Over the last several decades, the United States’ incarceration rate has steadily increased. By 2011, close to one percent of the adult population was experiencing some form of correctional supervision. Although incarcerated men are physically separated from their communities, their absence may still affect those who are left behind. Using the change in incarceration caused by a sentencing reform in North Carolina, together with an intensity of treatment research design, I show that effective incarceration policies have spillover effects on family formation patterns. In the wake of the policy change, unmarried and young black women reduced their fertility, and the composition of births shifted towards women of higher socioeconomic status. At the same time, I find that among those who gave birth, the quality of partner matches decline. Also, white women are less likely to be married, but there is no effect on marriage rates for black women.

Siobhan is a PhD Candidate in Economics at UC Davis specializing in applied microeconomics.

"Baby's Gone: The Effects of Increased Sentencing Severity on Fertility and Family Formation"

Siobhan O’Keefe
Ph.D. Candidate, UC Davis

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