



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 jail¹.

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 exams**⁴ 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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