

Children of Incarcerated Parents

DEFINITION

Children of incarcerated parents is the number of children with a parent in prison per 1,000 children under age 18. The data are reported by the place of the parent's last residence before entering prison.

SIGNIFICANCE

In the United States, one in forty children has a parent in prison.¹ Nearly 3.6 million parents are under some form of correctional supervision, including parole.² Women prisoners account for approximately 7% of all inmates and are the fastest growing group in the prison population.³

The increase is partly due to stricter sentencing guidelines and mandatory sentences, particularly for drug-related offenses.^{4,5} Fathers are more likely than mothers to be in prison for violent crimes, whereas mothers are more likely to be in prison for drug-related offenses and fraud.⁶

As a result of parental incarceration, and the crimes and arrests that often precede it, most children experience disruption in their homes, a series of temporary caregivers or placement in foster care, financial hardship and lack of contact with their parents.⁷ Children of incarcerated parents are at greater risk for poor academic achievement,

substance abuse, impaired development, criminal behavior and incarceration.^{8,9}

Despite the large and increasing numbers of incarcerated parents, the children they leave behind remain a hidden population with little attention paid to their special needs. The children's care arrangements are often handled informally by family members, so they rarely come to the attention of a child welfare agency. While the children may experience problems at school or in other areas of their lives, these problems are often not recognized as being related to the incarceration of a parent.¹⁰

Upon release from prison, a successful transition to the community requires that ex-offenders enhance their education, find stable employment, suitable housing and health care, as well as receive other supportive services to restore the parent-child relationship.^{11,12} Seventy percent of imprisoned parents in the U.S. do not have a high school diploma and upon exiting prison, many face obstacles to furthering their education. Ex-offenders face barriers to earning a living, including limited significant work histories, the lack of skills and credentials and discrimination by potential employers.^{13,14} Ex-offenders must also deal with pressures from previous peer groups, broken relationships and discrimination.¹⁵



Incarcerated Parents in Rhode Island

- ◆ Of the 2,667 inmates surveyed in Rhode Island who were serving a sentence or awaiting trial at the Rhode Island Department of Corrections as of December 31, 2004, 62% reported having children.
- ◆ Of the 89 women with children who were serving a sentence at the Rhode Island Department of Corrections on December 31, 2004, 53% were serving a sentence for a nonviolent offense and 20% for a drug offense. Another 24% had committed violent offenses and 3% were serving sentences for breaking and entering. Of the 1,183 sentenced men with children, 17% were serving sentences for nonviolent offenses, 17% for drug offenses, 41% for violent offenses and 25% for breaking and entering, sex offenses or other/unknown offenses.
- ◆ Of the 1,646 parents incarcerated as of December 31, 2004, including those awaiting trial in Rhode Island, 50% were White, 29% were Black and 20% were Hispanic.

Source: Rhode Island Department of Corrections, December 2004



Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents

- ◆ Research shows that children of incarcerated parents are nearly six times as likely to enter prison as children whose parents have not been incarcerated.¹⁶ Children who lose their parents to the criminal justice system are more likely to express feelings of shame and loss and are at a higher risk for gang involvement, early pregnancy and drug abuse.¹⁷
- ◆ Mentoring is a promising approach to making a difference in the lives of children of incarcerated parents. Youth who are mentored have fewer unexcused absences from school than non-mentored youth, better attitudes and behaviors at school and less drug and alcohol use (especially among minority youth).¹⁸

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Table 22.

Children of Incarcerated Parents, Rhode Island, 2004

CITY/TOWN	# OF INCARCERATED PARENTS	# OF CHILDREN REPORTED*	2000 TOTAL POPULATION UNDER AGE 18	RATE PER 1,000 CHILDREN
Barrington	2	3	4,745	0.6
Bristol	8	18	4,399	4.1
Burrillville	4	7	4,043	1.7
Central Falls	37	83	5,531	15.0
Charlestown	2	6	1,712	3.5
Coventry	14	35	8,389	4.2
Cranston	72	140	17,098	8.2
Cumberland	11	18	7,690	2.3
East Greenwich	5	15	3,564	4.2
East Providence	36	80	10,546	7.6
Exeter	2	5	1,589	3.1
Foster	3	4	1,105	3.6
Glocester	4	8	2,664	3.0
Hopkinton	3	7	2,011	3.5
Jamestown	2	3	1,238	2.4
Johnston	18	46	5,906	7.8
Lincoln	4	5	5,157	1.0
Little Compton	0	0	780	0.0
Middletown	4	7	4,328	1.6
Narragansett	7	27	2,833	9.5
New Shoreham	2	8	185	43.2
Newport	34	71	5,199	13.7
North Kingstown	12	23	6,848	3.4
North Providence	17	36	5,936	6.1
North Smithfield	2	6	2,379	2.5
Pawtucket	96	198	18,151	10.9
Portsmouth	5	12	4,329	2.8
Providence	419	926	45,277	20.5
Richmond	2	3	2,014	1.5
Scituate	3	4	2,635	1.5
Smithfield	3	7	4,019	1.7
South Kingstown	11	18	6,284	2.9
Tiverton	2	2	3,367	0.6
Warren	2	3	2,454	1.2
Warwick	65	141	18,780	7.5
West Greenwich	1	1	1,444	0.7
West Warwick	39	78	6,632	11.8
Westerly	6	12	5,406	2.2
Woonsocket	77	166	11,155	14.9
Unknown Residence	165	357	NA	NA
Out of State Residence*	71	146	NA	NA
Core Cities	702	1,522	91,945	16.6
Remainder of State	499	1,067	155,877	6.8
Rhode Island	1,201	2,589	247,822	10.4

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Corrections, December 31, 2004.

Data on the number of children are self-reported by the incarcerated parents and may include some children over age 18. Nationally and in Rhode Island, much of the existing research has relied upon self-reporting by incarcerated parents or caregivers.

*Data on Out-of-State Residence report on those inmates from out of state, both those who are under jurisdiction of another state but serving time in Rhode Island and those who are under jurisdiction in Rhode Island, but report an out-of-state address.

Core cities include: Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, West Warwick and Woonsocket.

References for Indicator

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- ⁹ Krisberg, B. & Temin, C.E. (2001). The plight of children whose parents are in prison. *NCCD Focus* National Council on Crime and Delinquency.
- ¹⁰ Barnhill, S. (2003). Women and prison: Support strengthens three generations. *America's Family Support Magazine*. Princeton, NJ: Family Support Magazine.

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