

Why We Should Care About Children Of Inmates

Over the last 18 months, I have been forced by circumstances to live the life of the wife of an inmate in the Florida Department of Correction's custody. A stupid, colossal, tragic mistake landed my usually law-abiding 58-year-old husband in prison. It has been a huge adjustment to my life and to the lives of my children. Since October of 2016, I have been driving to north Florida to visit my husband. It was a surprise that he was incarcerated so very far from home. At the time, it was a 6.5 hour drive one way to see him. On those long drives, I thought about how glad I was and am that our children are adults launched into their careers or finishing college. But I wondered how other families cope.

My first visit was at the Lake Butler facility RMC. My husband was housed there due to heart failure and was just coming out of the medical unit. I was nervous about my first visit. Turns out the guards I encountered were kind and sensitive to a woman who was so clearly out of her element. I entered the Visitor Center and was struck by its dinghy but clean interior. I sat down and waited for my husband to appear. Looking around I was struck by the number of families that were to waiting for their loved one. Children filled the small room and I wondered how these families do it. How do they stay connected with their fathers?

In the subsequent visits, I watched dads holding their children trying to savor their presence and reconnect with the children they left behind. I watched several fathers trying to counsel their sons to stay in school, listen to their mothers/family members, and encourage them to not follow in their footsteps. The visitor parks are some small, some large with outdoor areas of cement picnic tables and some grassy areas to walk and run. In fine weather, there is laughter and giggles among the fencing and razor wire.

As I was driving home after a visit and thinking about what transpired during that visit, I kept coming back to the tearful good-byes the children had with their fathers. The look on the mothers/grandmothers faces having to go out in the world to face

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parenting alone, successfully sometimes and unsuccessfully at others. What resources do these families have in order to help their children be successful? Why should PTA or anyone else care?

The Magnitude of the Problem

“On any given day in America, it is estimated that more than 1.5 million children have a parent incarcerated in a state or federal prison. And more than 10 million children are living with a parent who has come under some form of criminal justice supervision at some point in the child’s life.” (Children and Families with Incarcerated Parents; Anne Casey Foundation)

The challenges of families with an incarcerated loved one, in this case fathers, are significant. Not only do these children face the sudden loss of their parent, but often suffer significant economic and social hardships. The challenges are formidable but can be overcome by rejecting stigmatizing these families and having the schools help these families step out of the shadows by providing much needed resources and support. (Children and Families with Incarcerated Parents; Anne Casey Foundation,)

PTA is in a unique position to advocate for programs and services that schools and other non-profits could provide for the educational support for these children and resources that will help families in economic, social, and mental health crisis.

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Some Facts We Should Remember

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OF THE INCARCERATED FACT SHEET **Rutgers University** **National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated**

The growing number of children with an incarcerated parent represents one of the most significant collateral consequences of the record prison population in the U.S.¹

Children with Parents in Prison **Demographics**

- More than 2.7 million children in the U.S. have an incarcerated parent. That is 1 in 28 children.²
- Approximately 10 million children have experienced parental incarceration at some point in their lives.³
- 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.⁴
- Approximately half of children with incarcerated parents are under ten years old.⁵

Impact

- 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. ⁶
- 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. ⁷
- Parental incarceration is now recognized as an “adverse childhood experience” (ACE); it is distinguished from other adverse childhood experiences by the unique combination of

Child Welfare

- 2% of incarcerated fathers and 8-10% of mothers have children in foster care (these data do not include at least some persons in prison with children in kinship foster care placements) ⁹
- Information from one study on children in Foster Care with incarcerated parents provides the following data¹⁰
 - o 25% of children live with their fathers when a mother goes to prison.

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- o 90% of children remain with their mothers when the father is incarcerated
- o 50% of children with an incarcerated mother live with their grandmothers
- o In the child welfare system, 1 in 10 children in in-home settings is living with someone who is on probation.¹⁰
- About 15-20% of children entering the child welfare system have incarcerated parent¹¹

About 1 in every 5 African American children who come to the attention of child welfare agencies have a recently arrested parent compared to only 1 in 10 White children and only 1 in 20 Hispanic children.¹²

- Incarcerated parents lose their parental rights at a disproportionate rate due to the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) which set strict timelines for initiating Termination of Parental Rights (placement cannot exceed 15 of previous 22 months)¹³

Parents in Prison

- In 2010 1.5 million people were in State or Federal prison in the U.S, and 750,000 in jails.¹⁴
- This is a 10% decline from 2009 but still significantly higher than 1980 when “mass incarceration” began.¹⁵
- 92% of people in prison are male, 8% female.¹⁶
- The number of women in prison increased by 587% between 1980 and 2011, rising from 15,118 to 111,387 ¹⁷
- Including women in local jails, more than 200,000 women are now incarcerated in the US ¹⁸
- Nationally, there are more than 120,000 incarcerated mothers and 1.1 million incarcerated fathers who are parents of

minor children (ages 0-17).¹⁹

- 44-55% Percent of fathers had at least one minor child living with them before incarceration ²⁰
- 64-84% Percent of mothers had at least one minor child living with them before incarceration ²¹
- 59 percent of fathers and 58 percent of mothers had no personal visits from any of their children.²²
- 62% of parents in state prisons and 84% of parents in federal prisons are held over 100 miles away from their residence. 43% of parents in federal prisons are held over 500 miles away from their last residence.

The uneven geographic distribution of incarceration in poor communities and communities of color means that the effects radiate beyond the individual to the broader community, presenting profound long-term consequences for family integrity, public health and general quality of life.³²

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54 % of men and 73% of women have a history of mental health “problems” as opposed to 25% entering prison with a mental health diagnosis.²⁴

- In 2010, 93% of Federal Prisoners were convicted of non-violent crimes, including 48% for drug offenses, and 11% for immigration offenses.²⁵

- In 2010, 47% of State Prisoners were convicted of non-violent crimes, including 17% for drug offenses, and 18% for property offenses and 13% for Public Order offenses.²⁶

- More than 60% of the people in prison are now racial and ethnic minorities.²⁷

- These trends have been intensified by the disproportionate impact of the "war on drugs," in which two-thirds of all persons in prison for drug offenses are people of color.²⁸

- Roughly two-thirds of women in prison are women of color, representing the fastest growing prison population²⁹

- Blacks make up 12.3 percent of US population and 43.9% of the state and federal prison population. Latinos constitute 12.6% of the country's population, but make up 18.3% of the prison population. Whites are 69% of the general population with only 34.7% of those incarcerated.³⁰

- If these trends continue, one in every 3 Black males born today can expect to go to prison in his lifetime.³¹

Care must be taken with these data on disproportionate representation of children of color so as not to interpret them as an indictment of specific groups of people but rather as a reflection of the long-term impact of poverty, segregation, discrimination and urbanization.

Caregivers

- Caregivers of children with parents in prison bear numerous burdens,

including stigma and shame associated with having a family member in prison, increased

financial strain, physical and emotional stress, and lack of external resources.³²

- Public assistance programs, including TANF were not designed with

relative caregivers in mind. Grandparents especially are reluctant to seek support for fear of losing the children the child welfare system.³³

Caregivers struggle with multiple challenges in fostering continued relationships between children and their parents in prison.³⁴

- Most prisons are not accessible by any form of public transportation, restricting child-parent visits. In some cases this means children will never visit their parents. ³⁵

- Collect phone calls from prisoners are subject to excessive surcharges, an economic burden most caregivers cannot manage.³⁶

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- Familial incarceration can be characterized as an “ambiguous loss” leading to “disenfranchised grief.” ³⁷
- Caring for children who are experiencing the stigma and blame associated with parental incarceration is particularly difficult for caregivers and may be taxing emotionally and physically.³⁸

Arrests

- One study conducted in 1998 estimated that of the 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
 - 3.2% reported the use of pepper spray. ³⁹
- Children who witnessed an arrest of a household member were 57% more likely to have elevated posttraumatic stress symptoms compared to children who did not witness an arrest ⁴⁰

Fact Sheet Resources

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

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title).In Press 16 Glaze, L. *Correctional Populations in the U.S. 2010*. Bureau of Justice Statistics. Washington, DC. 2011

17 The Sentencing Project

http://www.sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/cc_Incarcerated_Women_Factsheet_Dec2012final.pdf

18 Ibid

19 Glaze,L. and Maruschak, L. *Parents in Prison and Their Minor Children*. Bureau of Justice Statistics Washington, D.C. 2011

20 Ibid

21 Ibid

22 Ibid