**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.¹

10,000

children in Minnesota currently have a parent in prison or jail.¹

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**ADDITIONAL RISKS:**

Parental incarceration exposes children to stressful events and traumatic experiences. This exposure places children at a greater risk for negative outcomes.²

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.

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**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.³,⁴
- Children with incarcerated parents fail twice as many exams⁴ and are almost twice as likely to report extended absences from school.⁵

**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).⁶
- Children who experience maternal incarceration are at a higher risk for lacking needed medical services into young adulthood.⁷

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

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

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


