

# Parents Under Correctional Supervision: Past Estimates, New Measures



Presented by:

Christopher J. Mumola

Policy Analyst, Bureau of Justice Statistics  
U.S. Department of Justice

“Children of Parents in the Criminal Justice  
System: Children at Risk”

NIDA Research Meeting

North Bethesda, MD - November 6, 2006

# Overview

- Estimates of the scope of the issue across the criminal justice system
- Discussion of data collection challenges
- Profile of incarcerated parents' backgrounds, based on 1997 BJS data
- Look ahead to updated measures and new report, *Incarcerated Parents, 2004*

# 2002 Estimates

Number of parents on probation or parole more than double that of incarcerated parents

	Parents	Children
<b>Community corrections</b>	<b>2,575,700</b>	<b>5,062,800</b>
State probation (1995)	2,152,000	4,182,400
State parole (1997)	371,400	765,600
Federal parole (1997)	52,300	114,800
<b>Incarcerated</b>	<b>1,150,200</b>	<b>2,413,700</b>
Local jails (1996)	384,300	822,100
State prison (1997)	670,300	1,381,900
Federal prison (1997)	95,600	209,700
<b>Total under any correctional supervision</b>	<b>3,725,900</b>	<b>7,476,500</b>

# Incarcerated Parents and Their Children: 1991-2002 Trends

- While substantial, the increase in parents (69%) was actually slower than the growth of other prisoners (75%).

- Parents in State & Federal prison:

<u>1991</u>	<u>2002</u>
452,500	765,900

- Minor children of prisoners:

<u>1991</u>	<u>2002</u>
936,500	1,591,600

- The percentage of State and Federal prisoners who had minor children (56%) changed little since 1991 (57%).

# Incarcerated Parents and Their Children: 1991-2002 Trends

- Number of parents held in State prison grew by nearly 260,000:

violent offenders\* = + 113,000

drug offenders = + 60,000

\*Admissions data indicate that violent offenders accounted for an even greater share of this growth.

- The number of mothers in prison grew 88%, while fathers increased by 61%.

# Profile of Parents in State Prison

	Parents	Nonparents
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	93 %	95 %
Female	7	5
<b>Race</b>		
White	29 %	39 %
African-American	49	43
Hispanic	19	14
Other	3	4
<b>Median age</b>	32 yrs.	33 yrs.
<b>Marital status</b>		
Married	23 %	9 %
Widowed	1	2
Divorced/separate	28	20
Never married	48	69

- While parents were more likely to be female than other inmates, over 90% were fathers.

- Parents were more likely to be minority inmates (71%) than nonparents (61%).

- Though parents were twice as likely (23%) as other inmates (9%) to be married, at least half of parents had their children out of wedlock.

# Parents in State Prison: Offenses, Criminal History

	Percent of parents in State prison, 1997	
	Fathers	Mothers
<b>Violent offenses</b>	45 %	26 %
Homicide	11	9
Sexual assault	9	2
Robbery	14	6
Assault	10	7
<b>Property offenses</b>	21 %	28 %
Burglary	11	5
Fraud	2	11
<b>Drug offenses</b>	23 %	35 %
Trafficking	13	19
<b>Public-order/others</b>	11 %	11 %

- Parents (44%) were less likely to be violent offenders than nonparents (51%).

- Half (49%) of parents were arrested while already on probation or parole supervision.

- 60% of parents had multiple prior convictions; 44% had 3+

- 23% of parents were 1<sup>st</sup> timers; another 4% were drug crime-only recidivists.

# Children of Incarcerated Parents

At yearend 2002, 1 in every 45 minor children in the U.S. had a parent in State or Federal prison

- 2.2% of the Nation's 72.5 million minor children had a parent in prison on December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2002
- Racial disparity (1999 estimates):
  - African-American children = 7.0% (1 in 14)
  - Hispanic children = 2.6% (1 in 38)
  - White children = 0.8% (1 in 125)
- 58% were under 10 years old; mean age = 8 years old



# Impact on Children: Households

While not the only measure of parental engagement with children, it is worth noting that most parents in prison were not taken from their children's homes.

- Fewer than 40% of parents in State prison were living with any of their children prior to arrest:  
    Fathers = 36%      Mothers = 58%
- In 2002, an estimated 358,300 U.S. households with children were missing a resident parent held in State or Federal prison.

# Impact on Children: Current Caregivers

The consequences for care of children vary dramatically depending on gender of incarcerated parent

- Current caregiver while father is in State prison:
  - 90% = child's mother
  - 13% = child's grandparents
  - 5% = other relatives
  - 2% = foster care / agency / institution
- Current caregiver while mother is in State prison:
  - 28% = child's father
  - 53% = child's grandparents
  - 26% = other relatives
  - 10% = foster care / agency / institution

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100% because some parents had children in more than one residence.

# Impact on Children: Contact with Parents

Parents reported frequent telephone/mail contact with their children, but fewer than 1 in 4 reported a monthly visit with their children

- Most parents in State prison reported some form of regular contact (phone, mail, or visits):
  - Monthly: fathers = 62% mothers = 78%
  - Weekly: fathers = 40% mothers = 62%
- A majority of both fathers (57%) and mothers (54%) in State prison said they never had visits from their children.

# Impact on Children: Prison Time to Serve

Given length of prison terms reported by parents, the average parent in State prison will be released before their child reaches 18.

- Total time parents expected to serve (mean):  
Fathers = 6 yrs. 10 mos. (55% of sentence)  
Mothers = 4 yrs. 1 month (52% of sentence)
- Expected to serve less than 2 years:  
Fathers = 18%      Mothers = 38%
- Expected to serve more than 10 years:  
Fathers = 21%      Mothers = 8%

# Parents in State Prison: Substance Abuse

Parents reported serious substance abuse histories, slightly higher than other prisoners

- Any drug use in the month before offense:  
Fathers = 58%      Mothers = 65%
- Cocaine/crack:  
Fathers = 26%      Mothers = 45%
- Under the influence of drugs when committing crime:  
Fathers = 33%      Mothers = 43%
- Committed their crime under the influence of alcohol:  
Fathers = 37%      Mothers = 29%

## Parents in State Prison: Mental Illness, Homelessness

Parents were less likely to report indications of mental illness (14%) or recent experiences of homelessness (9%) than other prisoners (19%, and 12% respectively).

- Reported indications of mental illness:  
Fathers = 13%    Mothers = 23%
- Homeless in the past year before arrest:  
Fathers = 8%    Mothers = 18%

# Upcoming Report: *Incarcerated Parents, 2004*

- Updated estimates of number of incarcerated parents, and the number of minor children affected will be based on the *Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, 2004*.
- Many topics from the 2000 report will be updated, but new measures also available for the first time:
  - **DSM-IV measures of alcohol/drug dependence and abuse** (see *Drug Use and Dependence, State and Federal Prisoners, 2004*, released in October)
  - **Improved measures of mental health problems**, based on both a recent history of mental health problems, and self-reports of recent symptoms of three major mental health disorders: depression, mania and psychotic disorders (see *Mental Health Problems of Prison and Jail Inmates*)

# Upcoming Report: *Incarcerated Parents, 2004*

- Report should include an updated count of parents under all forms of correctional supervision:
  - New estimates of parents on State and Federal parole can be based on 2004 prisoner survey data
  - New estimate of parents in jail can be drawn from the *Survey of Inmates in Local Jails, 2002*
- Release of report expected in early 2007



For a copy of the report,  
*Incarcerated Parents and Their Children*

go to:

<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs>

**Contact Info:** Christopher Mumola  
Bureau of Justice Statistics  
Phone: 202-307-0765  
[christopher.mumola@usdoj.gov](mailto:christopher.mumola@usdoj.gov)