



# THE IMPACT OF INCARCERATION ON CHILDREN & ADOLESCENTS

*Parental incarceration has serious and lasting consequences for children, families and communities. Recent research helps explain how and why parental incarceration is so disruptive to a child's health and development. With increasing numbers of parents facing incarceration, it is critical to consider the impact that sentencing has on children.*

## 1 in 6

Minnesota youth has experienced parental incarceration.<sup>1</sup>

## 10,000

children in Minnesota currently have a parent in prison or jail<sup>1</sup>.

### ADDITIONAL RISKS:

Parental incarceration exposes children to stressful events and traumatic experiences. This exposure places children at a greater risk for negative outcomes.<sup>2</sup> These events include:

- Witnessing a parent's arrest.
- Witnessing a parent's sentencing.
- Being separated from siblings.
- Changing schools.
- Having both parents incarcerated.
- Experiencing 3 or more parental incarcerations.
- Lack of contact with incarcerated parent.

### THE HARMFUL EFFECTS OF INCARCERATION

**Academics:** Parental incarceration negatively impacts learning experiences and educational attainment for children and adolescents.

- Children with incarcerated parents obtain less formal education and are **more likely to drop out** of high school.<sup>3,4</sup>
- Children with incarcerated parents **fail twice as many exams**<sup>4</sup> and are almost twice as likely to report extended absences from school.<sup>5</sup>

**Health Care Access:** Children with incarcerated parents are more likely to have physical and mental health problems, but have a harder time accessing needed health care services.

- Children with incarcerated parents are **twice as likely to have unmet health needs** (including dental, vision and mental health care).<sup>6</sup>
- Children who experience maternal incarceration are at a **higher risk for lacking needed medical services** into young adulthood.<sup>7</sup>

**Mental Health:** Parental incarceration has a significant impact on children's behavior, emotion regulation and mental health outcomes.

- Children with incarcerated parents have **higher rates of internalizing behaviors:** depression, anxiety and withdrawal.<sup>2,3,8</sup>
- Children with incarcerated parents have **higher rates of externalizing behaviors:** aggression, bullying and acting out.<sup>2,3,8</sup>
- Students with incarcerated parents have **higher rates of mental health problems,** including self-injury and suicidal ideation.<sup>9</sup>

**Substance Use:** Young adults who experience parental incarceration are significantly more likely to use alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.<sup>3</sup>

- Youth report **using drugs and alcohol as a coping mechanism** to deal with the stress and stigma of parental incarceration.<sup>10</sup>
- Students with incarcerated parents are **more than twice as likely** to report using alcohol and binge drinking.<sup>11</sup>
- Students with incarcerated parents are **four times more likely** to report misusing prescription drugs.<sup>11</sup>
- Students with incarcerated parents are **five times more likely** to report using tobacco products.<sup>11</sup>

## Sources

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