

New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents

a special project of the Osborne Association

what we know

There is no single story that describes what it is like for a child to have a parent who is incarcerated. The experience depends on diverse factors, including the quality of the parent-child relationship prior to incarceration, the degree of household stability following the incarceration, and the child's age, developmental level, and individual personality.

- International human rights advocates have called parental incarceration **"the greatest threat to child well-being in the U.S."** ¹
- While many of the risk factors children of incarcerated parents experience may be related to parental substance abuse, mental health, inadequate education, or other challenges, **parental incarceration increases the risk of children living in poverty or experiencing household instability independent of these other problems.** ²
- **A misperception exists** that children of incarcerated parents are more likely to be incarcerated than their peers, and are predisposed to criminal activity. **There is no basis for this in existing research.** ³
- Some assume that the removal of a "bad" ("criminal") parent will improve the situation for the child. However, parental incarceration more often intensifies and compounds, rather than alleviates, the challenges children face.
- **Parental incarceration is now recognized as an "adverse childhood experience" (ACE);** it is distinguished from other adverse childhood experiences by the unique combination of trauma, shame, and stigma. ⁴
- **Separation due to a parent's incarceration can be as painful as other forms of parental loss** and can be even more complicated because of the stigma, ambiguity, and lack of social support and compassion that accompanies it.
- **Visits with parents (in most cases) help to heal the pain of the loss and are critical to children's well-being.** However, visiting opportunities can be few and far between due to the distant location of prisons and the costs associated with visits.
- For children whose mothers are incarcerated, there is an increased likelihood of instability and that the children are in, or may enter, foster care.

national stats on children and incarcerated parents

- **More than 2.7 million children** in the U.S. have an incarcerated parent and approximately **10 million children** have experienced parental incarceration at some point in their lives. ⁵
- **One in 9 African American children (11.4%), 1 in 28 Hispanic children (3.5%), and 1 in 57 white children (1.8%) in the United States have an incarcerated parent.** ⁶
- Nationally, there are more than 120,000 incarcerated mothers and 1.1 million incarcerated fathers who are parents with minor children (ages 0-17). ⁷
- A national study conducted in 1998 estimated that of parents arrested, **67% were handcuffed in front of their children**, 27% reported weapons drawn in front of their children, 4.3% reported a physical struggle, and 3.2% reported the use of pepper spray.⁸
- In 2004, **approximately 59% of parents** in a state correctional facility and **45% of parents** in a federal correctional facility reported **never having had a personal visit from their children.** ⁹

1 Comment from The World's Children's Prize Foundation at the 2004 World's Children's Prize award ceremony.

2 Phillips, S.D., Errantly, A., Keeler, G.P., Costello, J.E., An gold, A., Johnston, D., et al. (2006). Disentangling the risks: Parent criminal justice involvement and children's exposure to family risks. *Criminology and Public Policy*, 5, 677-702.

3 Raimon, M., Lee, A., & Genty, P. (2009). Sometimes Good Intentions Yield Bad Results: ASFA's Effect on Incarcerated Parents and Their Children.

4 Hairston, C.F. (2007). Focus on the children with incarcerated parents: A overview of the research literature. Annie E. Casey Foundation.

5 The Pew Charitable Trusts: Pew Center on the States. (2010). *Collateral Costs: Incarceration's Effect on Economic Mobility*. Washington, DC: Author.

6 Correctional Association of New York. (2009). Women in Prison Fact Sheet. New York, New York: Women in Prison Project.

7 Pew Charitable Trusts. (2010).

8 Phillips, S. D. (1998). Programming for children of female offenders. Proceedings from *4th National Head Start Research Conference*. Washington, DC.

9 Appendix Table 10, p. 18, in Glaze, L., & Maruschak, L. (2010). *Parents in prison and their children*. Bureau of Justice Statistics.

New York stats on children of incarcerated parents

- New York State is home to an **estimated 105,000 children** with a parent serving time in prison or jail.¹⁰
- According to a special study conducted by New York City's Criminal Justice Agency (CJA) over a **five month period** in 2009-2010, **53,891 minor children** in four of the five boroughs (Manhattan, Brooklyn, Bronx, Queens) were **impacted by the arrest of a parent or caregiver**.¹¹
- **56,315 men and women were incarcerated in NY state prisons** as of January 1, 2011. Approximately 96% were men and 4% were women—51% are African American, 22% are White, and 25% are Hispanic. Approximately 49% are from New York City, 12% from suburban New York, 23% from upstate urban areas, and 16.2% are from upstate non-urban areas.¹²
- The **majority of people in NY state prisons (60%)** self-reported at the time of admission that they **had at least one living child**. More women (approximately 70%) self-reported having living children than men.¹³
- There are more than **120,000 individuals on probation and nearly 42,000 on parole** as of December 31, 2009.¹⁴ **Stats on their children are not available**.
- There is **no data** on how many of the 23,381 children in foster care statewide (June 2010) have an incarcerated parent.
- A survey of 21 New York State OCFS kinship programs found **almost 10% of their cases involved an incarcerated parent**. Out of 2,982 kinship clients, **249 (8.35%) cases involved an incarcerated parent**. Within an individual program, the percent of caseload with an incarcerated parent ranged from 2.4% to 19%, depending on the location and type of services offered.¹⁵



contact us/support children of incarcerated parents

To learn more or to get involved, email the New York Initiative at NYInitiative@osborneny.org or call us at (718) 637-6595 or 6597 or visit www.osborneny.org.

If you have a family member or loved one who is incarcerated, please call Osborne's Family Resource Hotline at **1-800-344-3314** for information, support, and resources, or attend one of our weekly Sharing Our Strengths support group in Osborne's Brooklyn office at 175 Remsen Street (8th Floor). Call for the details.

CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS A BILL OF RIGHTS

1. I have the right **TO BE KEPT SAFE AND INFORMED AT THE TIME OF MY PARENT'S ARREST.**
2. I have the right **TO BE HEARD WHEN DECISIONS ARE MADE ABOUT ME.**
3. I have the right **TO BE CONSIDERED WHEN DECISIONS ARE MADE ABOUT MY PARENT.**
4. I have the right **TO BE WELL CARED FOR IN MY PARENT'S ABSENCE.**
5. I have the right **TO SPEAK WITH, SEE AND TOUCH MY PARENT.**
6. I have the right **TO SUPPORT AS I STRUGGLE WITH MY PARENT'S INCARCERATION.**
7. I have the right **NOT TO BE JUDGED, BLAMED OR LABELED BECAUSE OF MY PARENT'S INCARCERATION.**
8. I have the right **TO A LIFELONG RELATIONSHIP WITH MY PARENT.**

The *Children of Incarcerated Parents Bill of Rights* was developed by the San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership in 2005. For more info, go to www.sfcipp.org.

10 The Osborne Association (2010). New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents Fact Sheet. Brooklyn, New York: Author.

11 New York City Criminal Justice Agency (CJA) collected data on the following three questions asked of all arrestees once CJA had completed a bail assessment they conduct with all New York City arrestees: "Do you support children?", "What are their ages?", and "Do they live with you?"

12 New York State Department of Correctional Services (2011). *Under custody report: Profile of inmate population under custody as of January 1, 2011*. Albany, New York: Author.

13. New York State Department of Correctional Services (2011).

14. New York State Office of Criminal Justice Services (2010). New York State criminal cases supervised reports (Office of Probation and Correctional Alternatives Memorandum). Albany, New York: Author.

15 New York State Kinicare Coalition (2010). Since this data is self-reported by relative caregivers, there is likely to be significant undercounting given the stigma and shame associated with parental incarceration.