

“Release me to the streets but keep whatever’s left of me”: Impact of county- and individual-level incarceration on biological aging among mid-to-late life adults

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INTRODUCTION

Aging is a multidimensional process involving psychosocial wellbeing, cognitive performance, and biological health. Stress derived from racist experiences can impact physiological systems through inflammatory responses. We aim to examine the role of incarceration as a structural determinant of adverse aging.

METHODS

Linear regression models estimated the associations of Black–White and Latine–White disparities in jail and prison incarceration during 1985–1994 and 1995–2005 (data from the Vera Institute of Justice), as well as self-reported history of incarceration, with accelerated biological aging (based on GrimAge scores) for HRS participants racialized as Black, Latine, or White.

RESULTS

Participants racialized as Latine living in counties with widening Black-White jail and prison disparities across periods have an accelerated GrimAge score 1-3 months higher than counterparts from the same group not living in such counties. Self-reported incarceration for all racialized groups yielded accelerating aging by a minimum 14 months (Black) and a maximum of 20 months (Latine).

CONCLUSION

As described by Tupac Shakur in his song *2 of Americaz Most Wanted*, “Release me to the streets but keep whatever’s left of me, incarceration is a structural determinant of health that influences multidimensional aging irrespective of the type of incarceration. Exposure to incarceration contributed to accelerated GrimAge among participants racialized as Black, Latine, and White.

PARTICIPANTS CHARACTERISTICS

	Participants racialized as		
	Black (N= 656)	Latine (N= 585)	White (N= 2958)
2016 Age - Mean	6.655	6.628	7.076
Accelerated GrimAge – Mean	1.317 (≈16 months accelerated)	-0.181 (≈2 months decelerated)	-0.256 (≈3 months decelerated)
Woman - %	6.631	5.928	568
Higher than HS diploma - %	2.287	1.186	335
Married - %	3.933	6.117	6.075
Formerly incarcerated - %	1.128	67	551

COUNTY-LEVEL INCARCERATION DISPARITIES

