



## CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS FACT SHEET

### Incarceration of adults

- More than one in every 100 adults in America are in jail or prison<sup>1</sup>.
- On any given day, over 1.5 million children in this country—approximately 2% of the minor children—have a parent serving a sentence in a state or federal prison<sup>2</sup>.
- There is a disparate impact on families of color, with African-American children nine times more likely and Hispanic children three times more likely than white children to have a parent in prison<sup>3</sup>.
- Between 1995 and 2005, the number of incarcerated women in the U.S. increased by 57% compared to 34 percent for men<sup>4</sup> (Harrison & Beck, 2006). 75 percent of incarcerated women are mothers<sup>5</sup>.
- Sixty-three percent of federal prisoners and 55 percent of state prisoners are parents of children under age 18<sup>6</sup>.
- Forty-six percent of all imprisoned parents lived with at least one of their minor children, prior to entry<sup>7</sup>.
- The average age of children with an incarcerated parent is eight years old; 22 percent of the children are under the age of five<sup>8</sup>.

### How does this affect children and families left behind?

- Despite widespread statements that children with incarcerated parents are many times more likely than other children to be incarcerated as adults, there is no reliable research evidence to support this assertion<sup>9</sup>.
- Parental incarceration creates additional challenges for children and families often resulting in:
  - Financial instability and material hardship, with financial problems the most severe for already vulnerable families and caregivers who support contact between the incarcerated parent and his or her child<sup>10</sup>;
  - Instability in family relationships and structure, and residential mobility<sup>11</sup>;
  - School behavior and performance problems<sup>12</sup>; and
  - Shame, social and institutional stigma<sup>13</sup>.
- In addition to lowering the likelihood of recidivism among incarcerated parents, there is evidence that maintaining contact with one's incarcerated parent improves a child's emotional response to the incarceration and supports parent-child attachment<sup>14</sup>;
- Many programs and services for children whose parents are incarcerated offer promise in meeting some aspect of children's needs, but have not been empirically validated as having either short- or long-term impacts on children's well-being<sup>15</sup>.



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## How does this affect children and youth with respect to foster care?

- Most law enforcement agencies lack training and protocols on where to place children when a parent is arrested and incarcerated<sup>16</sup>.
- Ten percent of incarcerated mothers have a child in a foster home or other state care<sup>17</sup>.
- Eleven percent of children in foster care have a mother who is incarcerated for at least some period of time while in foster care; however, 85 percent of these children were placed in foster care prior to the mother's first period of incarceration<sup>18</sup>.
- The average stay in first foster care for a child with an incarcerated mother is 3.9 years<sup>19</sup>.
- Children of incarcerated mothers are four times more likely to be "still in" foster care than all other children. Children of incarcerated mothers are more likely to "age out" of the foster care system; less likely to reunify with their parents, get adopted, enter into subsidized guardianship, go into independent living or leave through some other means<sup>20</sup>.
  - Reunification is 21% for children of incarcerated mothers versus 40% for all children
  - Adoption is 37% for children of incarcerated mothers versus 27% for all children.

## End notes

<sup>1</sup> The Pew Charitable Trusts (2008). *One in 100: Behind Bars in America 2008*. Washington, DC. Available online at <http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/uploadedFiles/One%20in%20in%20100.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Mumola, C. J. (2000). *Incarcerated parents and their children*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice. Accessed 04/17/08 at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/iptc.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Harrison, P. M. & Beck, A. J. (2006). *Prisoners in 2005*. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Washington, DC. Available online at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/p05.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Mumola, C. J. (2000).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Garfinkel, I., Geller, A., & Cooper, C. (2007). *Parental Incarceration in Fragile Families: Summary of Three Year Findings*. A report to the Annie E. Casey Foundation (unpublished); Hairston, C. Finney. (2007).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Hairston, C. F. (2007); Hanlon, T. E., Blatchley, R. J., Bennett-Sears, T., O'Grady, K. E., Rose, M., & Callaman, J. M. (2005). Vulnerability of children of incarcerated addict mothers: Implications for preventive intervention. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 27, 67– 84.

<sup>13</sup> Hairston, C. F. (2007).

<sup>14</sup> La Vigne, N.G., Naser, R.L. Brooks, L.E. & Castro, J.L. (2005). Examining the effect of incarceration and in-prison family contact on prisoners' family relationships. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, 21(4).

<sup>15</sup> Hairston, C. F. (2007).

<sup>16</sup> Nieto, M. (2002). In danger of falling through the cracks: Children of arrested parents. California Research Bureau, CRB 02-009.

<sup>17</sup> Mumola, C. J. (2000).

<sup>18</sup> Ross, T., Khashu, A., & Wamsley, M. (2004). *Hard data on hard times: An empirical analysis of maternal incarceration, foster care and visitation*. New York: Vera Institute of Justice Available online at: [http://www.vera.org/publication\\_pdf/245\\_461.pdf](http://www.vera.org/publication_pdf/245_461.pdf); Moses, M.C. (2006). Does Parental Incarceration Increase a Child's Risk for Foster Care Placement? NIJ Journal No. 255, available at: [http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/journals/255/parental\\_incarceration.html](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/journals/255/parental_incarceration.html)

<sup>19</sup> Ross, T., Khashu, A., & Wamsley, M. (2004).

<sup>20</sup> Ross, T., Khashu, A., & Wamsley, M. (2004) & Moses, M.C. (2006).



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