



## ▼ *Almost 1.5 Million Minor Children Have A Mother Or Father In Prison*

### ▼ *A U.S. Department of Justice Report*

Of the nation's 72 million minor children (17 years old and younger), an estimated 2 percent had an imprisoned parent in 1999, the Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) announced in a report August 30, 2000. Last year, an estimated 721,500 federal and state prisoners had minor children.

Almost 1.5 million minor children had a parent in prison—an increase of more than 500,000 children since 1991. A majority of the children with imprisoned parents (58 percent) was younger than 10 years old—the average was eight years old.

According to the new BJS report, imprisoned parents were overwhelmingly male (93 percent), as is the general prison population, and predominately held in state prisons, rather than federal facilities (89 percent compared to 11 percent). The number of minor children with an imprisoned father (1,372,700) rose 58 percent from 1991 through 1999, compared to a 98 percent increase during the same period in the number of minors with an imprisoned mother (126,100).

Half of the parents in state prisons were black, about a quarter were white and a fifth were Hispanic. In 1999 an estimated 767,200 black

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children, 384,500 white children and 301,600 Hispanic children had a parent in prison. The percentage of black children in the U.S. resident population with an imprisoned parent (7.0 percent) was nearly nine times higher than that of white children (0.8 percent). Hispanic children were three times as likely as white children to have a parent in prison (2.6 percent).

State prisoners who were parents were less likely to be violent offenders (44 percent) than inmates without children (51 percent), the report said. Three-quarters of state

prisoners who were parents had a prior conviction, and a majority (56 percent) had previously been incarcerated. On average, the imprisoned parents expected to serve more than six-and-a-half years in state prison and eight-and-a-half years in federal prison.

More than 80 percent of all parents in prison reported that their minor children lived with the other parent, but these answers differed sharply by gender. About 90 percent of fathers in state prisons said at least one of their minor children were now living with their mother, while 28 percent of mothers in prison said their child's father was the current care giver. Mothers most often said their children's grandparents were the caregivers (53 percent), compared to 13 percent of the fathers who said their children were with grandparents.

Forty-six percent of all parents in state and federal prisons said they were living with their children just prior to their admission to prison. Among parents in state prisons, 44 percent of the fathers lived with their children prior to their admission, compared to 64 percent of the mothers. As of December 31, 1999, an estimated 336,300 U.S. households with minor children had a resident parent in prison.

Forty percent of the imprisoned fathers and 60 percent of the mothers reported weekly contact with their children by phone, mail or visit. However, a majority of both fathers (57 percent) and mothers (54 percent) reported never having had a personal visit with their children since their admission to state prison. More than 60 percent of the parents in state prisons reported being held more than 100 miles from their last place of residence.

The study also found that almost 60 percent of the parents in state prisons reported having used drugs in the month before their offense, and 25 percent reported a history of alcohol dependence. More than a third of the parents in state prisons committed their offense while under the influence of alcohol.

About 14 percent reported a mental illness, and 70 percent did not have a high school diploma. At the time of their most recent arrest, 27 percent of the fathers and 50 percent of the mothers in state prisons were unemployed. In the month prior to their arrest, 46 percent of the parents said they had incomes of at least \$1,000 a month, and 27 percent said their income derived from illegal activities. Mothers in state prisons were twice as likely as fathers to say they had been homeless in the year before their arrests, 18 percent compared to 8 percent.

About half of the parents in state prison were never married and a quarter were currently married. In the month before their arrest, 20 percent had been living with their children in two-parent households, 18 percent

were living with their children as single parents and 62 percent lived apart from their children.

The data are based on personal interviews in state and federal correctional facilities during which the inmates described various aspects of their lives both before and during incarceration.

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The special report, "Incarcerated Parents and Their Children" (NCJ-182335), was written by BJS policy analyst Christopher J. Mumola. Single copies may be obtained from the BJS fax-on-demand system by dialing 301/519-5550, listening to the complete menu and selecting document number 215. Or call the BJS clearinghouse at 1-800-732-3277. Fax orders for mail delivery to 410/492-4358.

The full report may be obtained from the BJS Internet site at: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs>. Additional criminal justice materials can be obtained from the Office of Justice Programs Website at: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov>.

*This article is taken from the BJS Internet site at: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs>.* •

**Incarcerated Fathers Library pamphlets** may be downloaded without charge from the Family and Corrections Network (FCN) web site, [www.fcnetwork.org](http://www.fcnetwork.org). Duplication is permitted and encouraged, so long as the materials are not altered or sold.

A printed set of the ten pamphlets can be ordered for \$6.00, shipping included, from FCN at the address below. Ask for *FCN REPORT #31 - The Incarcerated Fathers Library*. Sorry, FCN is not budgeted to mail free copies.

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