

## FACT SHEET



### FSU Center for Prevention & Early Intervention Policy

# Incarcerated Women: Their Histories and Their Children

75% of the women in prison are mothers, typically of two to three children. About 7 to 10 percent of women are pregnant when they are arrested. \*

## REFERENCES

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Krisberg, B.A., & Temin, C.E. (2001, October). The plight of children whose parents are in prison. *NCCD Focus*, Retrieved April 22, 2005, from [http://www.nccd-crc.org/nccd/pubs/2001\\_focus\\_plightofchildren.pdf](http://www.nccd-crc.org/nccd/pubs/2001_focus_plightofchildren.pdf)

Mumola, C.J. (2000, August). *Incarcerated parents and their children* (NCJ 182335). Retrieved April 21, 2005, from the U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics Web site: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/>

## RESEARCH

Scholars have consistently identified victimization- physical, sexual, and emotional- as the first step along females' pathways into the juvenile and criminal justice systems and as a primary determinant of the types and patterns of offenses typically committed by girls and women.

Ninety-two percent of the juvenile female offenders interviewed in the 1998 study by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency in the California juvenile justice system reported that they had been subjected to some form of emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse.

An overwhelming number of women in the criminal justice system have drug problems. Their drug use is often associated with childhood physical abuse and experience of family violence. It is also connected with their children's risk of abuse and trauma and may have brought the families in contact with the child welfare system even before the mother's arrest.

The number of women imprisoned has increased threefold in the last 10 years.

It is customary that babies born to prison inmates are immediately separated from their mothers and placed in emergency foster care or with any relative willing to assume the burden.

The child of an incarcerated mother is much more likely to live with grandparents, other relatives, or to be placed with foster care agencies.

Nationally, 60% of imprisoned mothers say they maintain some form of weekly contact with their children. However, fewer than half of imprisoned mothers (46%) report a personal visit with their children since going to state prison.

Over 60% of parents in state prisons across the US report being held over 100 miles from their last place of residence. In federal prisons, about 43% of parents report being held over 500 miles from their last place of residence.

Moses, M.C. (1995). *Keeping incarcerated mothers and their daughters together: Girl Scouts beyond bars*. Retrieved April 26, 2005 from the National Institute of Justice Web site: <http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles/girlsct.pdf>

Like children of divorced or deceased parents, children of prison inmates often show signs of distress caused by the lack of a stable home life and parental separation, such as depression, aggression, poor school performance, and truancy. Many times they also follow their parents' criminal behavior patterns.

Mumola, C.J. (2000, August). *Incarcerated parents and their children* (NCJ 182335). Retrieved April 21, 2005, from the U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics Web site: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/>

Nationwide, 22% of minor children with a parent in prison are under five years old.

Krisberg, B.A., & Temin, C.E. (2001, October). The plight of children whose parents are in prison. *NCCD Focus*, Retrieved April 22, 2005, from [http://www.nccd-crc.org/nccd/pubs/2001\\_focus\\_plightofchildren.pdf](http://www.nccd-crc.org/nccd/pubs/2001_focus_plightofchildren.pdf)

African American children are nine times more likely to have an incarcerated parent than white children. Latino children are three times more likely to have an incarcerated parent than white children

The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2002, March). *Partnerships between corrections and child welfare: Collaboration for change, part two*. Retrieved April 21, 2005, from <http://www.aecf.org/initiatives/familyofamily/tools/16937.pdf>

During arrest, little attention is paid to the needs of the woman's children. Children may actually view the actual arrest or may just reconstruct the scenario in their heads. In either case, it is traumatizing, and yet usually no provision is made for addressing the child's needs. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's project report, Partnerships Between Corrections and Welfare, Part II, a 1993 report by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency warned that children who experience a parent's arrest and are subsequently separated from them suffer a wide array of psychological problems including trauma, anxiety, guilt, shame, and fear. These problems frequently manifest themselves in poor academic achievement, truancy, dropping out of school, gang involvement, early pregnancy, drug abuse, and delinquency.

Morash, M., Haarr, R.N., & Rucker, L. (1994). A comparison of programming for women and men in U.S. prisons in the 1980s. *Crime and Delinquency*, 40(2), 197-221.

When the case involves incarcerated parents, careful assessment of "best interests of the child" is rare. The virtual absence of programs that could maintain infant and parent bonds during the criminal sentence makes such considerations moot.

Simmons, C.W. (2000, March). *Children of incarcerated parents*. Retrieved April 26, 2005, from California Research Bureau Web site: <http://www.library.ca.gov/crb/00/notes/v7n2.pdf>

According to the Women's Prison & Home Association, Inc. "Children of offenders are five times more likely than their peers to end up in prison themselves. One in 10 will have been incarcerated before reaching adulthood. "

\* The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2002, March). *Partnerships between corrections and child welfare: Collaboration for change, part two*. Retrieved April 21, 2005, from <http://www.aecf.org/initiatives/familyofamily/tools/16937.pdf>