

Justice Involvement Part 2: Poverty and Public Assistance

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Key Statistic

Data from the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS), 2021-2022

In California, 34.0% of adults living at below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level have a personal or household history of arrest or booking, higher than their population share of 29.8%.

Context

Justice involvement is broadly defined as contact with police, the criminal justice system, and the courts. Justice involvement harms the well-being of families and communities and limits access to government services and employment.^{1,2} This data brief focuses specifically on personal or household history of arrest or booking in relation to poverty and accessing public assistance.

Police activity is often concentrated in communities of color, marginalized communities, and low-income communities, especially impacting Black and Latino Californians.³⁻⁶ Persons with justice involvement are more likely to report having food, housing, and job insecurity, especially for those who are released from prison.⁷ Repeated police arrests and incarceration, may be the result of unaddressed medical issues, economic hardship, and homelessness.⁷

Incarceration can also lead to poverty in families and communities.⁸⁻¹⁰ When a parent is incarcerated, their family may need to apply for programs such as Supplemental Nutrition and Access Program (SNAP or CalFresh) and/or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF or CalWorks) for support during their absence.¹¹ Justice involvement can result in further economic hardship, traumatization, harms to health

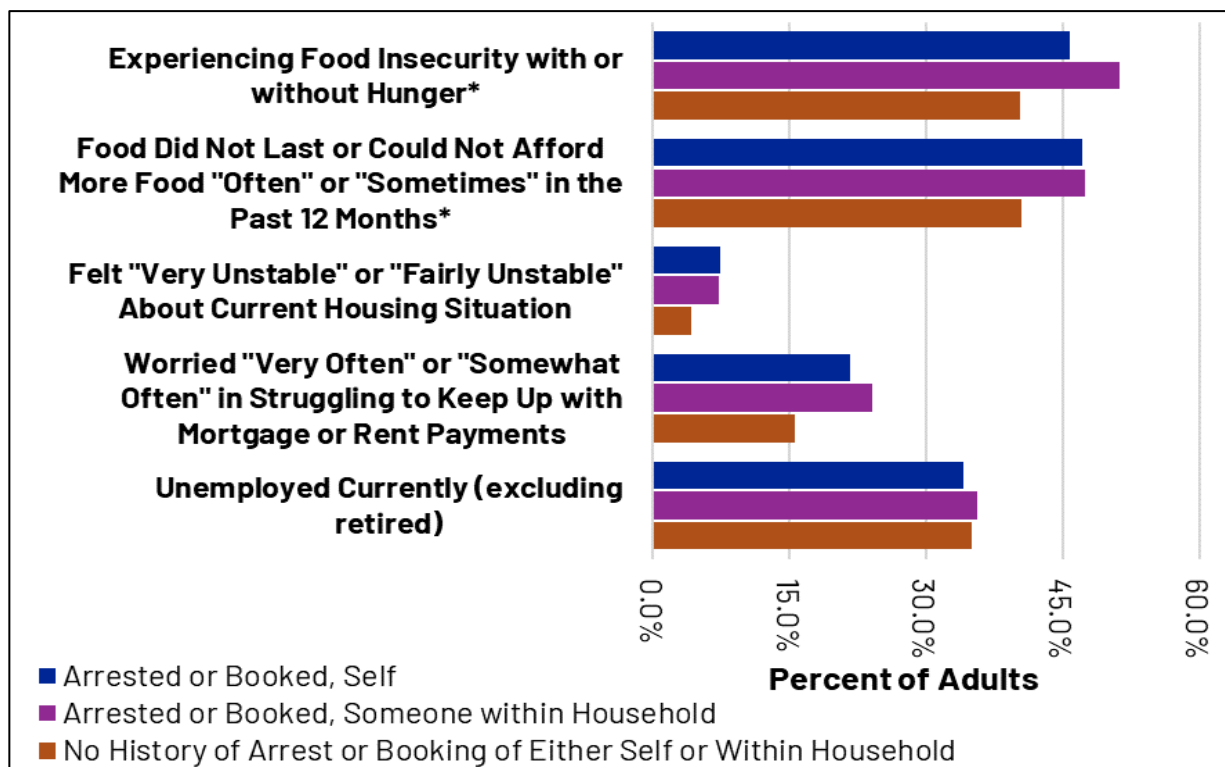
and further justice involvement, especially among children of family members who were arrested.^{6,12,13}

Were there differences among adults experiencing food insecurity, housing insecurity, and unemployment, by those who experienced an arrest themselves or within their household?

Compared to adults with no history of arrest or booking, those with any personal or household history reported significantly higher rates of:

- Food insecurity with or without hunger,
- Feeling their food could not last for the past 12 months,
- Feeling unstable about their current housing situation, and
- Worrying about rent or mortgage payments. (Figure 1)

Figure 1: Percentage of adults experiencing food insecurity, housing insecurity, and unemployment by history of arrest or booking in their household, CHIS 2021-2022



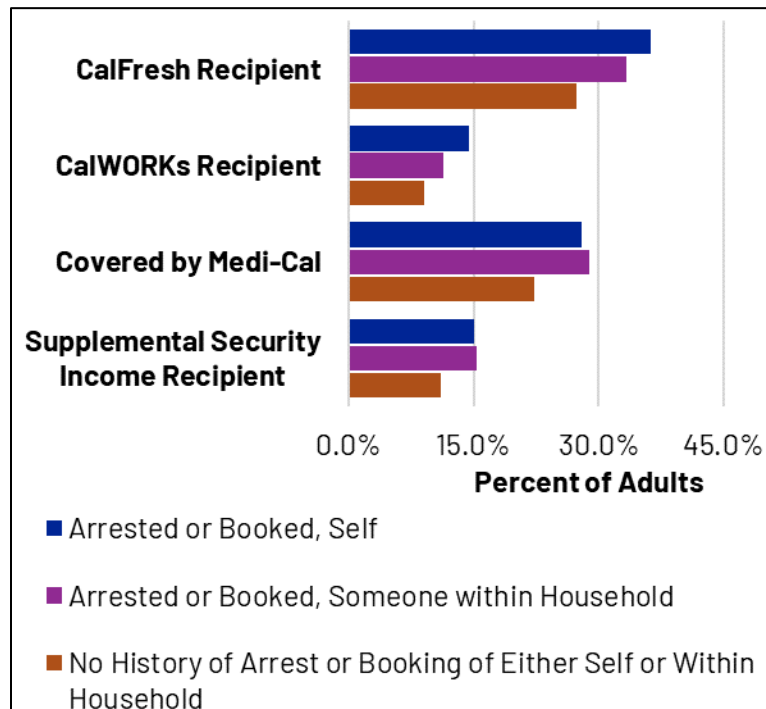
*Questions asked only of adults reporting income less than 200% of the Federal Poverty Level

Were there differences among adults who reported receiving public assistance, by experienced an arrest themselves or within their household?

Compared to adults with no history of arrest or booking, those with any personal or household history reported also had significantly higher rates of receiving:

- CalFresh,
- CalWORKs,
- Medi-Cal, and
- Supplemental Security Income. (Figure 2)

Figure 2: Percentage of adults who reported receipt of public assistance, by history of arrest or booking, CHIS 2021-2022



Policy and Research Notes

Continued investments in the success and well-being of communities, including accessibility and availability of public assistance programs such as SNAP, may deter crime and reduce the likelihood of reincarceration.¹⁴⁻¹⁶

Recent California laws have been enacted to support formerly incarcerated persons, including:

- **Providing employment guidance and pre-enrollment linking to public assistance programs when exiting county or state prison.¹⁷**
- **Sealing arrests that did not end in a conviction or old convictions after four years without a new felony offense.^{18,19}**
- **Restricting most employes from considering prior criminal history.²⁰**

Summary

Compared to adults with no history of arrest or booking, those with any personal or household history were:

1. More likely to be living at 200% below the federal poverty line;
2. More likely to be experiencing food insecurity and housing insecurity; and
3. More likely to be recipients of public assistance programs.

Methods and Limitations

Data from the 2021-2022 CHIS were used for this analysis. CHIS is a representative household survey of Californian adults California adults, currently not living in institutionalized or group quarters (e.g. long-term care facilities, prisons). We evaluated the following two survey questions:

- **Have you ever been arrested or booked for breaking the law?**
- **Have someone you lived with ever been arrested or booked for breaking the law?**

These data are based on samples and are subject to a margin of error. CHIS is a household survey, and people currently incarcerated or living in group quarters are excluded. Survey respondents may be reluctant to disclose prior arrests or bookings.

This data does not account for laws and policies affecting justice involvement nor does this account for justice involvement beyond arrests and bookings, such as police stops, fatal encounters, conviction and sentencing, and parole and release. Causality cannot be determined between public assistance and justice involvement from these data.

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