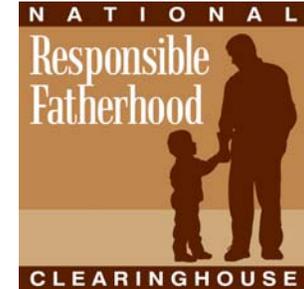




U.S. Department of Health
and Human Services
Administration for Children
and Families
Office of Family Assistance

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Responsible Fatherhood Spotlight



Fathers and Incarceration

Far more men are incarcerated than are women. Since most incarcerated men have families, when a man is incarcerated, there can be repercussions not only for himself, but also for his children and his spouse or partner. However, not all families are affected by incarceration in the same way. The implications of incarceration vary by the incarcerated individual's gender, race/ethnicity, age, and the geographical region in which he lives.

Definitions

Incarceration is the end result of arrest, trial, conviction, and sentencing. Incarcerated fathers can fall into three categories.

Imprisoned fathers: Fathers who are in prison are those who were convicted of crimes and are currently serving sentences in either local jails or state or federal prisons. In 1999, approximately 55 percent (593,800) of state and 63 percent (74,100) of federal male prisoners reported having at least one child under the age of 18.ⁱ

Fathers on parole: Fathers who are on parole are those who are conditionally released from their prison terms either by a parole board or under a mandatory conditional release. As parolees, they reenter the community but are supervised; and they can be returned to jail or prison if they are found to have violated any rules or committed other offenses or crimes. In 2005, 45 percent (227,600) of parolees successfully completed their terms of supervision, whereas 38 percent (191,800) returned to jail or prison because of parole violations.ⁱⁱ

Fathers released and reentering the community: Fathers who are released and are reentering the community are those who have served their court-mandated sentences—minus any credits

they have earned—and are released to the community without any supervision (i.e., parole). Reentry refers to the transition of offenders from prison to the general population.ⁱⁱⁱ

Implications of Incarceration

The crime committed and the punishment meted out for it tend to receive more attention than the implications of incarceration for all involved, both the victims and the families of the incarcerated individual. Here we focus on the incarcerated fathers and their families. The implications of incarceration for fathers are far-reaching. Prison sentences affect fathers themselves, their relationships with their children and their spouses or partners, as well as the community as a whole. Communities with large numbers of incarcerated men are characterized by a predominance of female-headed households, along with fewer available roles for men as fathers and as spouses.^{iv} However, it is important to separate the implications of incarceration from the implications of social and economic disadvantage, community characteristics, and criminal activity itself. Yet little research has been conducted on these complex interactions.

Implications for Fathers

- Incarceration can affect a father's emotional well-being, causing feelings of loneliness and isolation. Many incarcerated fathers have high levels of depression and anxiety, as well as low self-esteem. Fathers experience feelings of loss, powerlessness, and sadness. Some fathers feel guilty about the disruption that they have caused in the lives of their family members, blaming themselves for problems that occur in their children's lives.^v
- Incarceration frequently deprives fathers of the opportunity to fulfill family roles. Indeed, in some communities with high incarceration rates, women are averse to getting involved with the men in the community. The women see these potential partners as risks in that these men have a higher probability of being incarcerated and they may bring few social or economic benefits to the relationship.^{vi}
- Incarceration can also cause some fathers to lose their parental rights. About 44 percent of incarcerated fathers lived with their children before prison; after they are sent to prison, 85 percent of the children will live with their mother and 2 percent will enter the foster care system.^{vii} The fathers of the children who enter the foster care system face having their parental rights terminated. According to the 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act, once a child has been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months, the state is required to file a petition to terminate parental rights.^{viii} Fathers have to find competent legal representation and deal with the perception of others that contact with the incarcerated parent is not in the best interest of the child.^{ix}

Implications for Children

- Available evidence suggests that children with an incarcerated parent are more likely to exhibit signs of negative development, such as low self-esteem, depression, and inappropriate or disruptive behavior in school or at home.^x Having a parent go to prison can be a traumatic event that can take energy away from the tasks necessary for proper development.^{xi}

- The immediate effects of parental incarceration for children can include feelings of shame, social stigma, loss of financial support, weakened ties to the parent, changes in family composition, poorer school performance, and increased delinquency. Some of the long-term effects for children could include the questioning of parental authority, a weakening of the ability to cope with stress, and patterns of criminal behavior.^{xii}

Implications for Fathers' Spouses or Partners

- Most of the male inmates in state and federal prisons are not married. Incarcerated married men are 15 percent more likely to have their marriages dissolve in the first year of their sentences than those are who have never been incarcerated.^{xiii} Distance and the sheer fact of being incarcerated can put strains on marriages. Incarcerated men are an average distance of 100 miles away from their homes, making contact with their families more difficult.^{xiv} Another barrier to contact is that few prisons allow conjugal visits or extended contact with the prisoners.^{xv}
- Spouses/partners of inmates can experience significant personal changes during the incarceration period. By necessity, they often gain greater independence and learn to be self-sufficient. These changes modify their expectations of the inmate's role upon his return.^{xvi}
- During incarceration, husbands generally do not contribute financially to the household. Most incarcerated fathers held full-time or part-time jobs prior to imprisonment. Fathers' income is often the primary source of income for the family. The loss of that income may substantially burden families who already are living in poverty. Spouses may have to rely on other sources of income, including public assistance, assistance from family and friends, and illegal activities.^{xvii}

Overall Trends in Incarceration

The number of children with incarcerated parents increased greatly in the 1990s. In 1991, approximately 936,500 children under the age of 18 had a parent in prison; by 1999, that number had risen to an estimated 1,498,800, or about 2.1 percent of the nation's 72 million children under the age 18.^{xviii} (See **Table 1.**) In 1999, fathers were missing from 300,900 households with minor children due to incarceration.^{xix}

Table 1. Estimated Number of State and Federal Prisoners with Minor Children, by Gender, 1999

	State Prisoners			Federal Prisoners			State and Federal Prisoners
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Number of Parents							
1991	413,100	386,500	26,600	39,400	36,500	2,900	452,500
1999	642,300	593,800	48,500	79,200	74,100	5,100	721,500
Number of Minor Children							
1991	852,300	794,500	57,800	84,200	78,300	5,900	936,500
1999	1,324,900	1,209,400	115,500	173,500	163,300	10,600	1,498,400

Source: Adapted from *Incarcerated Parents and Their Children*. Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, NCJ 182335.

Differences in Levels of Contact

Parent-child contact in the form of phone, mail, or personal visits while in prison is less for incarcerated fathers than it is for incarcerated mothers. (See **Table 2.**) Approximately 62 percent of incarcerated fathers reported monthly contact and only 40 percent reported weekly contact with their children, whereas 78 percent of incarcerated mothers reported monthly contact and 60 percent reported weekly contact with their children. In contrast, a majority of incarcerated fathers reported that they never have had a personal visit from their children during their time in prison.^{xx} Also, telephone calls from inmates can be very expensive, with some phone companies charging fees of between \$1.50 and \$4 to place a collect call, on top of the per-minute charges for collect calls.^{xxi} Prisoners who maintain contact through letters and visits experience reduced recidivism, when compared with prisoners who do not maintain family ties.

Table 2. Frequency of Telephone, Mail, and Personal Contacts with Children for Parents in State Prisons, 1997

Type of Contact	Percent of State Inmates Reporting Monthly Contact with Their Children, 1997	
	Male	Female
Any	62.4%	78.4%
Phone	42.0%	53.6%
Mail	49.9%	65.8%
Visits	21.0%	23.8%

Source: Adapted from *Incarcerated Parents and Their Children*. Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, NCJ 182335.

Differences in Incarceration by Subgroup

Differences by Gender

Far more men are incarcerated than are women. As seen in **Table 3**, the number of incarcerated adult males increased between 1995 and 2005 from 1,057,406 to 1,418,406. The population of incarcerated women also increased between 1995 and 2005—from 68,468 to 107,518. However, the total number of incarcerated women is still much less than the total number of incarcerated men.

Table 3. State and Federal Prison Populations by Gender, Selected Years, 1995-2005

Year	Number of Inmates in State and Federal Prisons	
	Males	Females
2005	1,418,406	107,518
2004	1,392,278	104,822
1995	1,057,406	68,468

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin, Prisoners in 2005, NCJ 215092

Differences by Race/Ethnicity

Figure 1 and **Table 4** show rates of incarcerated persons by race. Black men have higher rates of incarceration than do men in the other racial and ethnic groups. Even though women's rates of incarceration are significantly lower than those of men, the pattern of these rates shows similar racial and ethnic disparities.

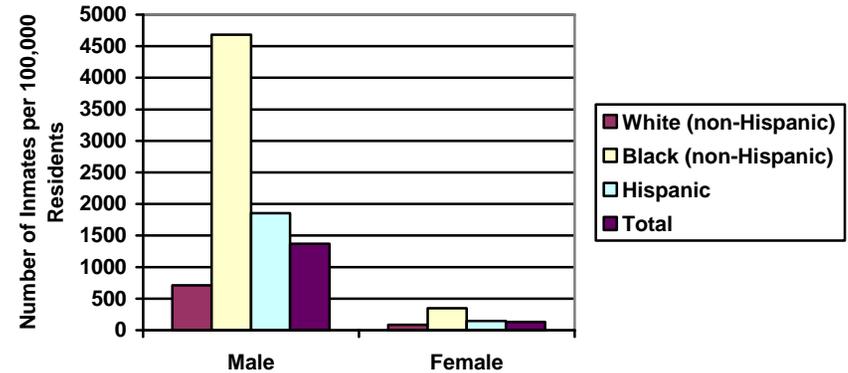
Table 4. Number of Inmates in State or Federal Prisons and Local Jails per 100,000 Residents, by Gender and Race/Ethnicity, 2005

Race/Ethnicity	Males	Females
White	709	88
Black	4,682	347
Hispanic	1,856	144
Total	1,371	129

Note: Based on the U.S. resident population for January 1, 2005, by gender, race, and Hispanic origin. Detailed categories exclude persons who reported two or more races. The total includes American Indians, Alaska Natives, Asians, Native Hawaiians, and other Pacific Islanders.

Source: Adapted from the Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin, Prisoner and Jail Inmates at Midyear 2005, NCJ 213133

Figure 1. Number of Inmates in State or Federal Prisons and Local Jails per 100,000 Residents, by Race/Ethnicity, 2005



Note: Based on the U.S. resident population for January 1, 2005, by gender, race, and Hispanic origin. Detailed categories exclude persons who reported two or more races. The total includes American Indians, Alaska Natives, Asians, Native Hawaiians, and other Pacific Islanders.

Source: Table 4

Differences by Age

Table 5 shows that young males between the ages of 25 and 29 are more likely to be incarcerated than are males in any other age group.

Table 5. Number of Inmates in State or Federal Prisons and Local Jails per 100,000 Residents, by Age, 2005

Age	Number of Inmates per 100,000 Residents	
	Male	Female
18-19	1,739	116
20-24	3,291	277
25-29	3,462	299
30-34	3,122	342
35-39	2,765	364
40-44	2,240	264
45-54	1,214	110
55 or Older	260	12

Note: Based on the U.S. resident population for January 1, 2005.
 Source: Adapted from the *Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin, Prisoner and Jail Inmates at Midyear 2005*, NCJ 213133

Differences by Region

As shown in **Table 5**, the South tends to have the most male prisoners, when compared with other regions.

Table 5. Number of Prisoners Under State or Federal Correctional Authorities, by Region and Gender, 2004 and 2005

	Male Prisoners		Female Prisoners	
	2005	2004	2005	2004
U.S. Total	1,418,406	1,392,278	107,518	104,822
Federal	175,196	168,164	12,422	12,164
State	1,243,210	1,224,114	95,096	92,658
Northeast	163,708	241,682	9,202	8,910
Midwest	237,851	234,047	16,855	16,545
South	561,096	555,480	45,140	44,789
West	280,555	272,515	23,899	22,414

Source: Adapted from the *Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin, Prisoner and Jail Inmates at Midyear 2005*, NCJ 213133

Definition of Measures, and Data Sources

Christopher J. Mumola provided information on the number of state and federal prisoners with minor children in a special report, *Incarcerated Parents and Their Children*. He calculated these numbers using the following Bureau of Justice Statistics data collection programs: the 1991 and 1997 Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, and custody counts from the National Prisoners Statistics program. The Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities provides nationally representative data on persons held in state and federal custody. These data are collected from approximately 14,000 inmates in 300 state prisons and 6,600 inmates in 53 federal prisons.^{xxii}

Inmate populations by gender and region, and inmate incarceration rates by race and ethnicity and age, were also reported by the Bureau of Justice Statistics and its data collection programs. The National Probation Data Survey and the National Parole Data Survey are conducted annually and report statistics on state and federal probation and parole counts, in addition to the characteristics of people supervised by probation and parole agencies. The National Prisoner Statistics program produces annual national and state-level data on the number of prisoners in state and federal prison facilities. The Annual Survey of Jails collects estimates of the number of inmates in the local jails around the nation and the relationship between jail populations and capacities.^{xxiii} The Census of Jail Inmates includes all local confinement facilities operated under the authority of 2,853 local jurisdictions. The Census also included 42 privately operated jails, 65 multi-jurisdictional jails, and 14 locally operated jails in Alaska. These do not include temporary holding facilities.^{xxiv}

Data Limitations

Among children with an incarcerated parent, a higher proportion will experience separation from their mother than from their father.^{xxv} Consequently, more research has been conducted on the effects of mothers' incarceration on families and children than on the comparable effects of fathers' incarceration. Additional research is needed so that a more updated and reliable portrait of incarcerated fathers can emerge.

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