incarceration & their circumstances is scarce.

OUR STUDY

Purpose: Examine current & historical incarceration among Maryland child support obligors.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How many non-custodial parents are or were incarcerated?
- What are their case characteristics?
- How much do they owe in arrears?
- To what extent do they pay after they are released from prison?

SAMPLE

- Random sample of 2,375 individuals who were listed as a non-custodial parent in an active child support case in Maryland in September 2004.
- 95% confidence level and a $\pm 2\%$ error rate.

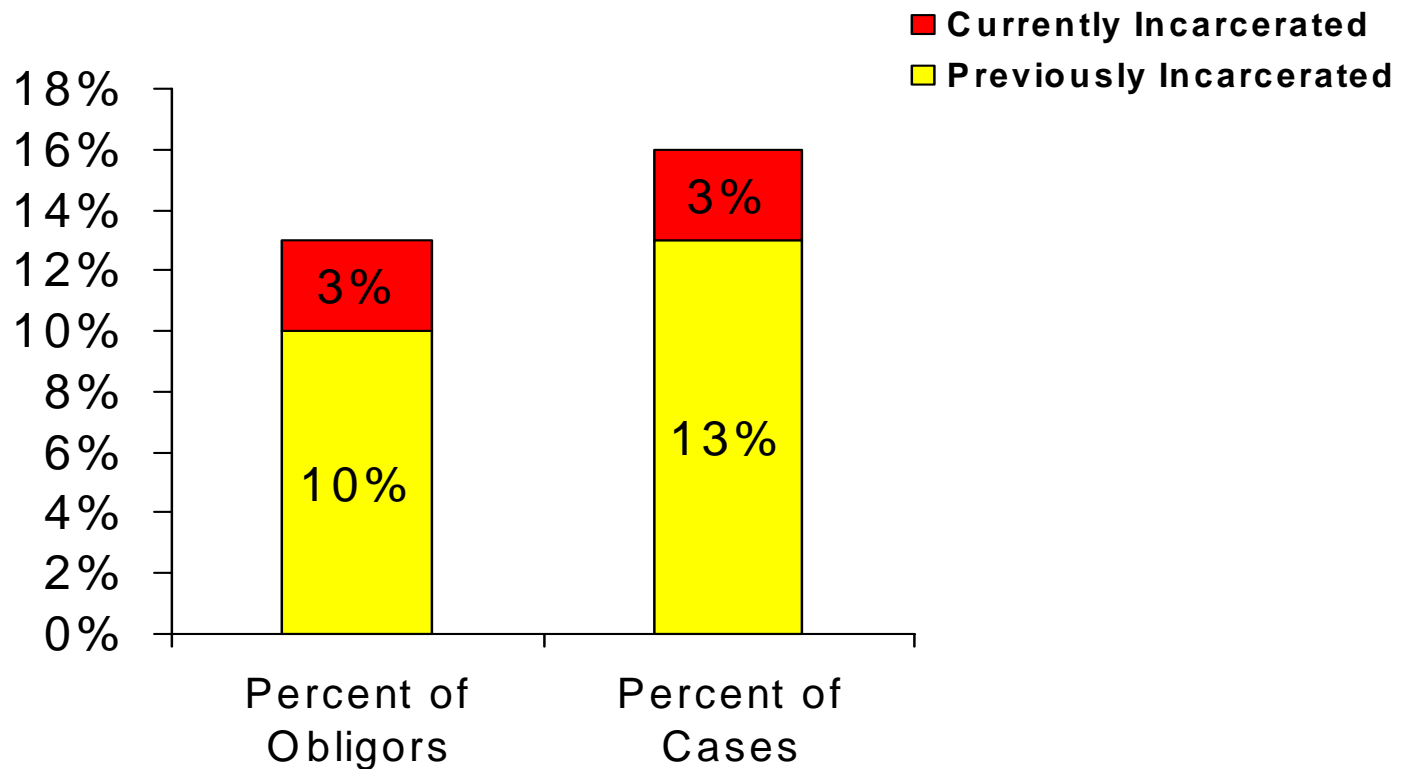
DATA SOURCES

- Child Support Enforcement System (CSES) – characteristics of sample members & cases
- Data on incarceration in Maryland prisons & the Baltimore City Detention Center - extract file developed by the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services specifically for this study.*
- Underestimates because data does not include information on county jails in Maryland's 23 counties.

*Research Disclaimer: Data was supplied for this study by the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services. Although the Department is unable to certify the accuracy and completeness of the data with regard to each subject of this Study, the researchers have nonetheless made every attempt to accurately and appropriately interpret the data supplied.

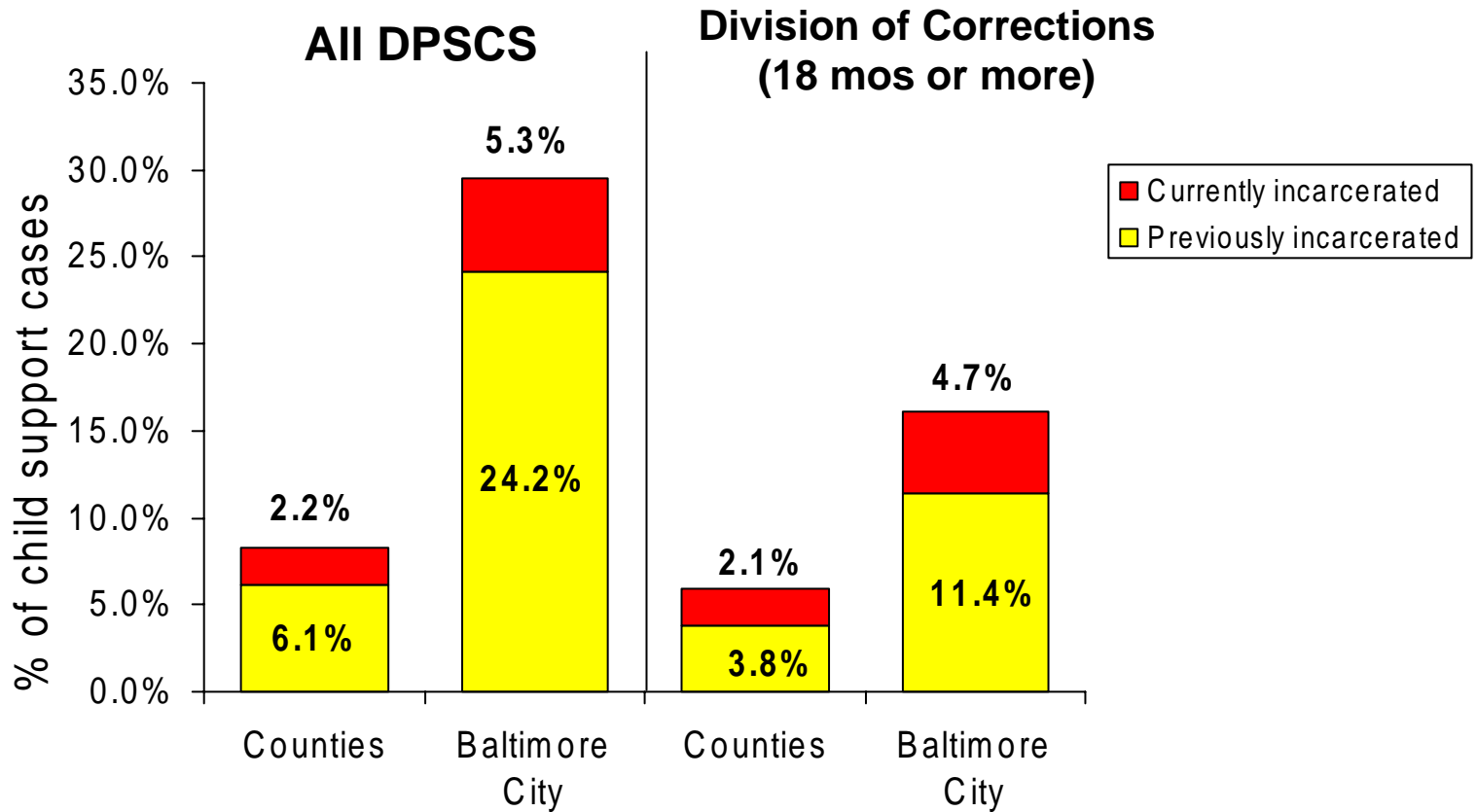
FINDINGS

Currently & previously incarcerated individuals account for 13% of Maryland's child support obligors & 16% of its cases.



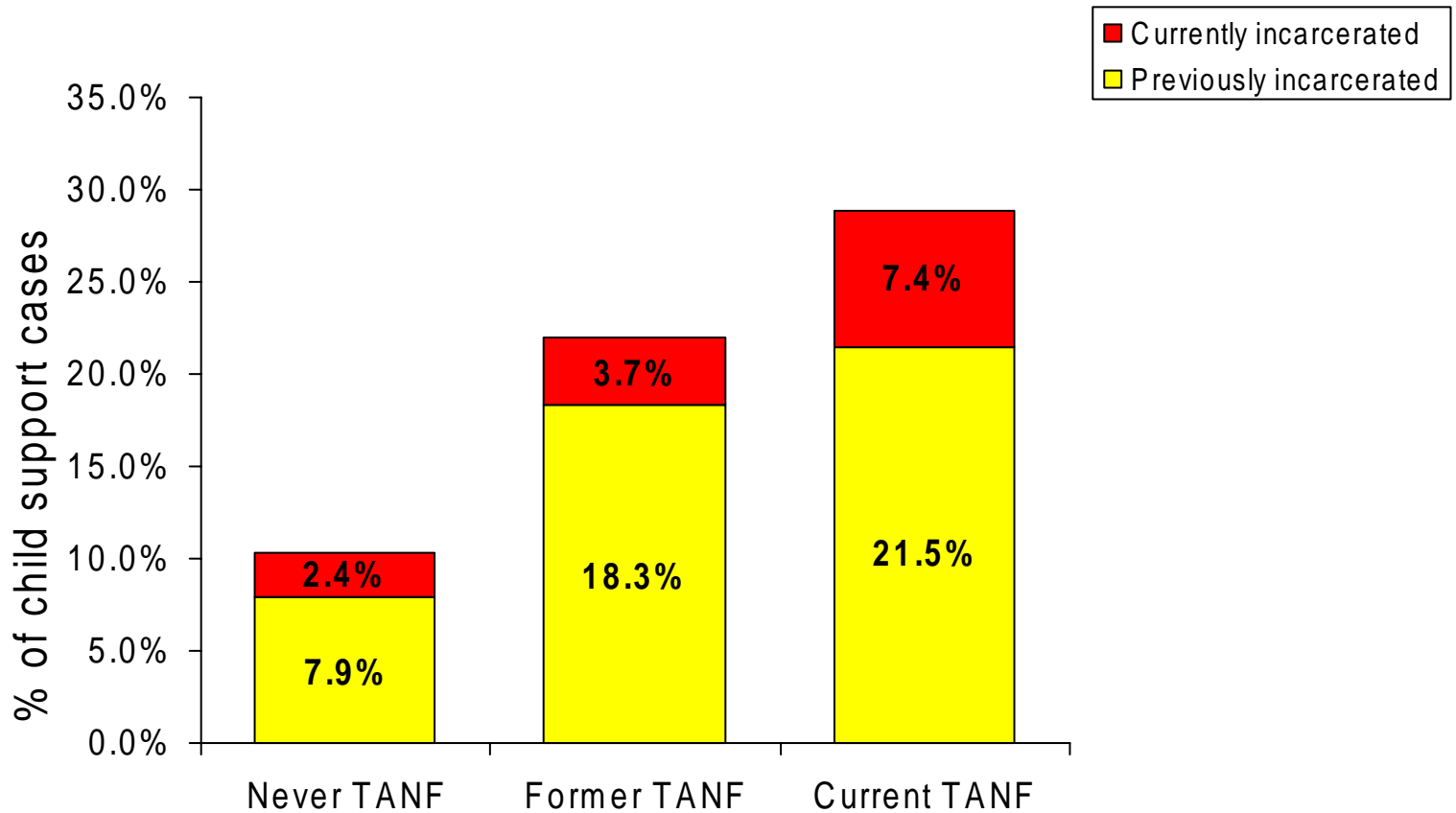
FINDINGS

Incarceration is more common among Baltimore City cases.



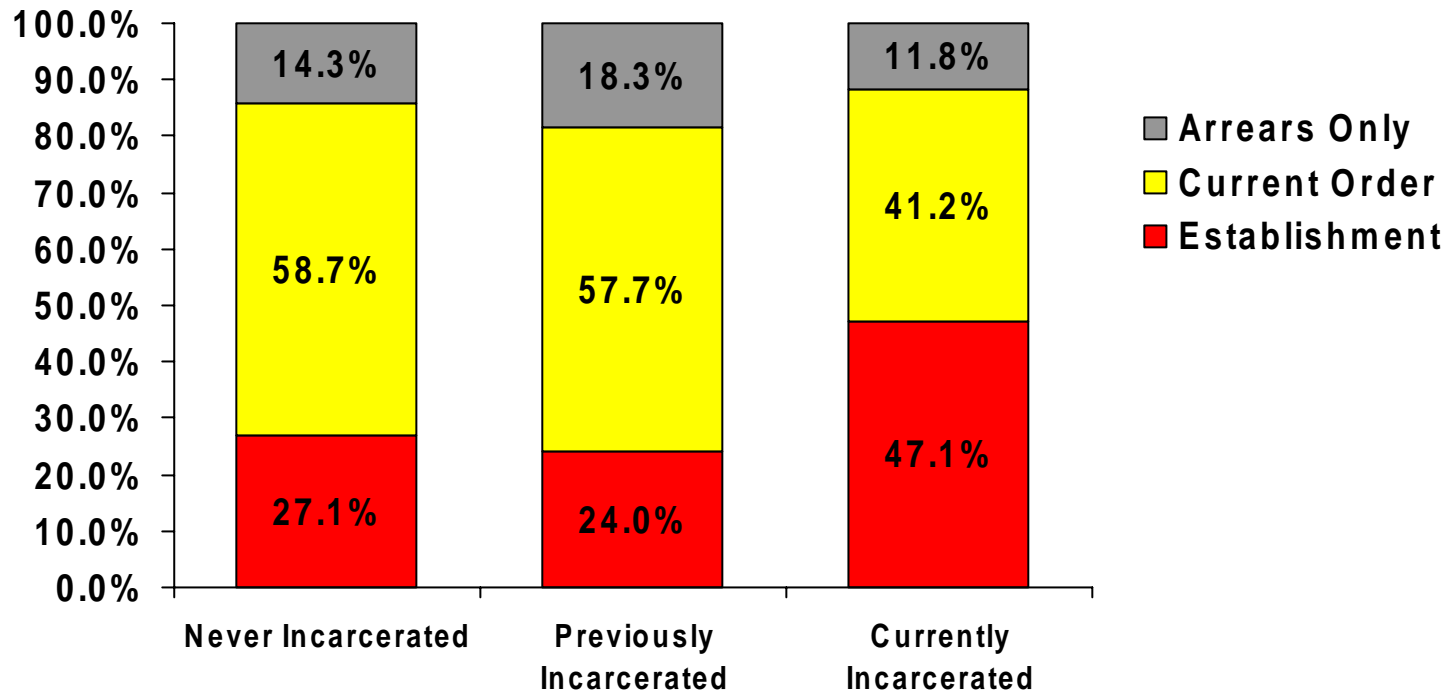
FINDINGS

Incarceration is twice as common among current & former TANF cases.



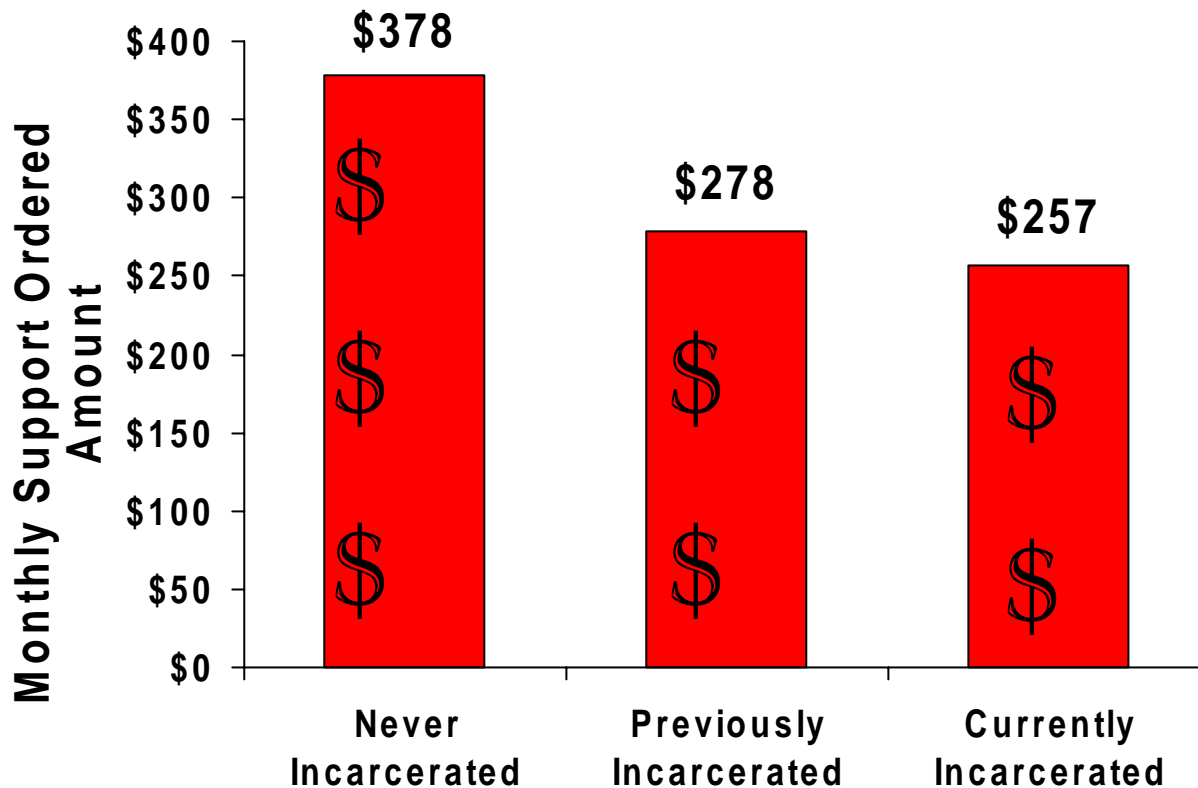
FINDINGS

Cases with a currently incarcerated obligor are more likely to require establishment.



FINDINGS

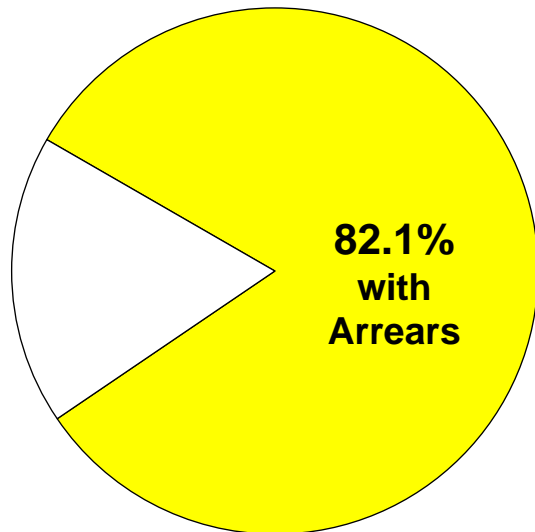
Currently & previously incarcerated obligors have lower orders for current support than never incarcerated obligors.



FINDINGS

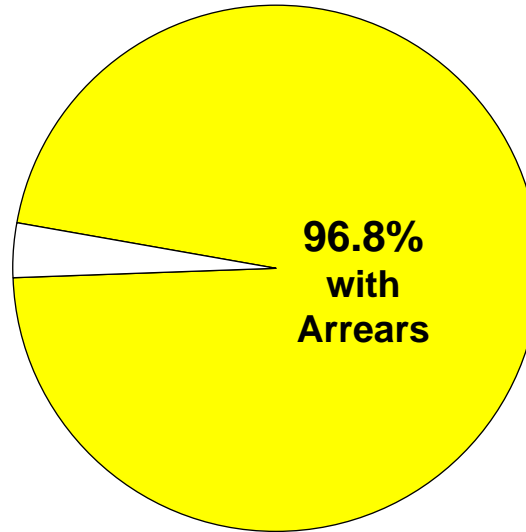
Previously & currently incarcerated obligors are more likely to owe arrears and have higher average child support debts.

Never Incarcerated



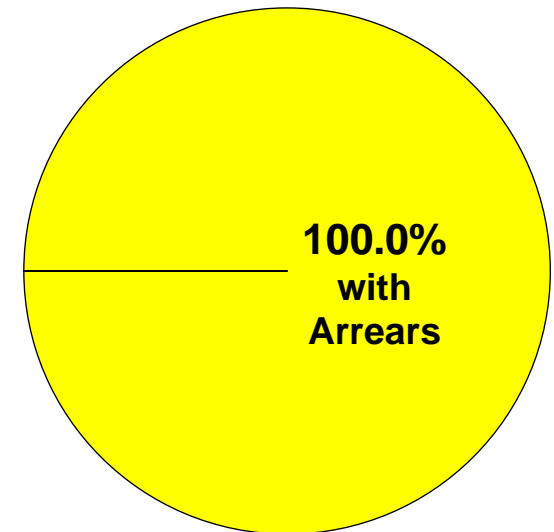
Mean: \$9,392.05

Previously Incarcerated



Mean: \$17,254.71

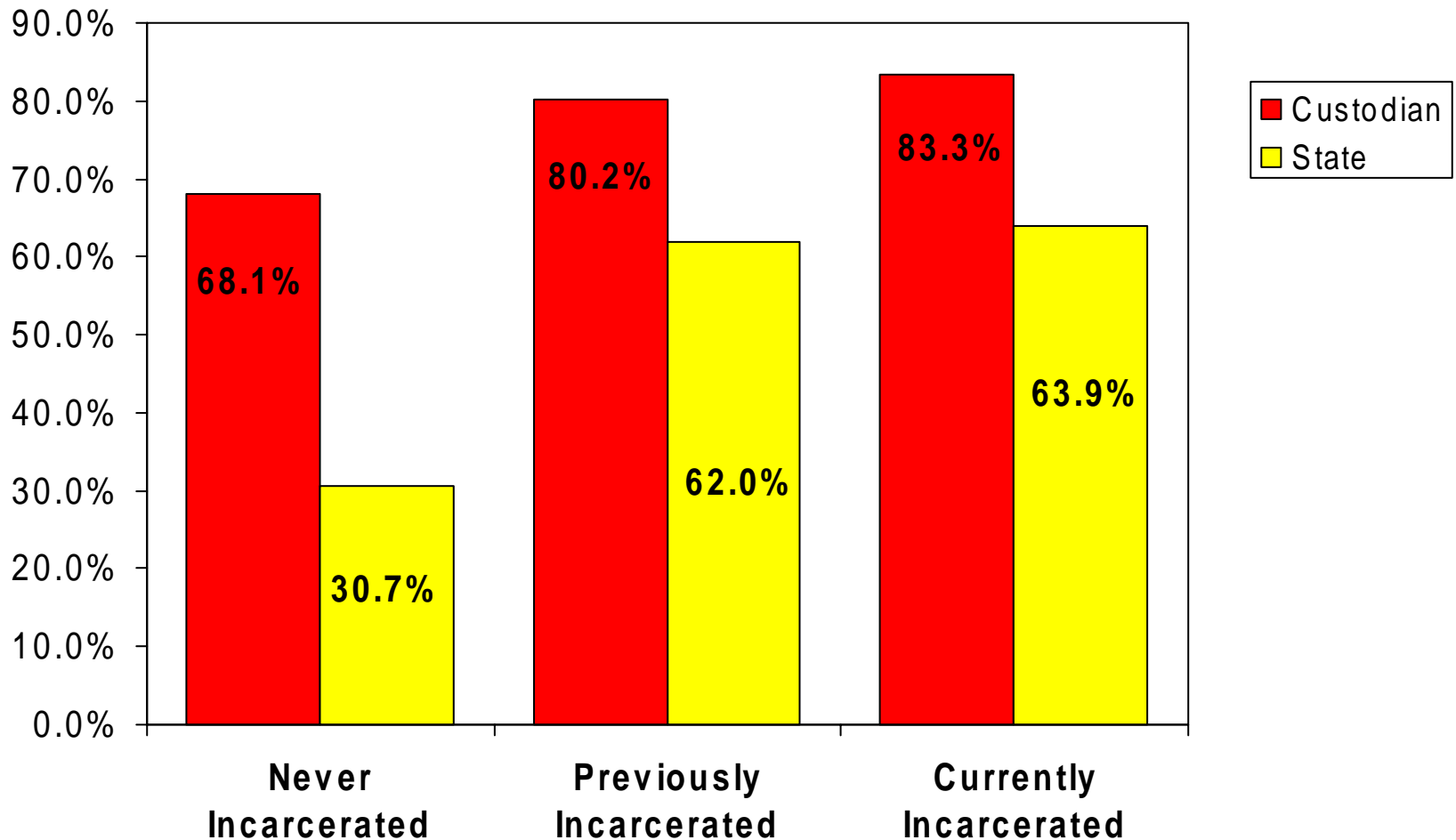
Currently Incarcerated



Mean: \$22,047.68

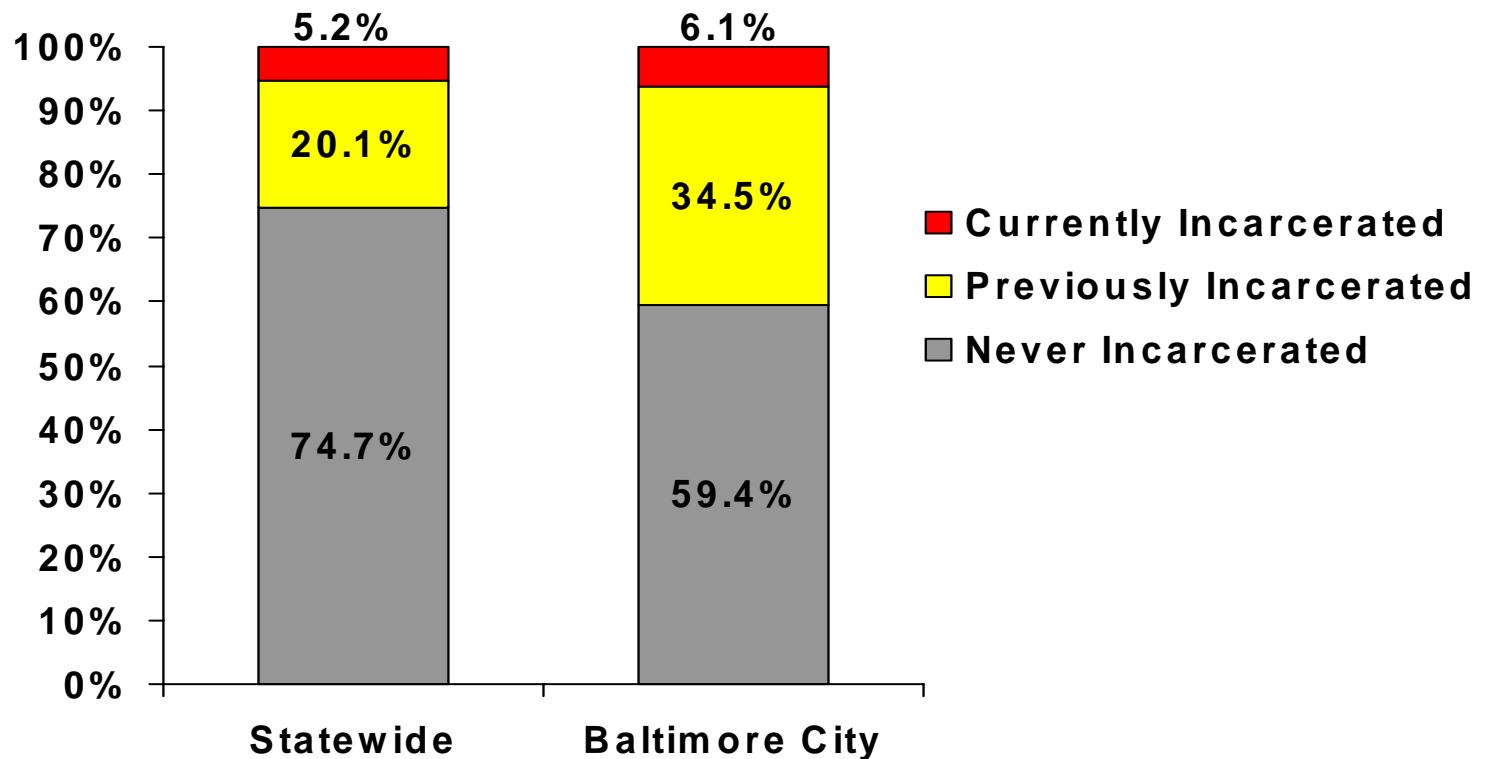
FINDINGS

Previously & currently incarcerated obligors are two times more likely to owe arrears to the state than those who've never been incarcerated.



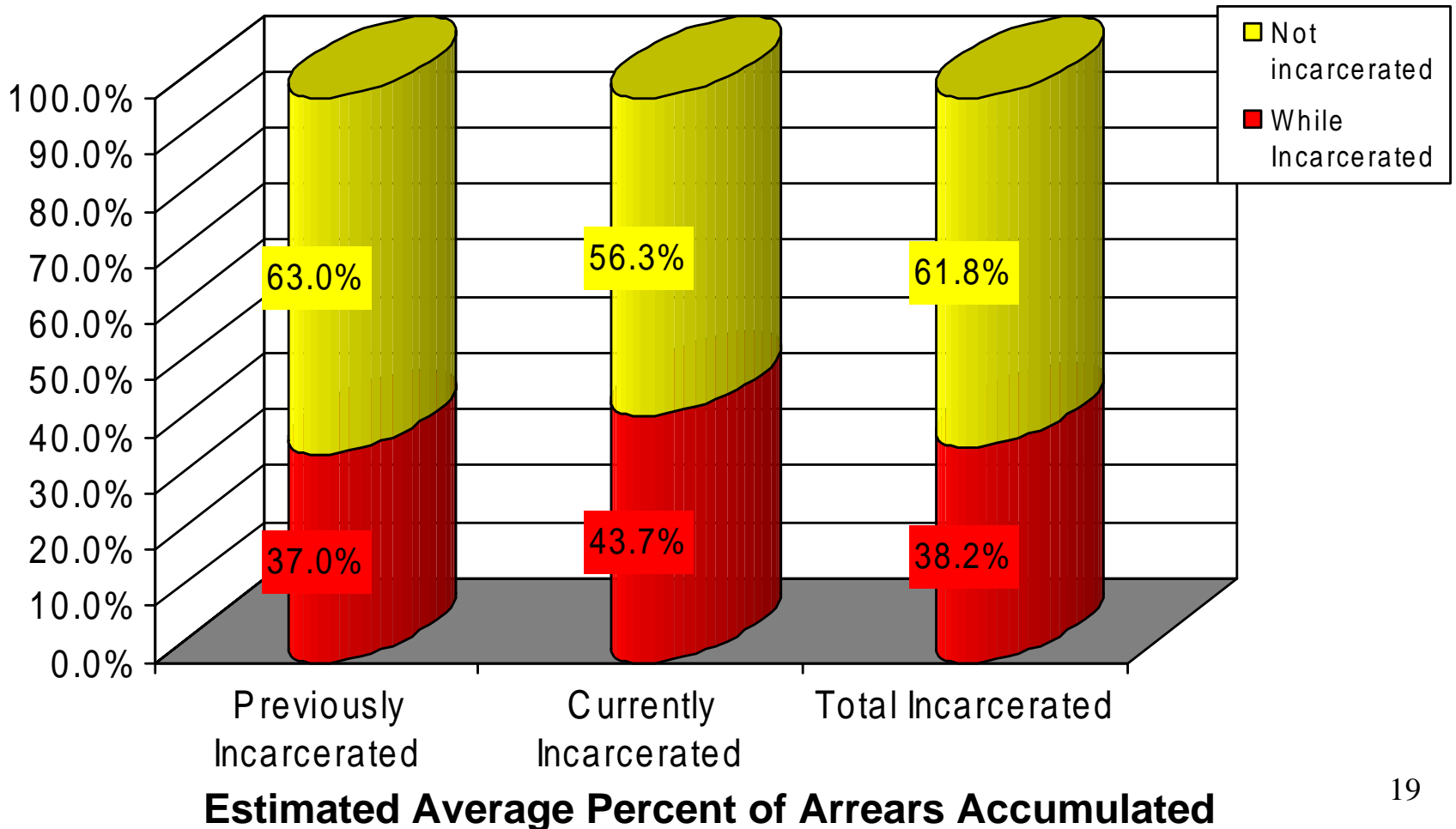
FINDINGS

At least one-quarter of arrears owed on Maryland cases are owed by previously & currently incarcerated obligors. Two-fifths of Baltimore City arrears are owed by obligors who are or have been incarcerated.



FINDINGS

On average, an estimated two-fifths of previously & currently incarcerated obligors' arrears accumulated while they were in prison.



FINDINGS

Previously incarcerated obligors are less likely to pay support & pay less than never incarcerated obligors. However, most still pay something.

Support Paid 10/03-9/04	Previously Incarcerated	Never Incarcerated
% paying any support***	61.0%	79.1%
Total amount paid (mean)***	\$2,210.78	\$3,918.93
% of current support paid (mean)***	53.5%	75.1%

*p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001

CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

- There is significant overlap among incarceration, child support, & welfare programs.
- Child support cases for children currently receiving TANF are twice as likely to have a non-custodial parent with an incarceration history than cases for children who have never received TANF.

Implication: Policy, program, research, & inter-agency attention should continue to be paid to the intersection of incarceration, child support, & welfare programs.

CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

- Obligor with current or previous imprisonment:
 - Have more child support cases per obligor, and more children per case;
 - Are less likely to have an order in place; and
 - Almost certainly owe support arrears.

Implication: Collaborative efforts between the child support & public safety programs should be undertaken to educate & engage incarcerated non-custodial parents in providing financial support for their children.

CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

- Arrears are correlated with non-custodial parent incarceration:
 - The average amount owed is roughly twice the average amount owed by those with no history of incarceration.
 - Obligors with past and present incarceration account for a disproportionate share of total arrears, state-owed arrears, and arrears owed to the custodian.
 - One-quarter of Maryland arrears & just over two-fifths of arrears on Baltimore City cases are owed by persons who are or were incarcerated.

Implication: Agencies should partner to identify currently incarcerated non-custodial parents & possibly modify their orders. Outreach to custodial parents may also be needed.

CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

- The effects of incarceration on child support payments linger after an obligor is released from prison.
- Obligors with an incarceration history are significantly less likely to pay support.
- When payments are made, they are significantly lower, and represent a smaller percentage of current support obligations.

Implication: Develop or expand programs for non-custodial parents who are about to be released or have recently been released from prison.



THANK YOU!

To obtain a copy of the full report visit our website:

<http://www.familywelfare.umaryland.edu>

For more information on this study, please send an e-mail:

povwigho@ssw.umaryland.edu