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

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.

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


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