

Description of the Project

This project examines how structural inequality shapes adolescent mental health among youth exposed to maternal incarceration in early childhood. Using longitudinal data from the Future of Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWS), it tests whether neighborhood disorder mediates the association between maternal incarceration and adolescent depressive symptoms and whether school connectedness functions as a source of resilience within this pathway.

The study builds on my ongoing research on structural conditions and adolescent outcomes. Last year, I analyzed maternal incarceration and adolescent trust in police using the same dataset; that manuscript is currently under review at *Sociological Perspectives*. Whereas that project focused on institutional trust as a civic outcome, the proposed study shifts attention to adolescent mental health and asks whether schools can interrupt structurally rooted pathways to psychological distress. Drawing on social-ecological and risk-and-resilience perspectives, the project extends the analytic framework from mediation to moderated mediation to situate mental health within intersecting family, neighborhood, and institutional systems.

Maternal incarceration is patterned by racialized inequality and concentrated disadvantage. Rather than treating it as an isolated family disruption, this project conceptualizes incarceration as embedded within broader structural contexts. By identifying neighborhood disorder as a mechanism and assessing the limits of school connectedness as a resilience resource, the study contributes to sociological debates about how inequality becomes spatialized across adolescence.

As an HBCU committed to advancing knowledge and opportunity, Lincoln emphasizes engagement with structural challenges affecting communities. This project aligns with that mission by examining institutional and neighborhood conditions that shape youth well-being and contribute to mental health disparities.

I am requesting a Faculty Research and Development Grant to support two months of summer research dedicated to longitudinal data harmonization, analytic modeling, manuscript preparation, and presentation at the American Sociological Association (ASA) Annual Meeting in August 2026 in New York City.

Measurable Goals and Objectives

The primary objective is to produce a submission-ready manuscript grounded in a moderated mediation framework. To accomplish this, I will construct indices of neighborhood disorder and school connectedness, reconstruct maternal incarceration exposure across Waves 1–5, estimate mediation and moderated mediation models using bootstrapped confidence intervals, conduct

robustness checks, prepare publication-quality tables and figures, submit the manuscript to *Youth & Society*, and present findings at the 2026 ASA Annual Meeting.

The project will result in one peer-reviewed manuscript submission and one national conference presentation.

Timeframe for the Project

The project will be completed over two summer months (June–July 2026).

Month one will focus on variable construction, recoding, index validation, and estimation of mediation and moderated mediation models. Month two will be devoted to refining model specifications, conducting diagnostic checks, preparing tables and figures, revising the manuscript, and finalizing conference materials. Summer support will provide the protected time needed to complete the analyses and prepare the manuscript for submission.

Enhancement of Teaching and Research at Lincoln University

This project strengthens both my research and teaching. Findings will inform courses in sociology, criminology, introductory social statistics, and Senior Seminar by integrating current empirical work on structural inequality, family disruption, and adolescent mental health. In Social Statistics, I will use elements of this project to demonstrate variable construction and index development using longitudinal data. In Senior Seminar, the project will serve as a model of moving from research question to manuscript preparation.

Presenting at ASA will increase Lincoln’s visibility in national conversations on youth, inequality, and incarceration, while also strengthening my developing program of scholarship using nationally recognized longitudinal data.

Measurement of Project Outcomes

Project outcomes will be measured by submission of a peer-reviewed manuscript, presentation at the ASA Annual Meeting, and integration of findings into course instruction and student mentorship. Submission to *Youth & Society* will serve as the primary research benchmark.

Dissemination of Project Outcomes

Findings will be disseminated through presentation at the American Sociological Association Annual Meeting (August 2026, New York City) and submission of the manuscript to *Youth & Society*. At Lincoln, results will be presented at the Faculty Research Symposium and summarized in a project report—including documentation of publication or manuscript review status—submitted to the FRDC Chair and Faculty Affairs.