



“The adults incarcerated today were yesterday’s at-risk children and youth”

- Dr. Laura Pitman, Oklahoma Department of Corrections

2016 POLICY BRIEF

CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Recommendations

Opportunities for children to stay connected to their incarcerated parents

Consider children from arrest through incarceration and reentry

Video visiting

Continue with data collection, research and evaluation

“People Sometimes Make Bad Choices; As A Result, They End Up In Prison Or Jail. But We Can’t Permit Incarceration Of A Parent To Punish An Entire Family.”

Eric Holder, United States Attorney General

The Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth

Who Are the Invisible Children of Oklahoma’s Criminal Justice System?

In Oklahoma there is no single source of data. The Oklahoma Children of Incarcerated Parents Advisory Committee has found that most agencies do not keep data on children who have an incarcerated parent. However, Oklahoma is fortunate to have access to the research of Dr. Susan Sharp and Dr. David McLeod. This information is the only window we have into how many lives of those who are incarcerated and their children. As part of the advisory committee work, several groups join together in an effort to better improve services to children with incarcerated parents.

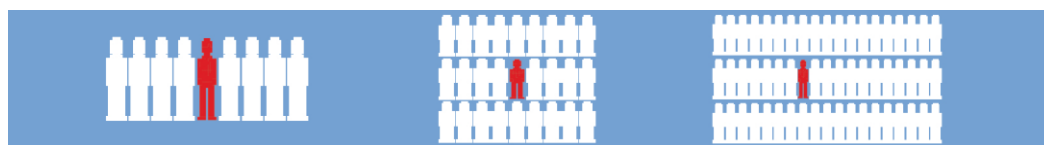
The Oklahoma Department of Corrections reported that as of December 2015, there were a total of 28,095 inmates held in our state prisons. With this in mind, **who is looking after the children?** These children may live with their other parent, maternal or paternal grandparents, mother’s sibling, other relatives of mother or father, partner’s parent (s), or friends of the family. It is important to consider the living environment and the type of care these children will receive while their parent is in jail or prison.

Oklahoma has consistently held the highest rate of female incarceration in the nation since 1998. There are approximately 3,000 women in prison.

We know that roughly 10% of Oklahoma’s children of incarcerated parents are in the foster care system. However, there are no data that shows how many children get to visit their parents or have a goal of reunification.

In a recent survey of families impacted by incarceration, 2 in 3 families had difficulty meeting basic financial needs as a direct result of incarceration. 70% of these families had children under the age of 18¹.

Children Who Have an Incarcerated Parent, by Race and Ethnicity²



1 in 9 Black Children 1 in 28 Hispanic Children 1 in 57 White Children

Parental Incarceration is Recognized as An Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE)

Oklahoma only has estimated numbers of children who are affected by parental incarceration. However, through Dr. Sharp's extensive research one outcome is unfortunately made clear, incarceration leads to negative outcomes for Oklahoma's children.

2014 Oklahoma Study of Incarcerated Women and Their Children³

Problems Experienced By Children	Experienced Since Mother went to Prison
Mental Health Problems	45.4%
Relationship Problems	23.6%
Education Problems	19.6%
Substance Abuse Problems	7.2%
Legal Problems	6.0%

Table 1. Problems Experienced by Children Since Mother's Incarceration

Oklahoma Children of Incarcerated Parents Community Programs Making a Difference in the Lives of Children and Youth

- The Oklahoma Children of Incarcerated Parents Mentoring Program provides one-on-one mentoring through the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Oklahoma's Amachi program. The expected number of children with incarcerated parents to be served in 2016 is around 500 children and youth.
- The Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth contracted with Marie Detty Youth and Family Services to provide an after school program for children of incarcerated parents attending Lawton Public Schools.
- Since 2012, 400 children have participated in a yearly At Risk Youth Conference for Lawton Middle School students.
- The Oklahoma Messages Project sent DVD messages and books from incarcerated moms and dads' to 1425 children in 56 counties, and over 77 children attended the Outdoor Adventure Day.
- Little Light Christian School, in Edmond Oklahoma, is a tuition free elementary school for kids with incarcerated parents.
- Whiz Kids, is a mentoring program for disadvantaged OKCPS elementary school children and EL Systema, is an orchestra program for disadvantaged elementary school children.
- Other community-based programs that provide activities for children of incarcerated parents are New Hope in Tulsa and Girl Scouts of Eastern Oklahoma.

1. DeVuono-Powell, S., et al., 2015. Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarcerated on Families. Ella Baker Center, Forward Together, Research Action Design. Available on line at: <http://www.whopaysreport.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Who-Pays-Final.pdf>

2. The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010. Collateral Costs: Incarceration's Effect on Economic Mobility. The Pew Charitable Trusts. Available online at: http://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pcs_assets/2010/CollateralCosts1pdf.pdf

3. This research was made possible through a grant from George Kaiser Family Foundation in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Susan F. Sharp, Ph.D., David Ross Boyd Professor of Sociology; David Axlyn McLeod, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Anne and Henry Zarrow School of Social Work, and Melissa S. Jones, MA; Available online at: https://www.ok.gov/occy/Programs/Children_of_Incarcerated_Parents/CIP_Publications