

Parents in Prison and Their Minor Children¹



Parents in prison...

- Of the 1,518,535 inmates held in the nation's prisons at mid-year 2007, an estimated 809,800 were parents of minor children, or children under age 18
- Parents of minor children held in the nation's prisons increased by 79% between 1991 and mid-year 2007; they currently account for 52% of the state inmate population and 63% of the federal inmate population
- More than 4 in 10 fathers in state or federal prisons were black; almost 5 in 10 mothers were white
- Incarcerated parents of minor children are most likely to be age 25 to 34
- Half of parents in state prison reported they had a family member who had been incarcerated
- Fewer than half of parents in state prison lived with their minor children either in the month before arrest or just prior to incarceration
- More than 4 in 10 mothers in state prison who had minor children were living in single-parent households in the month before arrest
- About 4 in 10 mothers in state prison are expected to be released within 6 months; an additional 21% are expected to be released in less than one year

Their Minor Children...

- There are an estimated 1,706,600 minor children with parents in prison, which accounts for 2.3% of the U.S. resident population under age 18
- A quarter of the minor children of parents in prison are under age 4
- The number of children under age 18 with a mother in prison has more than doubled since 1991
- More than a third of minor children will reach age 18 while their parent is incarcerated

Parents' offense histories...

- Drug and public-order offenders in state and federal prisons were more likely than violent offenders to have children
- Inmates in state and federal prisons with a criminal history were more likely to be parents of minor children than those with no criminal history
- In state prison, drug recidivists (62%) – offenders with a prior drug offense – had a higher likelihood of being a parent than violent (52%) and other recidivists

Substance abuse and incarcerated parents...

- Mothers in state prison are more likely than fathers to report homelessness, past physical or sexual abuse, medical and mental health or substance dependence/abuse problems

- In the month prior to incarceration, 81.5% of mothers **not** living with their minor child identified as having substance dependence/abuse, compared to 63.6% of mothers living **with** their children; men were at 68.8% and 65% respectively
- More than 4 in 10 parents in the nation's prisons who met the criteria for substance dependence or abuse had received treatment since admission

Support and care of children of incarcerated parents...

- Fathers living with their minor child relied heavily on someone to provide daily care
- Fathers most commonly reported the child's mother as current caregiver of their children, while mothers most commonly reported the child's grandparents
- About half of parents in state prison provided primary financial support for their minor children
- Among parents in state prison, two-thirds reported they had a work assignment; over half had attended self-help or improvement classes since admission

End Note:

¹Glaze, L. E, and Maruschak, L. M. *Parents in Prison and Their Minor Children*. Bureau of Justice Statistics Report, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Washington, DC., August 2008

**For more information on drug endangered children, visit our web site
www.nationaldec.org**

This project was supported by Grant No. 2007-DD-BX-K116 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and the Office for Victims of Crime. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.