



WOMEN IN PRISON FACT SHEET

Crime rates have been on the decline since 1994, but the U.S. continues to expand its prison population. As of January 2008, more than 2.3 million Americans are behind bars, that is, more than one in every 100 people. Total state spending on corrections nationwide topped \$49 billion. Payments for restitution for property crimes, child support, and income taxes have lagged as a result.

- The number of women admitted annually to the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) quadrupled between 1990 and 2005. The number of women in Illinois state prisons rose to 2,821 as of June 30, 2005, and nationwide the number of women in state and federal custody was 103,310.
- Nationwide the percentage of women more than doubled as a proportion of the population under correctional supervision, from 4% to 9%. More than 16,000 women went into pre-trial detention in Cook County Jail in 2004.
- Women prisoners usually are convicted of non-violent offenses, and their absence has an immediate, dramatic impact on their children and families. About 63% of women prisoners in Illinois serve sentences for property (30.2%) and drug (32.8%) offenses. About 80% of women detained at Cook County Jail are charged with non-violent crimes. In ten years during which the women prisoner population increased by 173%, their arrests for murder and manslaughter *decreased* 35.5%. Women's crime has not become more violent, but sentencing has become harsher.
- Like poverty, imprisonment disproportionately affects women of color. About 58% of Illinois women prisoners are women of color, and up to 90% of women in Cook County Jail are African American. In 2002 more than five times as many African Americans as whites were sentenced to prison for drug possession in Illinois. Illinois incarcerates 45 per 100,000 African Americans for drug possession, but 7.9 Whites per 100,000, although rates of drug use are similar for both groups, ranking worst in the nation for its racial disparity for drug possession. The impact of this racial disparity on families is unconscionable.
- Both childhood and adult histories of abuse are strongly correlated with drug use among women. A 1994 study reported that 80% of women prisoners had experienced physical and sexual abuse, often beginning in childhood.
- Women's incarceration for drug offenses increased more than 5,000% between 1983 and 2002. The Illinois Department of Corrections estimates that 80% of women prisoners need drug treatment, but it is available to only 16% of them. More than 60% of women entering prison have not attained a high school diploma.
- Rates of HIV infection are much higher in the prison population than in the general population. At year-end 2000, 3.6% of female state prison inmates were HIV-positive, compared to 2.2% of males. Prisoners in Illinois are paid as little as \$15 per month for prison assignments but they must pay \$2 for each doctor visit in prison.

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MOTHERS IN PRISON

- About 82.5% of women incarcerated in Illinois are mothers. More than 10 million children have had a parent imprisoned at some point in their lives. The majority of incarcerated mothers were their children's sole caretakers before arrest.
- More than 90,000 Illinois children had a parent in prison or on parole as of August, 2006 according to the *Chicago Reporter*. An August 2008 Bureau of Justice Statistics report found that the number of children of incarcerated parents more than doubled nationwide since 1991 and grew to more than 1.7 million as of mid-2007, making up 2.3% of all children in the United States. Only 37% of mothers in prison reported that their children were living with the fathers; 88% of children remain with their mothers when fathers are incarcerated.
- In FY 2003, 88 babies were born to mothers in the custody of Dwight Correctional Center. Nationwide, about 5% of women are pregnant when they enter prison and another 15% have babies less than six weeks old. Newborns are separated from imprisoned mothers within a day or two of birth, missing the crucial, ir retrievable period of mother-child bonding, which affects development for the rest of their lives.
- Studies demonstrate that regular visits between children in foster care and their mothers enhance the children's emotional, scholastic, and social adjustment to placement. Numerous studies show that family contact has a strong, positive impact on parole success when the mother is released.
- When a mother goes to prison, it is her children who suffer most. Studies link parental incarceration with problems including poor school performance, aggression, emotional problems, and post-traumatic stress. Young children may be severely traumatized by the sudden separation from their mothers, resulting in developmental delays and later problems. Children commonly experience sadness, anger, confusion, grief or depression due to the separation.
- 84% of mothers in federal prisons and 64% of mothers in state prisons lived with their children before arrest. Upon release, they face multiple barriers to reuniting their families, reintegrating into their communities, and obtaining stable employment and housing.
- According to DCFS, the median length of stay for children in foster care in 2001 was 40.4 months, the longest in the nation. The rate of parent-child reunification is only 28%, the lowest in the nation when compared to states with similar populations, in part due to lack of reunification services, a particular problem for women prisoners.
- Incarcerated parents in Illinois are targets for swift termination of their parental rights, which can lead to a long-term intergenerational cycle of foster care and incarceration. Children in state foster homes may be separated from brothers and sisters, moved to a series of different homes, and denied visits with their mothers. Foster care workers often fail to provide mandated visits and services. There is little coordination or continuity of services. An estimated one in four children in the custody of DCFS are abused while in substitute care, according to a 2004 report. Foster children have an increased risk of delinquency in adolescence and homelessness in adulthood.
- Maternal imprisonment affects future generations: children's psychological health and sense of family is damaged by the separation from their mothers. Increasingly, families are destroyed forever through termination of parental rights, permanently cutting off the mother-child bond even if nobody adopts the children. Illinois in particular has targeted prisoners for destruction of their families through legal severance of family ties, so that the children and mothers have no further communication, visits, or even information about each others' welfare.

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