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BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS
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AN ESTIMATED 809,800 INMATES IN THE NATION'S PRISONS WERE PARENTS TO 1,706,600 MINOR CHILDREN AT MIDYEAR 2007

WASHINGTON – An estimated 809,800 prisoners of the 1,518,535 held in the nation's prison at midyear 2007 were parents of minor children, according to a report by the Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS). Parents in prison — 52 percent of state inmates and 63 percent of federal inmates— reported having an estimated 1,706,600 minor children. Among state inmates, the percent of parents in prison decreased from 55 percent in 1997 but has remained stable for federal inmates.

About 2.3 percent of the 74 million children in the U.S. resident population who were under the age of 18 on July 1, 2007, had a parent in prison. Black and Hispanic children were about eight and three times, respectively, more likely than white children to have a parent in prison. Among minor children in the U.S. resident population, 6.7 percent of black children, 2.4 percent of Hispanic children, and 0.9 percent of white children had a parent in prison. State inmates who were parents reported that nearly a quarter of their children were age four or younger and reported having two children on average.

Among fathers in state and federal prisons, more than 4 in 10 were black, about 3 in 10 were white, and about 2 in 10 were Hispanic. Among mothers, 48 percent were white, 28 percent were black, and 17 percent were Hispanic.

State inmates age 25 to 34 (64 percent) were most likely to report being a parent, those age 55 or older (13 percent) were the least likely. Hispanic (57 percent) and black (54 percent) state inmates were more likely to report being a parent than white (46 percent) inmates. Findings were similar among men held in state prison, while the likelihood of being a parent did not vary by race among women.

Among male state inmates, public-order (60 percent) and drug (59 percent) offenders were more likely than violent (47 percent) and property (48 percent) offenders to be fathers. In state prison, inmates with a criminal history (53 percent) were more likely to report being a parent than those without a criminal history (48 percent).

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About two-thirds (64 percent) of mothers held in state prison and nearly half (47 percent) of fathers reported living with their minor children either in the month before arrest or just prior to incarceration. Among state inmates, mothers (42 percent) were two and a half times more likely than fathers (17 percent) to report living in a single-parent household in the month before their arrest.

Among parents living with their minor children prior to incarceration, more than three-quarters (77 percent) of mothers compared to just over a quarter (26 percent) of fathers reported providing most of the daily care of their children. More than half of mothers (52 percent) and fathers (54 percent) held in state prison reported providing primary financial support to their minor children.

Eighty-five percent of mothers and 78 percent of fathers in state prison reported having contact with a child (minor or adult) since admission to prison. About half (47 percent) of parents who expected to be released within six months reported at least weekly contact compared to 39 percent with 12 to 59 months, and 32 percent with 60 or more months.

Among parents in state prison, nine percent reported homelessness in the year before arrest, 20 percent had a history of physical or sexual abuse, 41 percent had a current medical problem, 57 percent had a mental health problem, and 67 percent met the criteria for substance dependence or abuse. Seven in ten parents in state prison who met the criteria for substance dependence or abuse reported ever being in a program or receiving treatment for alcohol or drug abuse; more than 4 in 10 received treatment since admission. Forty-six percent of parents who had a mental health problem reported ever having treatment; 31 percent had received treatment since admission.

Among parents held in state prison, over half (57 percent) had attended self-help or improvement classes since admission. Mothers (27 percent) were about two and a half times more likely than fathers (11 percent) to attend parenting or child-rearing classes.

The majority (52 percent) of parents in state prison reported that they had served 12 to 59 months. Mothers (38 percent) were more likely than fathers (21 percent) to report having served fewer than 12 months. More than 6 in 10 mothers held in state prison expected to be released in less than 12 months; compared to 4 in 10 fathers.

The report, *Parents in Prison and Their Minor Children* (NCJ 222984), was written by BJS statisticians Lauren E. Glaze and Laura M. Maruschak. Following publication, the report can be found at <<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/pptmc.htm>>.

For additional information about the Bureau of Justice Statistics' statistical reports and programs, please visit the BJS Web site at <<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs>>.

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