

# Parents in Minnesota Prisons and their Children

In partnership with the Minnesota Department of Corrections, researchers at the University of Minnesota conducted a study of parents in Minnesota prisons and their children.

Over a six-month period (July 2014 – December 2014), all new admissions to MCF-Shakopee and MCF-St. Cloud were surveyed during offender orientation sessions.

The anonymous survey assessed:

- Parenting status
- Pregnancy status
- Number of children under 18 years
- Ages of children
- Whether children lived with the parent in the month prior to arrest
- Interest in parenting classes

## Minnesota Exceeds National Rates

Minnesota has a higher proportion of prisoners who report being parents and living with their children than national estimates.\*



**Incarcerated Men with Children**

**66%**

**51%**



**Living with Children Prior to Arrest**

**56%**

**36%**



**Incarcerated Women with Children**

**77%**

**62%**



**Living with Children Prior to Arrest**

**66%**

**55%**

\*Glaze, L. E., & Maruschak, L. M. (2010). *Parents in prison and their minor children*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics. Retrieved from <http://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=823>

## Significant Number of Minnesota Children Affected

The number of Minnesota children with an incarcerated parent exceeds the entire population of children in Shakopee or St. Cloud.



**Children with an Imprisoned Parent**

**16,248**

**Total Children Living in Shakopee**

**11,700**

**Total Children Living in St. Cloud**

**10,450**



**Impact**

Parental incarceration often creates challenges for children and families at home, in school, and in their communities. Children with incarcerated parents may experience:

- Financial and material hardship
- Unpredictability in family relationships
- Difficulty with school relationships and academic performance
- Poor physical health
- Struggles with mental health
- Social and institutional stigma

## Pregnancy Rates Among Minnesota Prisoners

Although often thought of as a very small percentage of the offender population, there are as many pregnant prisoners as there are prisoners with life sentences in Minnesota. An even higher percentage did not report their status, perhaps because it was not known at the time of the survey.



Prisoners serving life sentences <sup>+</sup>	5.8%
Prisoners report they are pregnant	5.6%
Prisoners did not report their pregnancy status	7.7%

<sup>+</sup>Minnesota Department of Corrections. (2015). *Minnesota Department of Corrections adult inmate profile*. St. Paul, MN. Retrieved from <http://www.doc.state.mn.us/pages/index.php/about/statistics/>



Three quarters of incarcerated parents are interested in taking a parenting class.

## Implications for Minnesota Prisons

Recognizing parenting status among incarcerated populations has important implications and opportunities for corrections' programs and policies.



## About this research

This study is part of a program of research at the University of Minnesota focused on understanding the strengths and needs of incarcerated parents and their children.

In partnership with the Minnesota Department of Corrections and community-based organizations from the *Strengthening Families Affected by Incarceration Collaborative*, we have conducted a number of projects related to the health and development of incarcerated parents and their children.

- An evaluation of the Minnesota Prison Doula Project, a prison-based pregnancy and parenting support program for incarcerated women.
- A study of children's visiting experiences with their incarcerated parents in county jails.
- An evaluation of the Extended Visiting program at the Minnesota Correctional Facility-Shakopee.
- Ongoing analysis of the Minnesota Student Survey, assessing the impact of parental incarceration on youths' developmental outcomes.
- The dissemination of Sesame Street® resources (*Little Children, Big Challenges - Incarceration*) for young children with incarcerated parents.

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