



## CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS FACT SHEET

### Incarceration of adults

- More than one in every 100 adults in America are in jail or prison<sup>1</sup>.
- On any given day, over 1.5 million children in this country—approximately 2% of the minor children—have a parent serving a sentence in a state or federal prison<sup>2</sup>.
- There is a disparate impact on families of color, with African-American children nine times more likely and Hispanic children three times more likely than white children to have a parent in prison<sup>3</sup>.
- Between 1995 and 2005, the number of incarcerated women in the U.S. increased by 57% compared to 34 percent for men<sup>4</sup> (Harrison & Beck, 2006). 75 percent of incarcerated women are mothers<sup>5</sup>.
- Sixty-three percent of federal prisoners and 55 percent of state prisoners are parents of children under age 18<sup>6</sup>.
- Forty-six percent of all imprisoned parents lived with at least one of their minor children, prior to entry<sup>7</sup>.
- The average age of children with an incarcerated parent is eight years old; 22 percent of the children are under the age of five<sup>8</sup>.

### How does this affect children and families left behind?

- Despite widespread statements that children with incarcerated parents are many times more likely than other children to be incarcerated as adults, there is no reliable research evidence to support this assertion<sup>9</sup>.
- Parental incarceration creates additional challenges for children and families often resulting in:
  - Financial instability and material hardship, with financial problems the most severe for already vulnerable families and caregivers who support contact between the incarcerated parent and his or her child<sup>10</sup>;
  - Instability in family relationships and structure, and residential mobility<sup>11</sup>;
  - School behavior and performance problems<sup>12</sup>; and
  - Shame, social and institutional stigma<sup>13</sup>.
- In addition to lowering the likelihood of recidivism among incarcerated parents, there is evidence that maintaining contact with one's incarcerated parent improves a child's emotional response to the incarceration and supports parent-child attachment<sup>14</sup>;
- Many programs and services for children whose parents are incarcerated offer promise in meeting some aspect of children's needs, but have not been empirically validated as having either short- or long-term impacts on children's well-being<sup>15</sup>.



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