

# Parents in Prison and Their Minor Children<sup>1</sup>



## 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:**

<sup>1</sup>Glaze, 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](http://www.nationaldec.org)**

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