|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |

### *Incarceration and the Family: A Review of Research and Promising Approaches for Serving Fathers and Families*

# Characteristics of Incarcerated Fathers

## Contents

1. [Prevalence and Sociodemographics](#_Toc208309143)
2. [Parenting](#_Toc208309144)
3. [Type of Offenses](#_Toc208309145)
4. [Sentence Length](#_Toc208309146)
5. [Substance Abuse and Mental Health](#_Toc208309147)
6. [Research Limitations](#_Toc208309148)

* Of the state and federal prisoners who had minor children in 2004, 92% were men (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008).
* Over half of incarcerated fathers (54%) reported that they were the primary source of financial support for their children prior to their incarceration (Glaze and Maruschak, 2008).
* In 1997, most incarcerated fathers reported incomes below the poverty line prior to incarceration, with 53% earning less than $12,000 in the year before their arrest (Mumola, 2000).
* Among male inmates in state prison, 71% of those who were married were parents to minor children, compared to 44% of those who were never married, 55% of those who were divorced, and 64% of those who were legally separated. Among federal inmates, 77% of married men had minor children, compared to 58% of never-married men, 59% of divorced men, and 69% of men who were separated (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008).
* In a sample of inmates returning to Cleveland, Ohio, after incarceration, Visher and Courtney (2007) found that 46% had lived with a spouse or intimate partner prior to incarceration.
* The median age of incarcerated parents was 32 among those in state facilities and 35 among those in federal facilities in 1997 (Mumola, 2000).
* In 2007, a disproportionate number of fathers incarcerated in state prison were African American (42%) or Latino (20%). African American (49%) and Latino (28%) men made up a disproportionate share of fathers in federal prison as well (Glaze and Maruschak, 2008).

The percent of male inmates who were fathers, by age group, is shown in [Exhibit 2-1](#e2.1).

**Exhibit 2-1.  
Percent Fathers by Age**

**Source:**  Glaze & Maruschak. (2008). Parents in prison and their minor children.  
*Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report.* Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

## 2.2   Parenting

The average incarcerated father has 2.1 children. Their parenting relationships are often complex, with some men having children with multiple partners. Forty-two percent of state prisoners reported living with one or more of their minor children in the period immediately prior to their incarceration (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008).

* The average age of children with an incarcerated parent is 8 years old (Mumola, 2000).
* Most incarcerated fathers (88%) report that at least one of their children is in the care of the child’s other parent, compared to 37% of mothers (Glaze and Maruschak, 2008).
* Of children with an incarcerated father, 12% live with a grandparent or other relative and 4% live in foster care or with a non-family member (Johnson, 2006).

[Exhibit 2-2](#e2.2) shows the percentage of children of incarcerated fathers, by age.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Exhibit 2-2. Age Breakdown of Children with Fathers in Prison** | |
| **Age** | **Age Breakdown of Children with Father in Prison** |
| Less than 1 year | 2.1% |
| 1–4 years | 20.4% |
| 5–9 years | 35.1% |
| 10–14 years | 28.0% |
| 15–17 years | 14.5% |
| **Source:** Mumola, C. (2000). Incarcerated parents and children. *Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report.* Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics. | |

## 2.3   Type f Offenses

**Types of Offenses Committed by Fathers in Prison**

**Source:** Glaze & Maruschak. (2008). Parents in prison and their minor children.  
*Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report.* Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

* Most parents in state (62%) and federal (84%) prison were being held at correctional facilities located more than 100 miles from their last place of residence prior to incarceration (Mumola, 2000).
* Of parents in federal prison, 43% were held more than 500 miles from their last place of residence, compared with 11% of those in state facilities (Mumola, 2000).

## 2.5   Substance Abuse and Mental Health

Substance abuse and mental health issues are common among incarcerated parents:

* Of parents in state prison in 2004, 58% of fathers and 65% of mothers reported illicit drug use in the month prior to their arrest (Mumola, 2006).
* Based on the DSM-IV criteria, 67% of fathers incarcerated in state prison reported alcohol or drug dependence or abuse prior to arrest (Glaze and Maruschak, 2008).
* One-third of fathers in state prison committed their offense while under the influence of illicit drugs. Thirty-seven percent of fathers in state prison committed their offense while under the influence of alcohol (Mumola, 2006).
* Parents in prison reported slightly higher problems with substance abuse than did non-parents in prison (Mumola, 2006).
* Of fathers classified as having an alcohol or drug use problem, 42% reported having received any substance abuse treatment since admission for the current incarceration (Glaze and Maruschak, 2008).

Mental health issues also plague many incarcerated parents; 49% of fathers in state prison reported clinically meaningful symptoms of mental illness, as did 38% of fathers in federal prison (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). In general, rates of mental illness among inmates are two to four times higher than among the general population (Lurigio, 2001).

The intergenerational influences of family involvement in prison are strong. Forty-nine percent of fathers in state prison reported that a member of their family (a parent, sibling, or spouse) had ever been incarcerated. Nineteen percent of fathers in state prison had experienced paternal incarceration and 6% had experienced maternal incarceration (Glaze and Maruschak, 2008).

These descriptive statistics reveal the need for comprehensive services to prepare men for release, including relationship and parenting programs and other rehabilitation services to address substance abuse, mental health, and employment problems which may exacerbate family problems and increase risk for recidivism.

[

## 2.6   Research Limitations

Findings from the Surveys of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities and the National Prisoners Statistics program construct a basic picture of the characteristics of fathers incarcerated in U.S. prisons. Far less is known about fathers in the jail population, however. Given the large number of inmates held in local jails (780,581 as of midyear 2007), preliminary research on their fatherhood status and other characteristics is warranted (BJS, 2008).

The relationships of incarcerated and recently-released men and their current and past partners, are also not well documented. Regional findings from the Returning Home project represent a step toward generating a more complete picture of the family lives of these men, but national research is needed on fathers’ relationships and living arrangements prior to, during and after incarceration. In addition, information about these men’s attitudes toward, and concerns about, their romantic and parenting relationships is crucial for understanding the needs of these fathers and their families.

**Home Pages:**  
[Human Services Policy (HSP)](http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/index.shtml)  
[Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE)](http://aspe.hhs.gov/)  
[U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)](http://www.hhs.gov)