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Department of Sociology

Oklahoma Study of Incarcerated Mothers and Their Children – 2014*



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Susan F. Sharp, Ph.D.
David Ross Boyd Professor of Sociology
University of Oklahoma
Tel.: (405) 325-2829
Fax: (405) 325-7825
ssharp@ou.edu

Melissa S. Jones, MA
Doctoral Student in Sociology
University of Oklahoma
(405) 325-1751
Melissa.S.Jones-1@ou.edu

David Axlyn McLeod, Ph.D, MSW
Assistant Professor, Anne and Henry Zarrow School of Social Work
University of Oklahoma
(405) 325-4647
damcleod@ou.edu

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Introduction

Oklahoma has the dubious distinction of continuing to have the highest female incarceration rate, 130 per 100,000 residents, compared to the national average of 67 per 100,000 (Guerino, Harrison & Sabol, 2011), almost double the national rate. As of June 30, 2014, Oklahoma's female prison population was over 2400 prisoners (Oklahoma Department of Corrections, 2014). At a time when incarceration rates around the country are falling, Oklahoma's rates remain as high as or even higher than in previous years (Carson & Golinelli, 2013). Most of these prisoners are mothers (Oklahoma Department of Corrections, 2013), making it imperative that we continue to examine the impact of incarceration policies on their children. National data indicate that almost two-thirds of women prisoners are mothers (Bloom, Owen, Covington & Raeder, 2002), and around 60% were living with their children immediately before incarceration (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008).

Incarcerated mothers are more than three times more likely than fathers to have been the only parent in the household at the time they were incarcerated (Mumola, 2000). This leads to a greater chance that a child will be left without a parental presence that could moderate the impact of incarceration (Bloom, 1995; Bloom & Owen, 1994; Mumola, 2000; Owen, 1998; Sharp et al., 1999; Sharp & Marcus-Mendoza, 2001). This can create difficulties for both mothers and their children and problematize reunification when the mother is released (Brown, 2003).

Past research in Oklahoma has found that around half of the women prisoners had been living with their children at the time of incarceration (Moon et al., 2004; Sharp, 2004; Sharp, 2005a; Sharp, 2005b; Sharp, 2008; Sharp & Marcus-Mendoza, 2001; Sharp et al., 1999; Sharp & Pain, 2010). The continued high incarceration rate of women in the state, coupled with the reality that many are single mothers, underscores the importance of continually studying the effects of maternal incarceration in Oklahoma on the children involved.

The majority of the women in Oklahoma prisons are first-time offenders. Over 1000 women are admitted to the prison system each year, almost one in five for a technical violation of probation or parole. Over half are admitted for a drug offense, and the majority of the women are assigned to minimum, medium or community corrections security levels (Oklahoma Department of Corrections, 2013). The large number of first-time offenders admitted each year leads to ongoing disruption of families in the state.

Research indicates that mothers in prison share the same concerns for their children as other mothers (Radosh, 2004). Among incarcerated mothers, primary concerns are their children's security, comfort and education (Mignon & Ransford, 2012). However, both mothers and their children are at heightened risk of negative outcomes due to her imprisonment (Bloom, 1995; Bloom & Owen, 1994; Bowlby, 1988; Dowden & Andrews, 1999; Enos, 2001; Greenberg, 2006; Huebner & Gustafson, 2007; Kruttschnitt, Gartner & Miller, 2000; Sharp & Marcus-Mendoza, 2001).

While most women in prison experience anxiety and depression, they are exacerbated when there are children from whom the mother is separated, particularly if she was living with them at the time of her arrest (Clark, 1995; Tuerk & Loper, 2006). In contrast, attachment to children has been shown to have a positive effect on reintegration (Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2002; Huebner, DeJong & Cobbina, 2010; Sharp et al., 1999). Women's desistance from crime is positively associated with relationships with children (Giordano et al., 2002; Sharp & Marcus-Mendoza, 2001; Uggen & Kruttschnitt, 1998), and one recent study reported that women with children were more likely to be successful in reentry than those without children (Huebner et al., 2010).

Research also indicates a mother's incarceration negatively impact a child's wellbeing. Children suffer, and many experience negative outcomes such as school difficulties, depression and substance abuse (Sharp & Marcus-Mendoza, 2001). They may develop difficulties with attachment to others, and this can lead to mental health and relationship issues (Bowlby, 1988). The children of incarcerated mothers are at greater risk for criminal involvement in childhood, leading to their own criminal careers (Greenberg, 2006; Huebner & Gustafson, 2007), although this potential risk can be reduced through ongoing contact (Mignon & Ransford, 2012; Poehlmann, 2005). Therefore, it is extremely important to gather information on the relationships between incarcerated mothers and their children. The evidence strongly suggests that maintaining relationships between them can reduce the potential of future crime in both the

women and the children, as well as improve the lives of the children in the long run.

Description of the Current Study

This research was conducted the spring of 2014. Three hundred sixty-seven women prisoners participated in a survey containing questions on demographics, criminal record, and information about families such as contact with children, placement of children, and problems with children. The sample of potential participants in the survey was drawn and stratified by the Data and Evaluation Unit of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections. Oklahoma has three correctional facilities for women: Mabel Bassett Correctional Center (MBCC) with minimum, medium, and maximum security women, Dr. Eddie Warrior Correctional Center (EWCC) with minimum security, and Kate Barnard Community Correctional Center (KBCCC) with work release women. A multistage sampling procedure was used. First, the sampling frame was designed to draw participants proportionate to each facility. For each of the three facilities, each woman was randomly assigned an identification number, and the sample was then numerically sorted by this identification number. Potential subjects for each facility were then selected by taking the first (1-N) women on the list for that facility. To ensure the sample was representative, summary statistics were then run for each facility according to our criteria: time served to date, age and race. Comparisons of the sample to the population were then made for the three facilities to ensure the distribution of time served, age, and race matched those of the population of each facility. In all three facilities, the

potential sample did not differ statistically from the population on any of the variables. Women who were in segregated housing or who had serious mental illness that would preclude being able to complete the questionnaire were excluded from the sampling frame.

To minimize the loss of potential participants due to transfers, discharges or segregation, the three potential samples were drawn near the end of the day on Friday, May 13, and the survey was administered Monday through Wednesday of the following week (May 16-18, 2014). At the time the samples were drawn, there were 1,113 women at MBCC, 909 women at EWCC, and 215 women at KBCCC. A sample of 500 women (approximately 22.4% of the population) was drawn, consisting of 249 from MBCC, 203 from ewcc and 48 from KBCCC. The original sample of potential participants consisted of 96 African Americans, 305 whites, 22 Hispanics, 74 Native Americans, and 3 individuals classified as other.

The response rate was high for each facility. At MBCC, 172 questionnaires were completed (response rate of 69.1%). There were also three incomplete questionnaires that the participants asked us to withdraw, and these were destroyed. Additionally, some of the women were unavailable due to work assignments, transfers, and placements in segregated housing over the weekend. At EWCC, 158 questionnaires were completed (response rate of 77.8%). There were also two incomplete questionnaires that the participants asked us to destroy. Six women of the original sample were not available due to transfers or segregation. At KBCCC, 37 women completed the questionnaire

(response rate of 77.1%). Five women were not available due to work schedules. Thus, we had a total of 367 completed questionnaires for an overall response rate of 73.4%.

Additionally, we asked the participants for permission to link their questionnaires to their DOC records to obtain controlling offenses, prior incarcerations and assessments such as the LSI-R. At MBCC, 14 women denied permission to link records to the questionnaires. At EWCC 7 women denied permission to link records to the questionnaires, and at KBCCC, 4 women denied permission to link records to the questionnaires. This left us with 342 questionnaires that we were able to link with records (93.2% of completed questionnaires). Nearly half of the participants came from the two largest counties in the state: Oklahoma County (31.6% of the sample) and Tulsa County (14.7% of the sample). They had admission dates ranging from March 13, 1980 through November 8, 2011. The most common types of offenses were drug or alcohol offenses (n=119, 35.3%), crimes against a person (n=92, 27.3%) and property crimes (n=67, 19.9%). Close to half were serving time under the 85% rule (n=142, 38.7%).^{1,2} First time offenders accounted for nearly two-thirds of the women (n=238, 64.9% - 70.6% of those for whom we had data), with another 56 (15.3% or 16.6% of those for whom we had data) on their second incarceration in the Oklahoma Department of Corrections. In terms of risk assessment,

¹ Because there were missing data on thirty cases that either did not allow linkage with their ODOC records or simply had missing data, 42.1% of those in the sample were serving under the 85% rule.

² The 85% rule states that prisoners must serve 85% of their sentences before they start earning credit towards parole. Originally created to ensure violent offenders served the majority of their sentences, it has now been extended to some other crimes.

approximately one-third were assessed as being high risk (n=122, 33.2%), 153 (41.7%) with low to moderate risk, and 62 (16.9% were not assessed. The sentence lengths ranged from less than one year (n=1) to Life without Parole (LWOP) (n=3), with approximately 60% (n=222) sentenced to 10 or more years, with a mean sentence length of 12.7 years. Thirty-four (9.3%) were serving life or LWOP sentences. The three LWOP sentences were for drug crimes (n=2) or property crime (n=1).

DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE WOMEN IN PRISON

The demographic data for subjects are presented in Table 1. The subjects ranged in age from 20 to 65, with a mean age of 36.5 and a median age of 34. About one-third (n=123, 33.5%) of the women were between the ages of 30 and 40, with almost as many (n=119, 32.4%) ranging from age 20 to 30. Forty women (10.9%) were age 50 or older. Slightly less than half of the sample was white (n=179, 48.8%), and an additional 56 (15.3%) were African American. The sample contained 55 Native Americans (14.9%) and 15 Hispanics (4.1%). The remaining 62 subjects were categorized as “other” (16.9%). This category primarily was composed of women who selected two or more racial/ethnic categories.

Table 1. Demographics of the Women Prisoners

	N	Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>FACILITY</i>			
Kate Bernard	37	10.1%	10.1%
Eddie Warrior	158	43.0%	53.0%
Mabel Bassett	172	46.9%	100.0%
<i>AGE</i>			
20-30	119	32.4%	32.4%
31-40	123	33.5%	65.9%
41-50	85	23.2%	89.1%
50 and older	40	10.9%	100.0%
<i>RACE/ETHNICITY</i>			
African American	56	15.3%	15.3%
Hispanic	15	4.1%	19.4%
White	179	48.8%	68.2%
Native American	55	14.9%	83.1%
Other	62	16.9%	100.0%
<i>EDUCATION</i>			
Less than HS	146	39.8%	39.8%
HS Grad/GED	123	33.5%	73.3%
Some college	54	14.7%	88.0%
Vo-Tech	37	10.1%	98.1%
BA degree or higher	7	1.9%	100.0%

In terms of education prior to entering prison, 146 subjects had not completed high school (39.8%), 46 of whom (12.5%) reported an eighth grade education or less. An additional 123 (33.5%) reported that high school graduation or a GED represented their highest educational attainment. Thirty-seven women (10.1%) reported vocational or technical training, and 61 (16.6%) had some college, although only 7 (1.9%) of those with any college reported having a baccalaureate or graduate degree. Clearly, the majority of these women have low educational attainment, at high school level or below.

Their reasons for dropping out of school include pregnancy (n=77, 21%), hanging around with the wrong crowd (82, 22.3%), being bored with school (n=66, 18.0%), being unable to keep up in school (n=45, 12.3%), getting into trouble with the law (n=37, 10.1%), having to support themselves (n=35, 9.5%), and the family moving often (n=30, 8.2%). In response to an open-ended response asking them to describe other reasons why they did not finish school, 47 (12.8%) of the women reported serious family problems including death or illness in the family, substance abuse in the home or by themselves, and abuse.

Other reasons given by the women for dropping out of school included abuse and other problems in the home, friends or family members dropping out, illness or death in the family, drug use, and poverty. It is quite clear that the low educational attainment of these women in conjunction with the explanations they provided for not completing high school point to the need for earlier identification and intervention with troubled young women and girls. Failure to complete formal education either high school or beyond decreases the potential for being able to support oneself. It also increases the likelihood of criminal activity. Therefore, identification of youth struggling with school and intervention and support to determine the causes for school problems is an important tool in reducing crime as well as the impact on of offending on children. It is noteworthy that more than one in five of the women who participated in the research reported giving birth as a reason for dropping out. This indicates a significant number of teen-aged mothers who have ended up in prison. The risk factors for their children are increased due to the mothers' youth.

Only 87 (23.7%) of the participants in the study reported being married at the time of arrest, while another 98 (26.7%) reported cohabiting with a male partner and 19 (5.2%) were living with a female partner. Of the remaining women, 66 (18.0%) had never married, and 94 (25.6%) were separated, divorced or widowed. Three did not answer the question about marital status. Among those with children under the age of 18 with whom they were living at the time of arrest (n=164, 44.7%), slightly more were married (n=47, 28.7%) or cohabiting with either a male or female partner (n=48, 29.3%). This suggests that almost half of the women with children were the only parent in the home at the time of arrest, leaving children displaced. The reality is probably starker, since in the cohabiting relationships, the children may not have been children of the partner.

HISTORIES OF THE WOMEN PRISONERS

The women in the study were likely to have come from families without two parents in the home, as 125 (34.1%) reported being raised in a single parent home. An additional 65 (17.7%) were raised by grandparents, and 52 (14.2%) were raised by other relatives. Thirty-one (8.4%) reported spending at least part of their childhood in a foster home or living with other non-relatives.

The women prisoners also came from homes with a history of incarceration. Twenty-eight (7.6%) of the women reported that their mothers had gone to prison while they were growing up, 80 (21.8%) reported that their fathers had been incarcerated, 11 (3%) of whom reported both parents had gone to prison. This means that more than one in four (26.4%) of the women had a parent in prison during their own childhood. Of the women who were living with

their children at the time of incarceration, 14 (8.5%) reported their mother had gone to prison and 38 (23.2%) reported their father had been in prison when they were growing up. Of these, 3.7% reported both parents had been in prison. In total, about 28% of the women had at least one parent go to prison during their childhoods. About one out of twenty reported a grandparent had been in prison during their childhood. It is clear that intergenerational incarceration is occurring.

More than half of the women (n=196, 53.4%) reported growing up with someone in the household having a drug problem, and almost two-thirds (n=229, 62.4%) reported growing up with someone in the household with an alcohol problem. Parental alcoholism and drug abuse were common, with 95 (25.9%) of the women reporting their mother had an alcohol problem, 92 (24.8%) reporting their mother had a drug problem, 123 (33.5%) reporting a father with an alcohol problem, and 71 (19.3%) reporting a father with a drug problem. There was some overlap in parental substance abuse, with 50 of the women reporting both parents had an alcohol problem, and 43 reporting both parents had a drug problem. An additional 62 (16.9%) women reported a stepfather with an alcohol problem, and 41 (11.2%) reported a stepfather with a drug problem.

Other family dysfunctions were evident as well. Parental divorce (n=254, 68.9%) was reported by more than two-thirds of the women. Mental illness was also prevalent in childhood homes with 164 (44.7%) reporting someone in their home when they were growing up suffered from depression or other mental illness. Parental violence in the home was also common.

Table 2. Characteristics in Childhoods of Women Prisoners

	N	%
Single parent home	125	34.1%
Raised by grandparents	65	17.7%
Raised by other relatives	52	14.2%
Lived in foster home or with non-relatives	31	8.4%
Mother went to prison	28	7.6%
Father went to prison	80	21.8%
Both parents went to prison	11	3.0%
Someone with alcohol problem in home	229	62.4%
Mother had problem with alcohol	95	25.9%
Father had problem with alcohol	123	33.5%
Someone with drug problem in home	196	53.4%
Mother had problem with drugs	92	24.8%
Father had problem with drugs	71	19.3%
Parents got divorced	254	68.9%
Someone in household with a mental illness	164	44.7%
Father violent in the home	169	46%
Mother violent in the home	95	25.9%
Not enough to eat at least some of the time	101	30.2%
Physically abused	173	47.1%
Sexually abused	210	57.2%
Both physically and sexually abused	127	34.6%
Received services from child welfare	146	40.2%
Removed from home by child welfare services	48	13.2%

Nearly half (n=169, 46%) reported their fathers or father figures were violent towards someone in the household, with nearly one-fourth reporting violence was directed at them (n=86, 23.4%) and over one-third indicating their fathers were

violent toward their mothers (n=132, 36%). Mothers also exhibited violent behavior, with more than one-fourth (n=95, 25.9%) reporting their mothers being violent towards them (n=77, 21%) or their fathers (n=43, 11.7%).

The women also reported high levels of abuse and neglect. Almost one-third (n=101, 30.2%) reported not having enough to eat at least sometimes. Reports of physical abuse (n=173, 47.1%) were common in the sample, and 210 (57.2%) reported childhood sexual abuse. More than two-thirds of the women (n=256, 69.8%) experienced either physical or sexual abuse, with more than one third (n=127, 34.6%) reporting both types of abuse. Child welfare authorities were often involved, with 146 (40.2%) reporting receiving services from Child Welfare agencies, and 48 (13.2%) reporting that they had been removed from the home at least once.

Table 3. Problems Women Prisoners Experienced as Juveniles

	N	%
Ran away	201	54.8%
Arrested as a juvenile	137	37.3%
Incarcerated as a juvenile	81	22.1%
Birth of first child before age 18	105	28.6%

These women also reported they had run away (n=201, 54.8%) or gotten into trouble with the law, with 137 (37.3%) reporting being arrested as a juvenile and 81 (22.1%) reporting being incarcerated as a juvenile. Furthermore, the

women tended to be young mothers, possibly ill-equipped to raise children. Many had children before the age of 20, with 105 (28.6%) reporting their first child was born before they were age 18. The mean age at the birth of the first child was 19 years, and the most common (modal) age at birth of first child was only age 16.

Thus, it is clear that these women tended to come from homes characterized by crime, violence, neglect and abuse. They responded to abuse and dysfunction in the home by running away, getting into legal trouble, or having children. Not surprisingly the same was also clear in their lives after the age of 18. Nearly half (n=167, 45.5%) reported experiencing at least one rape after the age of 18. Additionally, 243 (66.2%) of the women reported that in their last relationship in the year before coming to prison, their partner had physically abused them, with 132 (36%) reporting a sprain, bruise or cut, 40 (10.9%) reporting a broken bone as a result of the abuse and 48 (13.1%) seeking medical care as a result. In contrast, 198 (54%) reported having physically perpetrated abuse on their partners. However, only 36 (9.8%) reported that their partner had a sprain, bruised or cut from violence the woman directed at the partners, 5 (1.4%) reported that the partner had a broken bone as a result of the woman's violence, and 9 (2.5%) harmed the partner enough the partner had to seek care from a doctor. It is clear that these women were more frequently brutally victimized than their partners.

Table 4. Abuse as an Adult (age 18 or older)

	N	%
Rape age 18 or older	167	45.5%
Experienced Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)	243	66.2%
Experienced sprain bruise or cut	132	36.0%
Experienced broken bone	40	10.9%
Hurt bad enough to seek medical care	48	13.1%
Perpetrated IPV	198	54.0%
Partner experienced sprain bruise or cut	36	9.8%
Partner experienced broken bone	5	1.4%
Partner hurt bad enough to seek medical care	9	2.5%

Substance abuse was also frequent among these women. In regards to alcohol, 158 (43.1%) reported using it once a week or more, with 65 (17.7%) reporting daily use. Marijuana use was also frequent, with 167 (45.5%) of the sample reporting use of once a week or more at the time of their arrest and 100 (27.2%) reporting daily use. We also asked them about their use of other drugs. The most frequently reported other drug used was methamphetamine, with 157 (42.7%) reporting using this drug once a week or more and 108 (29.4%) reporting daily use at the time of the arrest. Opiates other than heroin were the second most commonly abused drug, with 87 (23.7%) reporting using opiates once a week or more and 42 (11.4%) reporting daily use. We created a variable

that measured use of all drugs other than alcohol and marijuana.³ Two hundred twenty-six (61.6%) of the women reported use of one of those drugs at least once a week at the time of arrest and 156 (42.5%) reported daily use.

Finally, we used questions from the Civilian Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Checklist (PCL) to create a measure of Posttraumatic stress disorder. Utilizing the 50 points or higher cut-off recommended (ISTSS, 2014), 158 (43.1%) of the women met the criteria for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder.⁴ While we are not claiming to make a clinical diagnosis, PTSD has been highly correlated with substance abuse (Bloom et al., 2002). Left untreated, the likelihood that the women with high PTSD scores will continue using drugs to self-medicate once released.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE CHILDREN

The majority of the women participating in this study were mothers (n=313, 85.3%) of 818 children, or 2.6 children per mother. Some of the children are grown today but may have been affected by maternal incarceration since many of the women first entered into custody more than a decade earlier. Two hundred fifty (68.1%), however, reported that they still had minor children, for a total of 608 minor children (2.4 minor children per woman). Of the women who did report having minor children, 65.6% (n=164) reported that they were living with the children at the time they were arrested, for a total of 344 children (56.6% of all the minor children).

³ The drugs included in this measure were crack, powder cocaine, methamphetamine or other amphetamines, heroin, speedballs (an amphetamine or cocaine with heroin), opiates other than heroin, barbiturates, tranquilizers such as Xanax, PCP, bath salts and LSD and other hallucinogens.

⁴ There is another formula that can be used as well that looks at specific questions.

Of those women living with their children at the time of arrest, only 64 (25.2%) were married at the time, and another 75 (30.0%) reported they were cohabiting with a male partner. Thus, almost half were not living with a partner. This suggests that half of the children may have been left with no adult in the home, resulting in even more displacement and stress for the children. Indeed, the women who were married reported only 39 children were living with the child's other parent (11.3% of children living with mother at time of incarceration) and those who were cohabiting reported only 34 children (9.9% of children living with mother at time of incarceration) were living with the other parent. Thus, of the 344 children living with the mother at the time she was incarcerated, only 91 (26.4%) were residing with their other parent at the time of the survey, and almost three-fourths were not with a parent.

The mean age of the children living with their other parent was 7.6 years at the time of the mother's incarceration, and 35 of the 91 children (38.5%) living with their other parent had to move at least one time. Additionally, the children were frequently separated from other siblings. Of the 164 women who reported living with their children at the time of incarceration, 70 (42.7%) reported the children were no longer living with all of their siblings. This further increases the strain those children experience, exacerbating the possible feelings of abandonment. The impact on the risk of children's incarceration due to maternal incarceration as well as effects of the lifestyles of the mothers prior to incarceration can be seen in outcomes for the children. The survey respondents reported 10 children who were either in jail, a juvenile detention center, or prison.

While this is a relatively low number, it is important to remember that the ages of the children range from birth to 18.

Placement of the Children

The placement of the children during the mother's incarceration is reported in Table 6. As noted above, 91 (26.4%) children were with the child's other parent, and their average age at the time of the mother's incarceration was 7.6 years of age. The women reported 112 (32.6%) children living with their (the prisoners') mother, with an average age of 6.7 years at the time of their mother's incarceration. Another 15 (4.4%) children who were with the mother immediately prior to incarceration were now living with the prisoner's grandmother, and these children were an average of 11.1 years at the time of the mother's incarceration. Sixteen (4.6%) (average age of 7 years at time of incarceration) were living with the prisoner's partner's mother, and 14 (4.1%, average age 9.3 years at time of incarceration) were living with friends of the prisoner. Disturbingly, the women reported 33 (9.6%) of the children with whom they were living were currently in foster homes or agencies. Even more disturbingly, the average age at the time of incarceration of these children was only 4.2 years old. The remaining children were either with other relatives or the women did not know with whom they currently were living. In fact, 19 (11.6%) of the women who were living with one or more of their children prior to incarceration reported that they did not know where 20 of those children are currently living.

Table 5. Children of Incarcerated Women

	Number of Women (N=367)	Number of Children	Children per Woman
Women Reporting Children	313 (85.3%)	818	2.6
Women Reporting Minor Children	250 (68.1%)	608	2.4
Women Reporting Minor Children with whom They Were Living at Time of Incarceration	164 (44.7%)	344	2.1

Table 6. Placement of Children Who Were Living with Mother at Time of Incarceration

<i>Current Placement of Child</i>	Number of children	Mean age (in years) at time of Incarceration
Other parent	91 (26.4%)	7.6
Prisoner's mother	112 (32.6%)	6.7
Prisoner's grandmother	15 (4.4%)	11.1
Prisoner's siblings	41 (11.9%)	6.0
Prisoner's partner's mother	16 (4.6%)	7.0
Prisoner's friend	14 (4.1%)	9.3
Foster home or agency	33 (9.6%)	4.2

It is evident that the children are most likely to be placed with the prisoner's mother, grandmother or siblings. In-family placements account for almost half of the children living with their mother at the time she went to prison. The children's other parents had an additional 90 children, slightly more than one-fourth. However, it is of concern that about one in seven children were either living with non-family members or were placed in a non-familial foster home or agency. In particular, the young age of the nearly ten percent of children in foster homes is of particular concern.

Issues with Children

The women were asked to report problems their children had experienced, both before and since incarceration. The results are reported below in Table 7. Among the children who were living with the mother immediately prior to incarceration, the most frequently reported problems were school issues, troubles with friends and guardians and depression.

Perhaps of even greater concern is that the reported magnitude of the problems in virtually every case was higher than either before the mother went to prison or a combination of before and since she went to prison. In other words, the problems appear to be exacerbated by the mother's incarceration. Bad grades were a commonly reported problem. According to the women prisoners, 56 of their children (16.3% of the 344 children) experienced bad grades after the mother was incarcerated compared to 29 (8.4% of the 344 children) who experienced problems before the mothers incarceration and 35 (10.2% of the

Table 7. Problems Experienced by Children Before and Since Incarceration

Problems Experienced By Children	Before Incarceration Only	Since Incarceration Only	Both Before and Since Incarceration
Bad Grades	29	56	35
Expelled from School	14	33	17
Dropped Out of School	18	18	-
Trouble with Friends	14	51	22
Trouble with Guardians	21	49	24
Running Away	10	27	11
Arrested	18	19	14
Incarcerated	12	13	6
Alcohol Problems	12	18	16
Drug Problems	18	19	21
Depression	17	90	42
Suicidal	9	14	4
Became pregnant or got someone else pregnant	12	18	5

344 children) both before and since her incarceration. Similarly, 9.6% of the children (n=33) had been expelled prior to incarceration, compared to 4.1% (n=14) before incarceration and 4.9% (n=17) both before and since the mother's incarceration. Dropping out of school seemed to be less affected by maternal incarceration with 18 (5.2%) dropping out before she went to prison and the same number since she went to prison. In terms of trouble with friends, the other survey respondents reported that 51 (14.8%) had experienced this since incarceration compared to 14 (4.1%) before her incarceration and 22 who had

experienced trouble with friends both before and since incarceration. Forty-nine (14.2%) were experiencing problems with their guardians since the mother's incarceration, and 27 (7.8%) had run away from home since the mother went to prison, compared to only 10 (2.9%) who ran away prior to the mother's incarceration and 11 (3.2%) both before and since incarceration.

The mothers also reported legal and substance abuse problems among their children, although the differences between before and since incarceration were small, which would indicate that the children were an at risk population. Eighteen (5.2%) had been arrested only prior to incarceration, 19 (5.5%) only since incarceration, and 14 (4.1%) had been incarcerated both before and since. Thirteen (3.8%) had been incarcerated since the mother's incarceration, 12 (3.5%) before and 6 (1.7%) at both times. Eighteen (5.2%) had problems with alcohol only since incarceration, 12 (3.5%) only before, and 16 (4.6%) had experienced alcohol problems both before and since incarceration. Disturbingly, 19 (5.5%) had experienced problems with drugs only since the mother's incarceration, 18 (5.2%) only before incarceration and 21 (6.1%) had drug problems both before and since incarceration.

The most frequently reported issue in the children was depression. More than one-fourth (n=90, 26.2%) had begun to experience problems with depression since the mother went to prison. In comparison, 17 (4.9%) had problems with depression before the mother's incarceration, and 42 (12.2%) had experienced problems both before and since. The mothers also reported a few children who had become suicidal (n=14, 4.1%) since the mother went to prison,

9 (2.6%) who were suicidal before maternal incarceration and 4 (1.2%) who were suicidal at both points in time. Finally, 18 (5.2%) of the children had either gotten pregnant or gotten someone pregnant since the mother went to prison, 12 (3.5%) before the mother went to prison and 5 (1.4%) at both points in time.

Table 8. Total Number of Children Reported Experiencing Problems at all Points in Time

Problems Experienced By Children	Total Number Children	
Bad Grades	120	34.9%
Expelled from School	64	18.6%
Dropped Out of School	36	10.5%
Trouble with Friends	87	25.3%
Trouble with Guardians	94	27.3%
Running Away	48	13.9%
Arrested	51	14.8%
Incarcerated	31	9.0%
Alcohol Problems	46	13.4%
Drug Problems	58	16.9%
Depression	149	43.3%
Suicidal	27	7.8%
Became pregnant or got someone else pregnant	35	10.2%

To get a clearer understanding of the risk of these children, Table 8 reports the total number of children the mothers reported experiencing each of these problems at any point in time. In order of most commonly reported problems with the children at any point in time, depression emerged as the clear

leader. In fact, the mothers reported symptoms of depression in nearly half (n=149, 43.3%) of their children who were living with them prior to incarceration, with suicidal behavior reported in 27 (7.8%) of the children. More than one-third (n=120, 34.9%) had experienced bad grades, with 64 (18.6%) children reported as being expelled and 36 reported as dropping out (n=36, 10.5%). More than one-fourth (n=94, 27.3%) reported problems with guardians, and almost as many (n=87, 25.3%) reported problems with friends. Substance abuse issues ranked next with 58 (16.9%) of the children having reported problems with drugs and 46 (13.4%) with alcohol. Unsurprisingly, legal problems were also common, with 51 (14.8%) reported arrested and 31 (9.0%) reported incarcerated. Forty-eight (13.9%) children were reported as having run away at some point in time, and 35 (10.2%) were reported as having either gotten pregnant or gotten someone else pregnant.

It is important to look at the numbers reported in table 8 because these children are often at risk before the mother went to prison as well as during and after her incarceration. Unstable living situations, absent fathers, mental health problems in the mothers, substance abuse in the home and family histories of violence are considered risk factors for problems for children which ultimately translate into problems in adulthood. Specifically, children experiencing the aforementioned risk factors have physical and mental health problems, substance abuse and addiction problems and risky behaviors in adulthood. Thus, these are high risk children (Anda, n.d.; Anda et al., 2002; Dube et al., 2002; Dube et al., 2003; Felitti, 2003; Felitti & Anda, 2010; Felitti et al., 1998).

Early and focused intervention is needed to prevent adverse outcomes in adulthood among these children.

Contact between Children and Incarcerated Mothers

One of the biggest predictors of successful reentry is familial support. For women, the biggest predictor is maintaining an ongoing relationship with their children while incarcerated (Johnston, 1995). Thus, we explored the level of contact between Oklahoma's women prisoners and their children. Of the 164 women who were living with their children at the time of incarceration, 137 (83.5%) reported they were still allowed contact with their children. However, the type and amount of contact vary greatly, ranging from very consistent contact to almost no contact. For example, 51 (31.1%) women reported they were never able to talk with their children on the telephone, while 87 (53.0%) reported talking on the phone with their children once a month or more often. Mail was even more common, with 27 (16.5%) stating they never received mail from their children, while 65 (39.6%) reported receiving mail from their children once a month or more often. Visitation was the most complex, with 62 (37.8%) reporting never being visited by their children, 13 (7.9%) reporting visits only once a year, 39 (23.9%) reporting visits more than once a year but less than once a month, 17 (10.4%) reporting visits once a month, and 65 (39.6%) reporting visits more than once a month.

Concerns of Incarcerated Mothers

Before turning to the limitations of the study and potential policy recommendations, we will examine the concerns expressed by the prisoners

about the placement of their children. The women reported a number of concerns, including concerns about the age and health of caregivers:

I thank God that I have a praying momma. Even though she is blind taking care of my kids and my grandma because she got her legs cut off so I pray to God that she continue to be strong.

Grandfather is 60 and bad health and can not (sic) hardly handle this boy.

My mom isn't in very good health to be taking care of them."

My mother trys (sic) her best, but she is elderly on social security and in somewhat poor health. My brother's live with her also. She is a great mother and I appreciate all she has done and sacrificed for me and my children.

My mom isn't in very good health to be taking care of them.

Three of the women reported children in jail or prison:

Even though my child was involved in my crime, he needs to know I love him.

My baby boy is currently in Osage County jail for a crime he did not commit. My daughter and grandma was stabbed to death and my son is in jail for it, but did not do it.

My two oldest are in prison. My son has 3 life without parole sentences. My daughter is pregnant and on her way to prison. I don't think it would of been this way if I wouldn't have been in prison this long.

Additionally, four women reported a child was deceased:

My first son is dead. My second son lives with my older sister.

My son is deceased and has been for almost 5 years. My daughter was adopted by my parents when she was 14 or 15.

My son is now deceased.

Son passed away from sids (sic) 2001. Daughters were separated in 2002 and adopted out.

The most common issues included unstable living situations, children being separated from each other, and concerns about how the children were being treated.

My oldest boys were left to take care of themselves so they ended up on the street. I tried to contact DHS and they told me there was nothing they could do.

My son goes back and forth from his dad's to my mom's house. A woman I don't know takes care of him while at dad's. He mostly stays with my mom. The other location is unknown.

3 year old has moved twice.

At first I didn't know anything about my kids. My kids were in different environments and they couldn't see (each other). My son took care of his little sister just 6 months. I get letters and they are together.

He has been through several foster homes and I believe he is currently up or has either been adopted out.

My kids would be living with family if the case worker would take my family's calls.

My oldest child was given choice to live with non-relative at 13 or 14 yr. Not best idea because took him from real sister. He grew up without her.

Two of my children are in foster care. One of my children lives with my mom. One of my children has been adopted.

My oldest is with father in Michigan somewhere. I've never been able to find.

Daughter was with family- DHS took her from my stepmom who now finally faces charges for the abuse.

I fear my 15 year old brother is violent with her. I know nothing about where my son is.

DHS approved adopted families should really be screened more closely these types of homes do more harm to our children emotionally and mentally then anyone will ever know.

They moved from foster care to my sister last August.

Since I have been incarcerated my daughter was molested for 7 years by my ex-sister-in-laws step-dad and he is still out there, but she no longer lives there. I thought I made the right choice, but I guessed wrong. My

children have had a hard time since I have been in prison and I feel very guilty.

A number of women also felt that the children were better off with other caregivers than themselves. Poignantly, one stated:

I have 2 other children who live with my aunt and have since my prior incarceration. I love my children. I just don't feel like I ever learned to be a mom or had the chance with the drug addiction.

Although the majority of the women did not offer comments about where their children were living, those who did underscored the issues with separation of children, unsafe environments, and caregivers who are ill or infirm. It is clear that the state should focus on ensuring these children are in safe and healthy environments.

Limitations of the Study

The most obvious limitation of the current study is that we were not able to interview the caregivers or the children themselves, so information about the children comes from the mothers only. Additionally, although every effort was made to have a representative sample, participation was voluntary, and we do not know the demographics of those who did not participate or whether they differ in significant ways from the women who participated in the study.

Discussion and Recommendations

This research was based on survey research of 367 women prisoners housed in MBCC, EWCC and KBCCC in May 2014. The sample constitutes

15.3% of the 2,402 women housed in those three facilities as of that date. Thus, to understand the impact of incarcerating women, one would need to multiply each number by 6.54. Extrapolating, that would suggest that there were 2,046 women incarcerated in those three facilities in May 2014 who reported they were mothers of 5,346 children, some of whom are now grown. However, 1,634 women would be mothers of 3,974 children who are still minors, and 1,072 women would have been living with 2,248 minor children immediately before going to prison. Additionally, this is only a snapshot of one week in time. The true impact in one year's time is far greater because approximately half of the female prisoner population turns over each year. If the population that comes into prison is representative of those who are in prison, then approximately 8,000 individuals would have a mother in prison in Oklahoma. More specifically, this could represent almost 6,000 *minor* children with a mother in prison.

Furthermore, each year 3,300 to 3,400 minor children would have the mother with whom they were living taken away from the home to be incarcerated in the Oklahoma Department of Corrections. This does not even include the number of mothers in county jails throughout the state. Therefore, the number of children impacted by maternal incarceration is a major social problem within the state of Oklahoma.

The women in this report tend to be single mothers with low educational attainment. Furthermore, the women reported extensive trauma histories that could impact their parenting skills as well as put them at future risk of substance abuse. Indeed, over 40% of the women reported symptomology that put them

above the cut-off point for diagnosing PTSD. Furthermore, a significant number reported daily substance use immediately before coming to prison.

Notwithstanding the need for services, the majority of women will not receive trauma-informed interventions or substance abuse treatment prior to release.

This increases the risk of ongoing substance abuse whether they are re-arrested or returned to prison (Bloom et al., 2002; Covington, 2003; Richie, 2001).

Additionally, best-practices indicate the importance of continued treatment and support after release (Messina, Burdon & Prendergast, 2006). Currently, after-care does not exist for most women who are released.

Additionally, many of the women were serving quite long sentences and came under Oklahoma's 85% rule. The 85% rule was originally a Truth-in-Sentencing revision designed to keep the most violent and predatory offenders from quickly returning to the streets and further offending (Turner et al., 2006). However, over time numerous crimes have been added to the list. Because of the expansion of the use of the 85% rule in Oklahoma, many women are serving long sentences and are ineligible for "good time" credits, resulting in long separations from their children. While there are certainly exceptions, women who are limited threat to society end up charged with 85% crimes despite the reality that women offend less often than men and their offending is less serious (Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996). Women may be charged with drug trafficking for the tangential roles they play in the crimes of their intimate partners, or they may be charged with child abuse because a partner abused their child and they were unable to protect the child. While some women charged under the 85% rule may

have indeed committed very serious offenses, some are unwitting or unwilling partners in the offenses.

The findings suggest that the state needs to provide services to both the women and their children as an intervention, before serious problems develop. The recommendations of this report fall into three broad categories. In the first category, parent-child contact needs to be improved, including provision of transportation for children to visit. Additionally, if properly supervised current technology such as Skype and email could be used to foster more contact. These types of changes could be relatively inexpensive compared to the annual cost of reincarcerating the women or incarcerating their children at a later date. This could improve life-chances for children, especially younger children, who are traumatized by the loss of their caregiver. Research over the past three decades has clearly indicated the need for ongoing contact whenever possible. Women who remain in contact with their children are more likely to successfully reintegrate (Bloom, 1995; Bloom & Owen, 1994; Bowlby, 1988; Dowden & Andrews, 1999; Enos, 2001; Greenberg, 2006; Huebner et al., 2010; Huebner & Gustafson, 2007; Kruttschnitt et al., 2000; Petersilia, 2003; Sharp & Marcus-Mendoza, 2001). Pre-existing mental health issues may be intensified by stress related to separation from children and concern over the children's well-being, especially if the mother has been living with the children prior to her incarceration (Clark, 1995; Tuerk & Loper, 2006). In contrast, desistance from criminal behavior is linked to having ongoing relationships and contact with children (Giordano et al., 2002; Sharp & Marcus-Mendoza, 2001; Uggen & Kruttschnitt,

1998). Children also experience negative outcomes, including attachment disorders (Bowlby, 1988) and engaging in criminal behavior (Greenberg, 2006; Huebner & Gustafson, 2007), although some of the problems can be reduced through maintenance of contact and involvement with their mothers (Mignon & Ransford, 201; Poehlmann, 2005).

Fostering of mother-child relationships as well as dealing with the children's emotional trauma could be partially addressed through improved visitation policies. Contact between mothers and their children can be extremely beneficial to the child. For one thing, seeing the mother may help reassure a child about the mother's situation (Johnston, 1999; Mignon & Ransford, 2012; Parke & Clarke-Stewart. 2003). Additionally, the mother-child bond can be better maintained with regular contact. Mother-child contact is most beneficial when the mother plans to live with her children after release, but it can be beneficial in any situation where the mother plans to maintain a relationship with her children. One recommendation would be to ensure there are child-friendly visitation areas at the facilities and more programs like the play-day at Dr. Eddie Warrior Correctional Center in order to minimize the trauma to the children. Additionally, specific types of programs to enhance contact such as arranging with community organizations to provide transportation would be useful and have a positive impact. Transportation difficulties are frequent among caregivers, given the somewhat remote location of both the Mabel Bassett and Dr. Eddie Warrior facilities. This is particularly important currently, with high fuel prices and exorbitant rates for telephone calls from prisoners. Another suggestion made by

a caregiver in a prior study that had merit was to allow prisoners to purchase phone cards with canteen funds rather than utilizing collect-calling for telephone contact. Although there could be security issues involved with this, it does not appear that they would be insurmountable.

The second category would be more costly and intensive. This type of programming would include monitoring the children to ensure that financial and emotional needs are being met. It would also include provision of needed services. However, identifying where the most at-risk children are located and getting services to them remains difficult. In the past ten years, a number of programs have emerged around the state to serve this population, including Girl Scouts Beyond Bars, Project M.E.N.D., the Messages Project, Little Light Christian School, Big Brothers/Big Sisters Amachi Program, Camp New Hope, among others. Clearly, more are needed given the extent of the problem. Additionally, more programs are needed to support re-entry of women returning home to their children, as reunification with children after incarceration can be problematic (Arditti & Few, 2006; Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001).

The third type of recommendation would include providing more training, mental health and substance abuse treatment, and re-entry assistance in order to reduce recidivism and increase the stability of these families upon release of the mothers. Research indicates that women face significant problems re-entering. Jobs that pay sufficiently to support a family are difficult to obtain (O'Brien, 2001; Piehl, 2003; Richie, 2001; Seiter & Kadela, 2003). Additionally, the majority of the women need substance abuse treatment and/or mental health

support in the community (Richie, 2001; Sharp, Peck & Harstfield, 2012). Finally, joint counseling for mothers and children prior to release could help them address some of the issues that could lead to problems upon release. Ideally, successful reintegration would include counseling for family members as well as practical and financial assistance in setting up a household and finding employment. Released prisoners face considerable difficulties finding housing, transportation and employment. Many landlords do not want to rent to someone with a felony conviction. Likewise, employers are very hesitant to hire someone who has been in prison. Most prisoners do not own a vehicle when released, and many face a relatively large expense, often around \$700, in regaining a driver's license that has lapsed while the woman was in prison. These very real and practical problems must be addressed for a woman to successfully not only reenter society but also reintegrate into the mainstream.

When incarceration is the appropriate response to the crime, thorough assessment is needed of the homes where the mothers plan to place their children. Currently, although judges are tasked with ensuring there is adequate care for minor children, there is no requirement for adequate documentation of suitability of placement, nor is there a requirement to continue to assess the living situation during the mother's incarceration. One potential solution would be to shift this to organizations other than the courts. Systematic tracking of children would be costly. However, in terms of reducing intergenerational offending and other problems, it may end up being cost-effective over time.

There is also the potential that children will be placed in harmful settings, strongly suggesting the need to develop a consistent program for monitoring the well-being of minor children of incarcerated mothers. This type of program could reduce the likelihood of children being in situations where they are abused or neglected. Additionally, it is recommended that children be assessed for educational and mental health needs. The mothers reported that their children tend to have emotional problems, school problems, and substance abuse problems. Therefore, we recommend that the children be assessed at the time of the mother's incarceration and then at regular intervals, perhaps every six months, to determine their ongoing needs. This would assist in ensuring that appropriate services are directed to the children. Additionally, the mothers reported movement of the children from one household to another, and regular assessments could identify if this is creating any problems.

In conjunction with that recommendation, policies related to financial assistance of households with children of incarcerated mothers should be closely examined. Clothing, school supplies, and activities, often for more than one child, place a severe financial burden on low- and moderate-income households. If the families have not applied for state assistance because of concerns about the burden of repayment by the mother, the financial burden may be even greater. This is a realistic concern, as the earning potential of these women is generally relatively low, but it results in children not having some of their needs met, such as school supplies and clothing. This repayment of state services received is an unintended effect of welfare reform. The Personal Responsibility

and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PWORA) requires repayment unless the child support requirement is waived or lowered during incarceration. Legal assistance for women facing incarceration in getting this addressed is highly recommended. Otherwise, the newly released mother, often now responsible for the children, can be faced with overwhelming financial responsibilities which will negatively impact the children (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Petersilia, 2003). She will be required to pay restitution or court charges, parole fees, and often for substance abuse or mental health treatment. At the same time, she may be trying to re-establish a household for herself and her children, regain her driver's license, etc.

Counseling and support are needed for caregivers, children, and the mothers. Caregivers are frequently older, oftentimes grandparents who have assumed the responsibility for the care of the prisoner's children. Having a small child in the home can create social isolation, as well as additional stress. Providing more support to caregivers, especially economic and social support could help prevent abuse or neglect of the children (Dressel & Barnhill, 1994).

The majority of the recommendations in this report hinge on tracking the children from the point of incarceration until release and successful reintegration of the mother. This would require cooperation between a number of agencies as well as the court system. However, without some type of interventions and programs in place, the children of women prisoners, perhaps even more than those of male prisoners, are at high risk of becoming offenders themselves.

One final recommendation is important. Alternative sanctions such as intensive supervision probation, day-reporting centers or nighttime incarceration programs should be utilized in lieu of incarceration where possible. However, these programs will be successful only if there is considerable oversight as well as services to assist the women and their children improve their situations. Since the majority of the women sentenced to incarceration have a high school education or less, paying for substance abuse programs and additional court charges and probation fees, while a laudable goal, simply may not be feasible.

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