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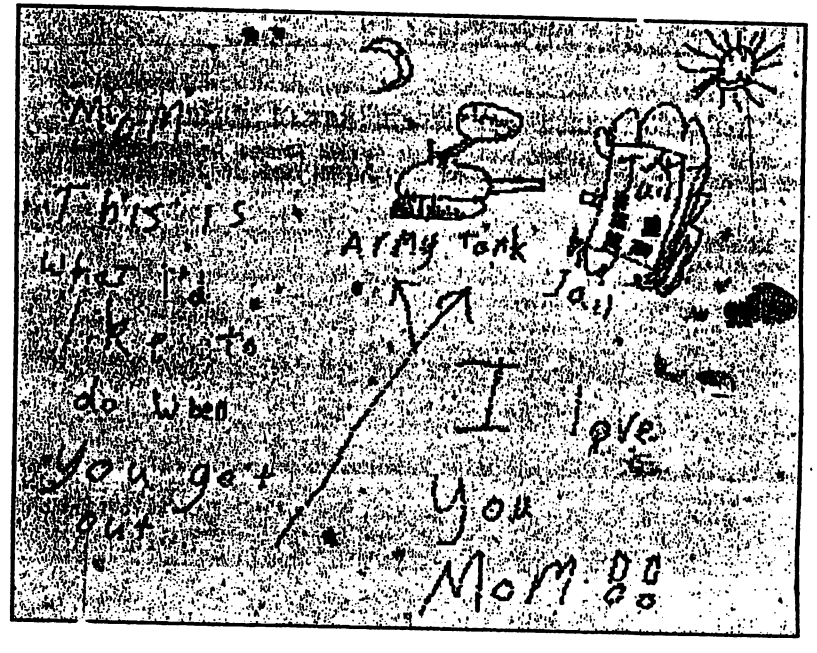
PARENTS IN PRISON ??



A GROWING CRISIS!

Friends and comrades,

Nothing scares me more than a system that forces children to endure useless repression by the state. Mothers being locked in prison as first time non-violent offenders at an alarmingly increasing rate forces us to take this situation seriously.

As Anarchists we recognize that women prisoners (political prisoners included) are less talked about and supported than male prisoners so we decided to compile a pamphlet about mothers in prison to increase awareness. The population of women in prison has increased 500% since 1980 and 80% of women "serving time" are "in" for non-violent crimes. 80% of those women in prison today are moms and 70% are single mothers.

We are up against a system that is "anti-women" and "anti-child." A "judicial system" with pretentious, self righteous authorities and a mass population of people who "must be punished" to be molded into "productive" members of this authoritarian and capitalist society. Mothers and children alike. Recognizing the absurdity of this we began gathering info for the zine and about 2 days into it realized that we were ignoring a huge aspect of the overall situation.
Fathers in prison. Both of us correspond with fathers in prison who despite the barrier of a system that is "pro slavery" and "anti-family" are hopelessly struggling to maintain a relationship and provide some type of support to their children.

We recognize that there is a higher percentage of women who had custody of their children before entering the prison system. We recognize that women receive less support than men (even by the Anarchist community). We understand that women are less likely to have access to visits than men because there are less facilities for women and they are often shipped far from home. But as anarchists we feel that it is vital to our movement to support parents and not just mothers. We believe that we need to look closely at why women are less supported than men (especially mothers) and make that change while continuing support to men. So we changed the zine from mothers in prison to parents in prison.

Some of the articles in this pamphlet mention reform or resource addresses of groups that advocate reform. This is for those of you who are currently incarcerated and need immediate help. As Anarchists we see the system as a brutal reality that causes people to commit the "crimes" (be it criminal or political) they are locked away for and in NO WAY SUPPORT PRISON REFORM! We recognize the prison system as a structure that the state can not do with out. We work toward the abolition of the state and therefore understand the importance of ABOLISHING THE PRISON SYSTEM.

This zine is intended to educate people about parenting from prison and support those experiencing the nightmare of trying to hold a family together while clutched in the claws of a punitive system that supports "legal slavery" and sees "family structure" as a hindrance to this. It is our hope that it will stir emotions and create more motivation for those of us who have the power to stand the fuck up and abolish the state.

In struggle and solidarity,
Austin Anarchist Black Cross

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Books for parents, caregivers and professionals to read with children of prisoners

A Visit to the Big House by Oliver Butterworth. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1993, ISBN #0-395-52805-4.

I Know How You Feel Because This Happened to Me. Center for Children with Incarcerated Parents, Pacific Oaks College and Children's Programs, 714 West California Blvd., Pasadena, CA 91105.

Joey's Visit by Donna Jones. Cornell Cooperative Extension of Onondaga County, 1050 West Genessee Street, Syracuse, NY 13204.

Just for You - Children with Incarcerated Parents. Center for Children with Incarcerated Parents, Pacific Oaks College and Children's Programs, 714 West California Blvd., Pasadena, CA 91105.

My Mother and I Are Growing Stronger by Inez Maury. New Seed Press, PO Box 9488, Berkeley, CA 947099, ISBN# 0-938678-06-X

Two in Every Hundred: a special workbook for children with a parent in prison Reconciliation, 702 51st Avenue North, Nashville, TN 37209, (615) 292-6371..

When Andy's Father Went to Prison by Martha Whitmore Hickman. Albert Whitman and Company, 5747 Howard Street, Niles, IL 606487-4012, ISBN #0-8075-8874-1.

FATHERS IN PRISON

FACTS ON FATHERS IN PRISON

* 93 percent of imprisoned parents were male.

* 90 percent of fathers in state prisons said at least one of their children was living with the child's mother.

* 28 percent of imprisoned mothers said the father was the current caregiver.

* 57 percent of imprisoned fathers and 54 percent of imprisoned mothers said they'd never had a personal visit with their children since entering prison.

* The percentage of black children with an imprisoned parent was nearly nine times greater than that of white children; the percentage for Hispanic children was about three times greater than that of white children.

* 60 percent of parents in state prisons said they'd used drugs in the month before arrest.

* 14 percent of parents in prison said they had a mental illness.

* 70 percent of incarcerated parents didn't have a high school diploma.

A "stand up guy" in prison is tough, hard, quick to anger, violent, remorseless, and most importantly, emotionally closed. There is probably not another place in society where the most negative aspects of male culture so valued as they are in a prison

This is one of the reasons why even though parenting programs for women have been long recognized as being beneficial and integrated into the female prison regimen, it is only recently that the benefits of parenting programs for men have been accepted.

Dr. Larry Barlow, a Family Therapist in Tallahassee, Florida, acknowledged in a recent interview for the radio program LAW, POWER AND JUSTICE, that he had had a difficult time creating an awareness that parenting programs for men were important, and a more difficult time getting money for them. After all, there are not many people who are even interested in rehabilitation for prison inmates anymore, much less concerned with their parenting.

But, most men get out of prison, and as role models for another generation, they can set a good example, or a bad one. We, as a society, have to deal with the results.

It has long been accepted in the correctional field that a man is less likely to return to crime after he is released from prison if he has a family to go back to. This is one of the reasons why criminologists have argued for regular family visits to inmates in institutions in the least restrictive environment possible. Some states have even allowed conjugal visits for some prisoners. But, even when attention has been given to the relationship a man maintains with his partner, little attention has focused on his relationship with his children.

There are several factors which make this relationship especially problematic.

First, children are sometimes present when their fathers are arrested. The child, who looks at the father as the protector, sees that the protector can't even protect himself. The

RESOURCES

Legal Services for Prisoners with Children/ Families with a Future
1540 Market st.
ste 490
San Francisco, Ca. 94102
(415) 255-7036

Texas Inmate Families Ass.
po box 181253
Austin, Tx. 78718-1253

Aid to Inmate Mothers
PO box 986
Montgomery, Al. 36101-0986
(334) 262-2245

Committee for Prisoner Support
PO box 12152
Birmingham, Al 35202-2152

MIWATCH
224 Main st.
Little rock, AR 72206

Aid to Imprisoned Mothers (Georgia)
524 Larkin St. SW
Atlanta, GA 30313-1210

Chicago Legal Aid to Incarcerated Mothers
205 Randolph #830
Chicago, Il

Incarcerated Mothers Program
1968 Second Ave, New York, NY 10039

Pennsylvania Prison Society
2000 Spring Garden St.
Philadelphia, PA 19130-3805

The Program for Female Offenders, Inc.
1515 Derry Street, Harrisburg, PA 17101
(717) 238-9950

There are many more groups out there these are just a few that I was able to find. I have not researched any of these groups personally and if you need any research done or support of any kind I am willing to help you at and you can contact me at:

Anarchist Black Cross
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convicted, be behind bars until he turns 21. Not every child who loses a parent to prison will express his hurt as dramatically as he did, but one way or another, they will make their sorrow known.

We say we are a nation that believes in families -- we say it with particular vehemence each election season -- but we're not. What we really believe in is individuals -- as in "individual responsibility" -- as in "every man (woman and child) for himself." Mom screwed up? Make her pay, regardless of the effect it may have on her children and the communities in which those children live.

We are able to lock people up in the numbers that we do only so long as we see them as useless, extraneous individuals whom our society simply does not need. But the vast majority of female prisoners are mothers and caretakers; they are needed in the most fundamental way.

When I told the 16-year-old who had lost his mother at age 9 what the boy in Ohio had done and why, he had no comment, only a question: "Did they let him see his mother?"

salon.com | March 29, 2000



strongest figure in the child's life, does not even have the power to keep himself from being hauled off in handcuffs.

Second, when the father of a family is arrested, family income almost always drops significantly. Children feel abandoned by the father, and suffer economic deprivation because of his departure.

Third, maintaining a relationship with children while incarcerated is difficult. Women must frequently travel long distances in uncomfortable transportation to get to the prison where their partner is housed, and carrying children just compounds the difficulties of the visit. It's just easier to leave them at home.

Fourth, meaningful communication in a visiting room of a prison is difficult to say the least. This is especially the case for inmates who are not allowed contact visits and have to communicate through glass partitions.

Fifth, prison inmates are likely to have had a bad relationship with their own fathers, and don't have much of a role model to go by in trying to parent their own children.

Sixth, inmates are often embarrassed to have their children see them in prison. Some families maintain the fiction for years that the man is working elsewhere rather than admit to the children that he is in prison. Some men simply tell their wives not to bring the children back.

The Parenting Program devised by Dr. Barlow and his partner, Art Cleveland, asks men to examine things like the male inmate's relationship with his own father, the importance of the father figure in the life and development of a child, developmental stages of children and behavior that can and cannot be expected at particular ages, and what it means to establish a safe, secure and satisfying environment for a child. The program is information and skills based. It does not try to evaluate each man's parenting defects, but encourage men to examine those defects for themselves and come to their own conclusions.

Drs. Barlow and Cleveland have been impressed with the successes of their program. They find that men in prisons usually finish the program with an increased awareness of what it really means to be a father, an increased motivation to establish or re-establish a relationship with their children, and a certificate they can show to their partners in hopes of demonstrating their seriousness about maintaining a relationship with the child or children.

Programs such as this are not costly and if we have the chance of breaking a family cycle of fathers passing abusive behavior on to their sons, seems to me like we should take it.



Excerpts from letters:
"Far as my family goes I doubt if you can help, my wife don't like dealing with a lot of people. Takes along time for her to trust someone. She lost her job so she's straight up stressed out. Bills are past due, wife cant find a job been out of work for over a month. Far as what I need I learned how to do without and I could never ask for anything of you or anyone else when my wife and daughters have a rough time of it"

"I was checkin out that picture you sent me with all of your family together and it really makes me wish I could start all over again with my little girl. The last time I saw her and held her was 11 years ago when I was still in lock down in California, she was only 6 years old! Shell be 18 this year! I miss my baby so much it hurts, for the last few years the people said minors are not allowed to visit here because I'm still slammed down in a high security unit but we just got a new warden, a woman, and I asked her about allowing my daughter to visit me- surprise she said yeah. the only problem now is that since 911 she don't want to fly. she asked me if I would let her new boyfriend bring her. No way jose. I don't want her sleepin in the same room with a guy! Ill kill that guy. You better appreciate your daughters while they are young cuz when they are teens its a double headache"

"Far as my wife goes she's in my corner but has her struggles and theres always bills etc. So it is what it is. But the last few years its been more drama surrounding us. Basically in short, I fight from this cell to keep my family together. The waters seem calm now but I never know. I play the hand I'm dealt. In a nightmare situation like this, I'm fighting and praying for the truth to come out and trying to keep my family together. Thats life."

They may not understand these policies, but they live with their impact every day.

No sooner did the news get out that another child had brought a gun to school than Al Gore and George W. Bush weighed in from the campaign trail. Gore stood up for trigger locks. Bush -- an advocate of more prisons and longer sentences -- proposed mentors for the children of prisoners. If Bush were able to pull them out of a hat, 1.5 million mentors would be nice. But mentors are no substitute for mothers.

The war on drugs has had a particularly devastating impact on women, who have become the fastest growing, though least violent, segment of the prison population. The number of female inmates has tripled since mandatory sentencing laws were enacted in the 1980s, and the increase shows no signs of abating.

About 80 percent of female prisoners are mothers, and most of those are single parents -- the primary source of care for the children they leave behind. Before mandatory sentencing, judges could take children's needs into account when they decided where and how a drug-offending mother paid for her crimes. Now, federal statutes not only disallow such flexibility, they actually make it explicit that the responsibilities of mothering are not "ordinarily relevant" to sentencing decisions.

Incarceration, of course, is not the only thing that takes parents from their children. Drugs can do it, too. The children, in whose name this drug war is being fought, want their mothers off drugs; but not if it means they lose them in the process. Some states and private organizations have recognized this in creating programs that work to get women off drugs and keep, or reunite, them with their children at the same time.

Seventeen states now have community facilities where mothers can do all or part of their time along with their young children, instead of in prisons hundreds of miles away from them. The "Girl Scouts Beyond Bars" program has created troops in several states that meet in the prisons, where inmates and their children can eat, make art and sell cookies together.

These programs, and others like them scattered across the country, affirm something that those who advocate conventional incarceration fail to recognize -- that the parent-child bond, in addition to its private importance to the individuals involved, is a social asset that should be valued and preserved. If 1.5 million children have a parent behind bars, it goes beyond personal tragedy; it's a community concern.

When we incarcerate a drug offender, we do so, at least in theory, not because she is a menace from whom society must be protected at any cost, but because we believe she is caught in a destructive cycle that must be interrupted. But rather than being interrupted, that cycle is being perpetuated into the next generation.

About half of all juvenile hall inmates have a parent who has been incarcerated. The Ohio boy -- who was charged with inducing panic, aggravated menace, carrying a concealed weapon and carrying a firearm in a school zone -- could, if

What would it take to restore Susana's father to her, in body as well as in spirit? Universally accessible drug treatment in and out of jails and prisons? Not just second chances, but third, fourth and fifth chances for drug offenders who can't kick their habits on the first or second try? Support for the children of offenders, who are disproportionately likely to become the next generation of prisoners? They are questions we barely consider in shaping drug policy and sentencing laws, but ones that children like Susana can't afford to ignore.

"His love for me helps me," Susana says, "and his support, the way he tells me, 'Don't end up like this, you shouldn't be in gangs, you should be going to school and getting an education.' That helps me in a lot of ways, but I ask myself sometimes, 'Why couldn't he do it for him?'"

When the jailhouse is far from home

BY NELL BERNSTEIN

Last Thursday, a sixth-grader in Ohio brought a handgun to school and held his classmates hostage. He didn't shoot anybody. It wasn't his plan. After a teacher intervened and gave him a hug, he revealed his true purpose. He pulled a gun because he wanted to go to jail to be with his mother, who is serving time for a drug-related probation violation. That day, she was scheduled to be transferred from a local jail to the Ohio Reformatory for Women in Marysville, 150 miles away from her son.

There are 1.5 million children in this country who have lost a parent to jail or prison. The incarceration fever that caught hold in the 1980s and has yet to break (the United States held a record 2 million people behind bars at last count) has left a generation of children in limbo. Many will spend their childhood in foster homes, with aging grandparents or with other relatives or friends. Often -- very often -- they bounce from one short-term caretaker to another.

One boy, now 16, was 9 years old when the police came to his door. They arrested his mother, who used drugs, but left him and his infant brother behind. (He speculates now that they must have thought there was another adult in the house.) For two weeks, he took care of the baby and stayed inside, waiting for his mother to come back. He didn't really know how to change a diaper, but he thinks he did OK. Once, he remembers, he burned himself cooking. Eventually, a neighbor stopped by and called the authorities and he and his brother went into separate foster homes. He didn't see his mother again until he was a teenager.

Children may not understand the rationale behind mandatory sentencing laws that take their parents away from them for years or decades. They may not understand the "conspiracy" provisions that put their mothers behind bars for picking the wrong boyfriend. They may not understand the "war on drugs" that has swelled the prison population without reducing the availability of drugs in their neighborhoods. They may not understand why their mom is in a prison hours away, where they cannot go visit her. (About half of all incarcerated women never receive visits from their children, often because the women are housed in remote facilities.)

"Yeah, xxx will always be my lil girl but shell be 19 next year and wont really need me." I missed the best years of her life and these feds are partly to blame. Sure I'm in prison but these folks have kept me locked down in conditions Id rather not let my family visit. Anyways I'm in lock down so minors cant visit and anyway its too late because xxx has dropped out of school and with minimal communication with minimal communication with her I really don't have much influence on her. Never the less I am thankful that she doesn't smoke or drink or use drugs like a bunch of other kids her age."

"Its always hard talking to your sons about prison, When I was coming up, going to prison was almost a rite of passage. I was never afraid of it, I think I wanted to prove to my peers that I wasn't afraid of it, In fact, part of me was probably even looking forward to it. Prison isn't anything like its portrayed in movies. there is some sense of humanity that occurs within groups of men here. yet nothing in the moves can portray the deep sense of loneliness and self hatred that happens in prison. I love both of my sons and I want to assure them they don't have to worry about me.But I want desperately for them to realize prison is no joke and that a real man doesn't have to prove his manhood by coming to prison, If either of them ever came to prison it would be my worst nightmare. I don't know what I would do.

"I always felt ashamed to contact my son. I pretended if I wasn't around him then he wouldn't miss me. I guess it was "out of sight out of mind" In the parenting class I found the strength to write him. I apologized to him from the bottom of my soul. I told him that I had been selfish and when I was committing the crimes I wasn't thinking of him. I told him I probably wasn't even thinking of myself. I asked him to give me another chance to be a real father and that by being a real father I would accept more responsibility than I ever had before. I only have three years left in here and we could build a great life together and teach each other new things. I told him if he wanted he could call my Mom his Grandma and she would bring him to visit me. I want sure how he would respond to the letter and was pretty nervous about the whole thing. I was really afraid that he would hate me or worse pretend that I don't exist. Last Sunday he came up with my mom and visited me. I'm 30 years old and I held him in my arms and cried. I don't think I have ever been so grateful for anything in my life"

Incarcerated fathers are restricted from performing many everyday activities with their children in the visiting rooms. Such restrictions may lead to a role reversal between fathers and children which are confusing to the children. For example, in most prisons inmates are not allowed touch money. Many visiting rooms have vending machines marked off in a corner with a colored line painted on the floor. Incarcerated fathers cannot pass the line, so the kids walk up to the machine insert money and choose item. If the food needs to be heated up the children must put it into the microwave and wait while the fathers look on helplessly.

This parentification of children can be quite confusing and frightening. The children often sense that they have more power than their fathers do. The fathers are dependent upon the children coming to visit. Furthermore, the fathers interactions with their children are under surveillance in the visiting room and therefore interactions between fathers and children have a surreal quality to them.

FATHERS IN PRISON AND THEIR CHILDREN

VISITING POLICY GUIDELINES

Inmate Fathers are Parents too...

Frequent visiting between separated fathers and their children is important to the well-being of fathers and children and to the maintenance of parent-child bonds. Family visiting during imprisonment depends, however, not only on individual preferences but also on corrections policy.

Although most states indicate that the purpose of visiting is to maintain family relationships, parent-child relationships are rarely addressed in state-level policy directives. State policies governing visiting seldom reflects the special needs of children, the importance of frequent parent-child contact, or the nature of complex family networks.

These policy guidelines are provided to strengthen prisoners' family ties and enhance relationships between incarcerated fathers and their children. All have been implemented successfully by some states but none have been universally adopted, Although the focus is fathers, the directives apply to incarcerated mothers as well. Implementation of these policies will enable a state to demonstrate its commitment to the maintenance of prisoner-family relationships and its recognition that inmate fathers are parents too.

Visiting Schedules

Children and their incarcerated parents should be permitted to have at a minimum, weekly visits. Visiting schedules should be flexible and permit weekday, weekend and evening visits.

Prison visiting schedules are restrictive and permit visiting only on certain days at certain times. Schedules seldom take into consideration non-prison work and school schedules resulting in limited access for many families and individuals.

Frequent contact between separated parents and children is important in preserving parent-child attachments. Visits provide children and parents ongoing opportunities for sharing memories, creating new experiences, and remaining in touch with each other. Providing a range of times when children may visit enhances the likelihood of frequent visiting. Children's caretakers and other family members are better able to arrange visits when options which do not unduly disrupt their regular schedules are available.

Special Visits

Opportunities for extended visits (day-long and/or overnight) involving incarcerated fathers, children, and other family members should be provided.

Fathers who are in prison have limited contact with their children. Even those who have frequent visits are seldom able to engage in daily experiences that are part of being a family. Parents and children need to have opportunities to spend extended, uninterrupted time together in community-like environments such as the picnic areas, family trailers, and children's centers found at some prisons. Special visits permit parents and children to prepare meals and eat together, play games or sports, and carry out other routine, though meaningful, family activities. They also provide opportunities for families to celebrate special occasions such as Father=s Day, birthdays, and Christmas together. Theses special visits help fathers and children feel connected to each other, share meaningful experiences and special moments, and remain a part of each other's lives.

Permission and Escorts

Written permission from children's mothers should not be required for children to visit their incarcerated fathers. Persons who are allowed to accompany a child on a visit should include an adult on the prisoner's visiting list or an adult in an official capacity such as the child's social worker.

Prison rules often identify a child's custodial parent, an adult who may have little or no interest in the prisoner, as the sole source of approval for a child's visit or as the only adult who may accompany the child on a visit. An estranged spouse may not authorize a child's visit based on her relationship with the prisoner, rather that on the child's needs or interests. A child's custodian may not be opposed to, or may indeed be in favor of, a child's spending time with his or her incarcerated father, but prefer not to visit herself. In these situations, policies which require a custodial parent's approval or presence may result in the child's inability to visit.

Prison officials are not in a position to determine what is best for a child, to resolve family disputes, or to monitor complex family relations. A father's inability to spend time with his children should be based on family preference or court order derived from careful study rather than on prison rules.

Children's Visiting Areas

Child-centered, supervised areas should be established and maintained in all prisons. Toys, books, games, and other activities appropriate for children of different ages should be provided.

Corrections visiting policies, generally, place restrictions on social interactions between parents and children during visits. They, in addition, stress discipline and control of children and do not make provisions for child-centered activities. It is not reasonable, however, to expect young children to sit still and remain orderly throughout a prison visit. Even older children become restless and bored when talking is the only activity permitted. The visiting room environment should promote informal, relaxed social interaction between parents and children. Areas where parents and children can play together and where children may participate in supervised activities while adults spend some time in private conversation promote the maintenance of family relationships.

"I knew it was procedure and I should have gotten off of him when they told me to. But I just wanted to hold him because I knew that would probably be the last time I'd ever hug him, kiss him, anything."

Susana's understanding of addiction is remarkably empathetic for a 15-year-old who has grown up in an era of scare campaigns and simplistic answers. She understands that drugs have "controlled" her father and that his addiction has driven his criminality. At the same time, she believes her father "had chances to do shit with his life but he just never took them ... That's why I'm trying to take advantage of life, be a teenager, not just be in and out of Juvenile Hall, not being able to enjoy my time out there."

This is Susana's second trip to Juvenile Hall. The first time, just a few months ago, she was charged with auto theft and evading police after she borrowed a friend's car without permission, then crashed it into a pole trying to avoid being pulled over. She was released to her aunt under house arrest, with an electronic monitoring bracelet around her ankle. Not long after, she and her aunt got into an argument and her aunt locked her out of the house, causing her to violate her house arrest.

Susana is in Juvenile Hall now because there is nowhere else for her to go until her probation officer finds a group home that will take her. She's an athletic girl -- loves swimming, boxing, lifting weights -- with big plans to finish high school, join the Navy, go to college and become a professional bodybuilder. Her confinement is making her crazy with impatience and worry. She hates the idea of her father finding out where she is, but hates even more that she has no way of keeping in touch with him -- incarcerated minors are not allowed to write to, or receive letters from, adult prisoners, even if those prisoners are their parents.

That Father's Day is around the corner only makes it worse: Susana usually sends her father $120 (the jail takes $20 from each money order and she likes him to have an even $100), a card and handwritten verses from the Bible; he writes her back with his interpretation of the scriptures she's chosen.

The last time Susana saw her father was the day after he was sentenced for his third strike. Susana was there for the sentencing, but ran sobbing from the courtroom when she heard the sentence read. The next day, she went to see him in the county jail. "Mija," he told her, "this might be the last time I'll see you in a while, but keep strong and don't let nothing get to you. Don't let this get to you either."

Susana left the visiting room in tears, and entered a hallway flanked by blocks of cells. Often, when she would visit her father, other prisoners would whistle at her as she passed through the corridor. This time she heard someone counting quietly: "One, two, three ..." Then a chorus of male voices: "Don't cry, Mija. We'll take care of your papi for you."

Susana knew right away her crazy father had somehow orchestrated the performance. She laughed so hard she found she was no longer crying. "I was like, oh my God, my dad is too much." She tells the story with a visible blush of pleasure at the quintessential adolescent experience of being embarrassed by her dad.

Susana has counted the years that her father is likely to serve -- 18 at a minimum -- over and over in her head and can tell you without hesitation how old they will both be when he gets out (33 and 62); but she is a little unclear on what the span of years will actually entail.

"I'll still be college when he gets out, I think ... " she speculates vaguely, counting out loud the years she'll spend in the Navy, the years in school. She has agreed to wait until his release to get married so he can be there to give her away. "He wants to be that person, you know? So I promised him."

Susana doesn't have too many other adults who want to "be that person" in her life. Her aunt and her grandmother won't take her calls now that she is locked up; she has no interest in maintaining a relationship with her former foster parents, and no idea where her mother is.

The last time Susana saw her mother was a couple of years ago, when she ran into her on the bus. Her mother didn't recognize her. "I'm your daughter," Susana called out. "Which one?" her mother asked. For now, the man she can't write to and doesn't know when she'll see again, the man who will be behind bars until she is in her mid-30s, is the sustaining figure in Susana's life.

Susana is locked up in a juvenile hall right next door to the county jail where she came to know her father during sporadic visits over the course of nearly a decade. She's a pretty, broad-faced girl with wide-set brown eyes, a chipped front tooth and long reddish-brown hair that drapes over her county-issue sweatshirt. In a glassed-in interview room with white cinder block walls and a concrete floor, Susana talks at length about the dad who spent most of her childhood in the place she refers to as "next door."

"My dad's handsome," she says with a rare smile. "I wish I had pictures of him. He's tall, he's muscular. He has my face, with a mustache and thicker eyebrows, and then his hair is shaved in the back, shaved on the sides, and he slicks it back with gel."

Her father has told her stories, Susana says, about their early days together, when he was free and she was small and he would pick her up and take her places, carry her in his arms. Susana can't recall a single image from that time. Her memories of him start when she was 5 or 6 years old, when her grandmother would come get her at the foster home where she spent most of her early years and take her downtown to see her dad.

"We had to wait in a waiting room for a really long time," Susana remembers, "and when we finally got in he was behind glass and you had to talk on a phone." Susana's foster mother had discouraged her from talking about or seeing her parents, and so, with the narcissism of a small child, she assumed the conventions of the visiting room existed to obstruct her in particular: "I figured they were trying to keep us apart, and that's why there was glass and a telephone, and we couldn't touch each other."

Within a few years, Susana figured out where her father was, and why he was there. He, like her mother, was addicted to drugs -- cocaine and later heroin -- and stole in order to sustain his habit. As a result, he spent most of Susana's life in and out of the county jail ("mostly in").

Susana isn't sure whether her father ever got any treatment for his addiction, but she knows she never saw him in a rehab program -- only jail. She sometimes thinks about what her life might have been like had he been able to conquer that addiction: She might not have grown up in an abusive foster home where she was "treated like a slave," she says, or wound up behind bars herself. But she doesn't spend too much time on could-have-beens.

"Drugs control you," she explains, though she has no personal experience of addiction. "And that's why I think they practically controlled his life. They practically told him what to do. 'Cause when you're on drugs you're always thinking, 'I need more. How am I gonna get it? How am I gonna get the money?' That's all you're thinking about when you're on drugs."

But because Susana has only ever seen her father during his stints behind bars, the desperate addict is not the man she got to know. The man she describes is an affectionate, clownish dad, one who revels in teasing -- and being teased by -- his mischievous daughter. He is a dad who expresses his love for her openly and likes to offer stern advice that Susana values, but also mockingly dismisses.

"As the years went on, our relationship got closer and closer. He'd be trying to tell me what to do, and I'd say, 'OK, Dad, I'll do it,' but I'd be thinking to myself, 'What can you do about it?'"

When Susana was 13, her foster mother threw her out and she went to live with her grandmother, and later with an aunt. That was the year she saw her father for the only time without a wall of glass between them. His brother had died of cirrhosis of the liver, and Susana's dad was permitted to attend the funeral. Susana and her boyfriend went out and bought him a suit for the funeral, new shoes and a shaving kit. But he arrived at the funeral home shackled at the hands, feet and waist, accompanied by guards and police. The gifts Susana had bought stayed in the bag, and her father stayed in his prison jumpsuit.

"When he came in the room, he didn't look at any of us," Susana remembers. "He just went straight to the coffin and he was praying there. He stood there for a while talking to his brother. Finally he looked at us, but he wouldn't look us in the eyes. One of my aunts asked, 'Can we hug him?' The police officer said, 'You know that's against procedure, but go ahead.'

"I got to hug him first, and I was hugging him for a while, and then he went on and hugged everyone else. Then he came to me and hugged me again, and that time I didn't want to let go. A police officer literally had to pull me off him and he actually restrained me, put my hands behind my back. Then they took him. After they took my dad, the police officer finally let go of me.

Parent Support Services

Parent education, parent support groups and family counseling should be made available to prisoners. These services should be provided by social services staff who are professionally prepared in the social and behavioral sciences and who are knowledgeable about family dynamics. Both corrections staff and staff of community agencies are appropriate service providers.

The majority of men in prison are fathers. Although most want to be better parents, many have not had adequate preparation for parenting. Others have difficulty in assuming a long distance parenting relationship and in sharing parenting with an individual with whom they may have little influence. Educational programs, parent support groups and family counseling can help fathers better understand and respond to the normal developmental needs of their children and the special problems caused by parental absence. They can assist parents in preparing for visits, in addressing children's and custodial parents' concerns which arise from visits and in dealing with stresses associated with fathers' limited involvement in their children's lives. Family-oriented programs and services are also helpful in preparing men for responsible parental and family roles when they return to their homes.

Cultural Diversity

Visiting policies, programs and services should reflect awareness of and respect for cultural diversity. Staff and volunteers involved in these programs should reflect the racial make-up of the prison population.

African Americans and other minorities constitute the majority, or a substantial number, of the prisoners in many institutions. Since minority lifestyles, family structures, problems and expectations often differ from those of majority culture, different service responses are required to meet the needs of the prison population.

The presence of African American and other minority staff and volunteers in decision making and program provider roles increases the likelihood that different cultural perspectives will be represented in policies and programs. The incorporation of minority and family content as an integral component of volunteer orientation and staff training strengthens a correctional system's capacity to provide effective, culturally responsive, programs of high quality.

Conscious, deliberate, and concerted efforts are needed to develop and sustain visiting environments and experiences which promote, rather than inhibit, strong, positive family relationships.

Administrative Structures

Parent-child visiting policies and programs should be a collaborative effort of the prison administration, community professional and prisoners. Formal structures should be established to assure involvement of these different groups.

Administrators, social service professional and prisoners, even when sharing a common vision, bring different views and concerns to program development. Recognition of these differences is important to the development of successful program. Policy directives and program guidelines must reflect administrative concerns with security, safety, and order. They should also reflect professional knowledge about way to promote and nurture positive parent-child relationships and prisoners' concerns about their own parenting and family roles and needs.

Prisoner involvement is also important in creating a sense of pride and ownership among those served by the program. This type of involvement affects both participation and the desire to protect the integrity of the program. Policy advisory groups, project task forces, and joint staffing are among the approaches used to effect collaborative planning and program implementation.

These guidelines were developed by Creasie Finney Hairston, Ph.D. and are based on studies of prison policies and family oriented programs. The views are those of the author.

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notation: This study examined the attitudes and perceptions of incarcerated men towards child care d raising children.

stract: The study used surveys to attempt to determine the attitudes of incarcerated men towards sponsible fatherhood and parenting with the intent of moving towards building stronger communities d reducing the flow of individuals into the corrections system. The study proceeded from the llowing hypotheses: incarcerated fathers are interested in their children and families; incarcerated hers would like to assist in child rearing; and incarcerated fathers would participate in a program to lp understand how to assist in rearing children. Confounding factors with the potential to refine the quiries in the study were race, marital status, education level, length of incarceration, and age. rticipants in the survey were 838 volunteers from the inmate populations of three New York State isons. The survey instruments were the National Trust/Resurrection Study Group Questionnaire, uestionnaire on Family and Parental Experience, and Questionnaire of Parental Attitudes. The study und that: (1) incarcerated fathers were interested in their children and families; (2) incarcerated fathers ould like to assist in child rearing; (3) incarcerated fathers would participate in a program to help derstand how to assist in raising children; and (4) the attitudes of the incarcerated men concerning armth, discipline, encouragement, and aggressive behavior were similar to those that would be pected of individuals in the general society. Notes, figures, tables, appendixes, references

hesaurus Term: Corrections/ ; Surveys/ ; Questionnaires ; Inmate attitudes ; Children of inmates ; amily support ; Inmates families ; Corrections decisionmaking ; Parental attitudes ; NIJ final report

MOTHERS IN PRISON

FACTS ON MOTHERS IN PRISON

-There are now 46 women on death row nation wide

-80% of imprisoned women have children and of those women 70% are single mothers prior to their imprisonment, 85.7% of female prisoners (compared to 46.6% of male prisoners) had custody of their children

-Mothers in prison are less likely to be visited by their children than are fathers because women are shipped to other counties or remote areas of a state more often than men and because children of incarcerated parents are often moved for foster care

-A survey conducted in 38 states revealed that 58% of the prisons or jails serve exactly the same diet to pregnant prisoners as to others and in most cases do not meet the minimum recommended allowances for pregnancy

-Children of imprisoned mothers are five times more likely that their peers to end up in jail

EFFECTS ON MOTHERS

Depression - Inmate mothers may become emotionally despondent or "close-up" to bury the pain of separation so that she can do her time and get back home to her children. This response may worsen their child(ren)'s feelings of loss of emotional support.

Feelings of loss - Prior to incarceration, many women are poor and have very little, but

Inmate 83A6158 is my father. Both my biological parents have been serving life sentences since I was 14 months old. After their arrest I was adopted by their friends, my other parents, who already had two children, my brothers. This visit may be my grandmother's last. I remember when she took care of me; now I steady her while we walk.

As we enter the loud, crowded visiting room, I rush my father. Our embrace is restricted by the wide table separating us, but it's great to feel his powerful arms around me. Usually my father is delighted when he sees me but today his eyes are sad. His best friend in prison has died of AIDS. Although prison deaths are common, this untimely news casts a pall.

As we talk, my attention is drawn to the families around us: crying newborn babies, couples huddling for privacy, men and boys playing silent games of checkers. The remaining hours pass too quickly and soon Jennings' voice, made harsh by his callous task, drones over the intercom that visiting hours are over.

The goodbye ritual is wrenching, and leaves us slightly self-conscious. While my grandmother and I move back through the labyrinth of gates and buildings, it is my father's turn to be strip-searched, normal procedure after any visit.

Many hours later, I walk in my front door. I'm home again. As I exchange hugs with my brothers, the phone rings. The automated voice recites a message I know by rote: "Hello, you have a collect call from a New York state correctional facility. If you will pay, press 5 now." It's my father, checking in, glowing from our time together.

I see prisons all around me. Tasting the cool water of a river, stretching out on a double bed, racing to school -- in some measure my freedom must compensate for their imprisonment. Every day I combine two lives: one immersed in the stability of privilege and the other meeting the challenges of degradation.

Oddly enough, wrestling with these worlds has extended my vision and generated a plethora of possibilities. I make choices judiciously. Tenacity and diligence are my allies.

"A policeman had to pry me away from him"

As far as the law is concerned, once your dad is in prison, he's not your dad anymore.

By Nell Bernstein

June 14, 2000 | Susana recalls touching her father only once, in an embrace that ended with police intervention. In 15 years, her father has never been able to feed her, support her or protect her. Yet Susana's father is the most important person in her life, the one person she knows loves her -- the only real parent she has.

Susana's dad is an inmate at San Quentin State Prison, serving 21 years to life under California's rigid "three strikes" sentencing law. Caught four years ago with stolen property -- and not for the first time -- he's been determined by the court to be of no further value outside of prison. Unfortunately, he is of vital importance to Susana (not her real name).

There are more than 1.5 million men incarcerated in the United States today. The majority of them are fathers. It's a role that may not have been central to their lives before they were arrested -- most did not live with their children, nor with the mothers of those children. Certainly their status as fathers is barely recognized by prison administrators or advocacy groups. Of the limited number of programs that aim to sustain family bonds during incarceration, the great majority are aimed at female prisoners.

On one level, it's a bias that makes sense. When children lose a mother to jail or prison, they often lose a caretaker and provider; when they lose a father, they are more likely to lose a visitor. But of the 10 million children whose lives have been touched by parental incarceration, the vast majority has experienced the loss of a father. In sheer numbers, these missing fathers represent an absence to be reckoned with. And as Susana's experience indicates, just because your dad didn't live with you before he was arrested doesn't mean you don't miss him or need him once he is gone.

"Early one Wednesday morning, about 10 kids, ages 5 to 11, are splayed out on the couches and chairs at the Incarcerated Mothers Program Center in East Harlem. A caseworker is telling them what to expect when they visit their mothers in prison. Many of the children, though, said they know the drill. Face forward, arms up, legs apart. Turn around, bend over and keep the arms out.

The children are not taking part in an exercise class. Instead, they are demonstrating to Gail Copeland, a caseworker at the center, that they know hot to be searched."

"They must endure invasive body searches just like adults. Then there's the frightening clang of doors slamming shut. Once inside the noisy visiting room, kids must shout at the top of their logs. In most state and federal prisons, children are allowed to hug and kiss their moms, but in many jails in which women are awaiting trial and sentencing, contact is forbidden. A pane of thick glass separates the mother and child, which can be yet another trauma."

"When he saw his mother come out, his little hand went to the glass," Smith says. "But when he realized he couldn't touch her, he just started screaming."

"April Rivera, a four-year-old from Miami, is singing the theme song to Barney with her mother. "I love you. You love me," she chirps. "We're a happy family." Even a purple dinosaur, however, can tell this isn't quite true. April's mom Regla Sanchez, 26, is inmate No. 162850 at the Hernando Correctional Institution, 320 miles away in Brooksville, FLA., and April is looking at an image of her mother on a computer screen. This virtual family visit is part of a new pilot program, Reading Family Ties, run by the Florida Department of Corrections in and effort to help incarcerated mothers and their kids bond. But when her mom disappears from the screen, April's face crumples. "It's hard", says Isabel Strausser, the program's Miami coordinator. "A lot of times kids cry and beg me to let their mothers go."

In prison again

I am the son of inmate 83A6158.

By Chesa Boudin

Jan. 18, 2001 | The metal detector goes off for the fifth time. The officers remove my 80-year-old grandmother's shoes and belt, ushering her into a private room for a thorough strip-search. This humiliating process verifies what I've been telling them all along: She has a metal hip. We pass the rest of the inspection, our hands are stamped with invisible ink and we proceed through three thick steel gates. As I step forward to check in with the next guard, my grandmother retreats to the bathroom to compose herself.

I have visited maximum-security prisons for 17 years and become acquainted with a soft-spoken guard named Jennings, who also happens to be an internationally ranked chess player. Although what I know about his everyday role as a correctional officer is vividly engraved in my mind, I talk to him easily. We chat about his son's accomplishments before he picks up a house phone to call for prisoner 83A6158.

As my grandmother approaches, Jennings jots down the names of two chess books and a Web site for me to carry back to my high school club. Nodding goodbye, my grandmother and I hold out our hands and the translucent ink glows faintly under the ultraviolet light. Jennings unlocks another gate, the final obstacle in our three-hour odyssey. I'm in prison again.

Feelings of guilt and failure - Women may feel that they are inadequate as a mother.

Fear of reunion - Mothers in prison may fear the difficulties of re-adjusting to family life after release.

"Everyday when my children are spread apart from each other, someone is preparing their daily meal at dinner time. About 400 miles away, their mother is sitting on a bunk bed, listening to music, crocheting, reading, writing a letter or just relaxing ... something is terribly wrong with this picture. There are other alternatives to this situation; solutions that would benefit the welfare of the children."



Lovetta Clark

Age 43, serving 30 years

charged with conspiracy to import and distribute cocaine

"My children are the ones that are suffering the most. My son, Stanley, always asked me, 'Mama, when are you coming home?' I replied, 'Soon.' After six years he said, 'Mama, soon sure takes a long, long time.' "

- Lovetta Clark

Photo: Lovetta Clark with her son, Stanley, and daughter, Kaniesha.

"They have made orphans of the children. They cry and miss their parents whom they love and were good to them."

– Winnie Crowley, mother of Jodie Israel

Photo: Jodie's children, Tracy, Laura and Richard.



"I have four children who all live with family, but in separate homes and towns. My oldest son lives with my husband's mother. My husband draws beautiful pictures and my little son keeps each and every one of them in a box, three years worth. One night, he asked his grandma if he could sleep with the box. She went into his room later, and he had fallen asleep with his arm over the box... the only real part of his father he knows."

Second of two-part series. Mothers in prison often have sentences long enough that they run afoul of a 1997 federal adoption law and they lose all parental rights--no letters, no phone calls, no birthday cards allowed.

(WOMENSENEWS)--Dial up Michelle Spruill and her gentle voice recording tells you that "if you ever need a helping hand, you can find one at this number." On her other line she signs off, "God loves you and so do I." Knowing that Spruill reluctantly gave up two sons for adoption two years ago, a recent caller can't help wondering if the messages aren't somehow intended for their ears.

In late 1996, Spruill began serving a five-year sentence in an Illinois prison for various property crimes that stemmed from drug abuse. One of her sons was placed in foster care. Another, born in prison, followed. But Spruill was determined to eventually reunite with her children, so she began rehabilitating herself, taking parenting-skills courses and undergoing substance-abuse treatment.

Her efforts appeared to pay off. After two years, Spruill was released into a halfway home and she began the necessary court proceedings to get her kids back. There, however, she encountered the Adoption and Safe Families Act, a federal law passed in 1997 that requires states to move to sever a parent's right to a child after he or she has spent 15 months in foster care.

"Too little, too late," is what a state attorney told her. After waging a legal battle for almost a year, she surrendered her parental rights in 2000 so that her sons' foster parents could adopt them.

"I didn't want to," says 29-year-old Spruill, who says she's been drug-free for seven years and currently holds down two jobs in Chicago, including one as a nanny. "But I was certain I would lose my rights to my elder son. And my biggest thing was that my two boys stay together."

15 Months Becomes a Bright-Line Rule

Spruill's story has become a familiar one to the many prison advocates and service providers gathered in New York this week for the 10th National Roundtable for Women in Prison. The sponsor of the event, the National Network for Women in Prison, has invited Spruill and other former inmates to join discussions on the Adoption and Safe Families Act and on the other effects that women's crimes and incarceration have on families, children and communities. The roundtable will specifically address the role of spirituality and faith in recovery and the pathways that are leading women and girls to enter the prison system at younger and younger ages.

Lisa Paine-Wells, a program associate at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, says one good thing has resulted from the Adoption and Safe Families Act.

"It has put people's attention up front on children. And it has made states more responsible than in the past for permanency plans for cases in which reunification would not be able to happen for three, four and five years."

She and other experts also agree that there are situations when it is probably better not to reunite--such as when a mother has committed extreme forms of child abuse--but, otherwise, rehabilitation and reunification should be the priorities. And when that's not possible, foster or adopted children should at least be permitted ongoing contact with their birth mother.

"We know that children do best in their own families or at least in the same community. We know that children have a need to belong and to understand where they came from. And we know that, by and large, they always want to be with their parents," Paine-Wells says.

"It's much easier for a child to remain with her family than it is to adapt and bond to a new family."

From 1985 to 1997, the U.S. female inmate population tripled. According to 1997 figures from the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, the most recent available, on any given day more than 100,000 women are held in U.S. prisons or jails. The overwhelming majority of them have committed drug-related or non-violent property crimes.

An estimated 200,000 children have an incarcerated mother and more than 1.6 million have a father in prison, according to the Child Welfare League of America. But many experts believe the number of children with incarcerated mothers is actually much higher, especially as law-enforcement agencies are not required to gather specific information on prisoners' children and because many women, fearing they may lose their children to the child welfare system, do not disclose that they've left children behind in the care of relatives and friends.

- 1.5 million children have a parent in jail or prison; another 3.5 million children have a parent on parole or probation

- In 1993 (and on the rise since) 40% of male teenagers with incarcerated mothers had involvement with eh juvenile system

- 60% of women teenagers whose mothers incarcerated were or had been pregnant

- 1/3 of all children with incarcerated moms have severe school related problems

- Researchers concluded that the moms incarcerated interfered with the children's abilities to master developmental tasks to which adversely affected bonding their senses of security and increased harsh authoritarian parenting

- The population of women in US prisons has risen 650% in the past two decades. Of the more than 149,000 inmates currently in local jails and state and federal penitentiaries, 70% have at least one child under 18."

- Half of the 1.5 million kids with an incarcerated parent will commit a crime before they turn 18. "We're creating a new crop that gets bigger each generation," says Anne Holt, a consultant for Florida's Department of Corrections."

EFFECTS ON CHILDREN

Loss of primary caretaker- The majority of incarcerated mothers are single mothers.

Financial hardship- Often the incarcerated mother was the primary family wage earner prior to her arrest.

Loss of emotional support- This is especially harmful for children during crises, such as mom's arrest.

Stigma of prison- The mother's incarceration carries a social stigma which affects both her and the child. Children may be physically and emotionally harassed by other children.

Shame- Children may try to hide their mothers whereabouts; often children tell others that their mother is in the hospital.

Mourn loss of mother- Children experience mourning after the incarceration of their mother. They receive little sympathy for their loss unlike children who are separated from their mothers by divorce or death.

Fear for mother- Children fear that their mother will not be all right or even in danger.

10.

Parts of a Letter from a Mom in Prison

6/12/2002
"I want every one everywhere to know how that cop pushed my little boy down and then walked in my apartment without being invited and without a warrant. And I don't know if I told you but my 11 year old daughter was molested while she was staying with my ex sister-in-law in February and March. She had to be taken to the hospital, that is how child protective services got involved, then my family stepped in, but now after only 2 months my family don't want my kids. Three of my babies will be in an orphanage in LaPorte TX and my other son is in a boys home in Houston. My 13 year old son was forced to sell drugs for his cousins as they got him high and drunk. I swear I wish I had all the addresses to all the talk shows, I want something done. I'm in here for something I didn't even do then my poor kids have been to hell and back. Surely someone out there will listen to me and care enough to get involved, if there was just some way I could prove that cop lied on the witness stand, under oath and he pushed my son down, he called me all kinda racial names spit on my floor, told my kids to shut up and he had harassed me several times before that. He had been to my apartment before and I can give the exact date and time but he lied and told the judge and jury he had never been there before. Fifteen years is a hard pill to swallow, especially since "I" myself had not done anything to break the law and even more so because I'm a single mother of five young children that no one wants!"

3/29/2002
"I've literally made myself sick, I miss my children so bad. I've about messed up my pictures of them, holding them to my face while I cry. Something has to give soon I really don't feel I can take too much more."

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CHILDREN WITH PARENTS IN PRISON

FACTS ON CHILDREN WITH PARENTS IN PRISON

- Children of imprisoned mothers are five times more likely than their peers to end up in jail.
- Over 50% of imprisoned women report having experienced physical or sexual abuse. 25% of inmate women have been abused by their boyfriend or husband.
- The majority of the 90,000 women in prison in the U.S. are there for economic crimes.
- 80% of inmate women report an income of less than $2000 in the year before their arrest.
- Sixty to 70% of arrested women have substance abuse problems that are likely to resurface after release without family or social support.

- For the majority of children, watching their mother or father handcuffed and taken to jail can be a traumatic experience. It has only been in the last 10 years that social and government agencies have begun providing services for them."

But not all women have such a safety net. Since incarcerated mothers tend to be their family's sole caregiver, many of their children do end up in foster care, bouncing chaotically from one home to another. Some children are transported out of state, where they have little or no opportunity to visit their mothers in prison. Ripped away from all that is familiar, they experience separation anxiety, low self-esteem and a range of other negative consequences, according to the Child Welfare League.

Most experts view the Adoption and Safe Families Act as a laudable attempt to establish needed stability for foster children. Promoted by then-first lady Hillary Clinton, the law amended the Adoptions Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980, which provided financial incentives for states to make "reasonable efforts" to prevent foster care. The 1997 legislation goes farther by putting permanent placement on a fast track. This, added to the 1996 changes in federal welfare laws that barred felons for the first time from receiving federal welfare payments and food stamps, made a bad situation worse, critics say.

Foremost, the federal adoption law requires states to begin terminating a parent's right to her child after the child has been in foster care for 15 of the last 22 months. Many incarcerated women are serving prison terms longer than that. Exceptions allow caseworkers to examine individual cases for compelling reasons not to file.

Martha Raimon, director of the Incarcerated Mothers Law Project of the Women's Prison Association and Home, Inc. in New York, says however, "Many caseworkers have used the time limit as a bright line: Fifteen months and you're out."

The exceptions for when a state may choose not to file termination proceedings include when a relative is caring for the child, when the foster care agency has not provided appropriate services or when the agency documents that termination would not be in the child's best interests. But for an incarcerated mother to make a persuasive case for reunification, she must have regular contact with her caseworker, frequent visits with her child and access to a judge.

Number of Children Affected by Law Unknown

While no organization tracks how many parents have been affected by the law, or how they've been affected (one goal of the National Network for Women in Prison is further research on incarcerated women), Gail Smith, executive director of Chicago Legal Advocacy for Incarcerated Mothers, says she knows of women whose rights have been severed even when there is no adoptive parent on the horizon.

"We are creating a pool of legal orphans," Smith says. "Many of these foster children are not babies; they are not at an age when they're likely to be adopted. So instead of permanency it creates more foster care drift."

Once parental rights are terminated, the decision is usually final. "After that," says Raimon, "there is no contact permitted between the birth mother and child. No phone calls. No letters. No visits. And it's rarely appealable."

Spruill can attest to the enormous difficulty this poses for the birth mother: "If I can only just contact my sons, and talk to her [the adoptee mother]," she says. "It would give me some clarity and make me feel better."

Ann Farmer is a freelance writer who lives in Brooklyn, N.Y.

For more information:

Raptivism.com
"Mothers In Prison":
http://www.raptivism.com/site/mothers.htm
Child Welfare League of America:
http://www.cwla.org/programs/incarcerated/so98journalintro.htm
Women's Prison Association and Home, Inc.
10th National Roundtable for Women in Prison in New York:
http://www.wpaonline.org/WEBSITE/rt.html



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Dear Friends:

My name is Beth Cronan. I am 41 years old and a mother of three. I am currently serving a 28 year sentence for a drug conspiracy. I am a first time offender.

I was raised in a wonderful home with parents who loved me. I was the only child in a middle class family. I was always safe and protected. I was full of trust. I believed in our country, in justice and the American Dream. My story is a tragedy of a life destroyed and hope shattered.

After graduating high school, I went to work in my father's business as a dental technician. A year later, I became pregnant and was a single mother for several years. I then met a man, married him, and relocated to Florida. We had a son together, bought a home, and were a typical family for many years. Neither of us were ever in trouble with the law. We were active in the community, our neighborhood, and with our children. When our marriage ended, the bottom fell out from under me. I was lost. I finally sought help and was treated for clinical depression, but I still felt empty.

About 8 months later I met a new man. At the time I met him, I didn't know that he used drugs. A few months into our relationship he introduced me to crystal meth. In a short period of time, I had tons of energy, lost a few pounds, and there were so many extra hours in the day. Within a few more months, I was hopelessly addicted.

My life quickly began to fall apart. It wasn't long before I lost my job because I couldn't get up for work; I'd only gone to sleep an hour before the alarm went off. I no longer did any of the things that I enjoyed. I neglected my children, never opened a book, my house was a mess, and my bills were piling up. I no longer saw my old friends. They knew something was wrong with me but I didn't want to hear what they had to say.

Soon he introduced me to his friends who lived a life of drugs. A whole crowd of people who never slept and never accomplished anything meaningful. They spent a lot of time laughing at my naivetey. I wanted them to like and accept me, altough, now I can't imagine why. I became aware that they were manufacturing their own low grade meth. I watched and I learned. I was in way over my head.

Eventually, the man I was seeing lost interest in me and moved on to the next woman. I also found out that a few of these people had been arrested and the entire crowd was being investigated by the DEA. I sent my sons to live with my ex-husband, abandoned my home, and left for Florida with a girl friend to live the life of a fugitive. At the time I hadn't even been indicted. Fear, ignorance and addiction were my motivation.



I traveled from one person's house to another, trading speed for a roof over my head. From day to day, I lived a life of drugs. Within months, I was arrested along with three others in an abandoned house. I was the outsider of the group. I had no criminal experience. Not knowing the ropes or the deals to be made through cooperation, I didn't fare as well as as my co-defendants. Although they all had lengthy criminal histories, and I was the first to plead guilty, I received more than four times as much time as any of them.

Women who give birth while incarcerated not only face the trauma of immediate separation from their newborns but also administrative and social service pressure to relinquish their new child. The case of Kebby Warner, a pregnant woman imprisoned for a bad check, illustrates the institutional belief that inmates cannot and should not retain custody, or even contact, with their children.

Warner, after having been misdiagnosed as having a stomach flu during her first month in prison, was informed that she was pregnant. Luckily, Warner's parents agreed to take care of the baby while she was incarcerated. After the birth of Helen, Warner refused to passively accept the prison requirement that separates mother and newborn after only one day: she refused to eat and thus won two more days in the hospital with her child. When the guards finally managed to separate them and bring her back to prison, she was told that if she had wanted to have children, she should have stayed out of prison. This one remark sums up the prevailing view of inmate mothers.

Although her parents had custody of her daughter, the pain and stress of separation still weighed upon her mind, leading to anger and fights with other inmates, disciplinary tickets and "the reputation of defiance," which resulted in a denial of parole. With the death of her father, however, came another loss: her mother, unwilling to care for a half-black baby alone, gave Helen to the foster care system.

The law allows for the termination of parental rights after two years. In Warner's case, this was certainly true. When her daughter was two years old, a judge terminated Warner's parental rights on the grounds that she "'neglected and abused my child due to the length of my incarceration.'" When she started to appeal this decision, her caseworker and the Family Independence Agency threatened to place Helen with a new foster family who would adopt her immediately, thus permanently sealing her file and preventing Warner from ever being able to find her. Under this pressure, Warner finally signed an affidavit relinquishing her rights as a parent.

However, this loss inspired Warner to action against the prison-industrial complex's policy of breaking up families: she is currently forming a support organization for incarcerated parents. The organization she envisions "will stand at the courthouse and protest the kidnapping of a child that deserves to know who her mother/father is."[24] Thus, although the prison-industrial complex negatively impacts families and severs family ties in an attempt to break the individual inmate, women both collectively and individually resist such efforts.

Center is administered by the Brooklyn Diocese of Catholic Charities and funded by the state's Department of Correctional Services.[16] However, under the Center's auspices, inmates, realizing the need for supportive programs for mothers, organized two parenting courses for Bedford's inmates--one on infancy for new mothers and pregnant prisoners and the other a ten-week course called "Parenting Through Films," with each week devoted to a new subject on growth and care for children.[17] These were the prison's first courses both organized and taught exclusively by inmates. Out of the Children's Center also came more far-reaching change. Until 1983, children of prisoners placed in the New York State foster care system did not have the legal right to visit their parents in prison. Inmates at Bedford Hills who had been unable to have their children visit them because of this formed the Foster Care Committee which, with the help of outside advocates, led to new legislation not only giving prisoners with children in foster care the same rights and responsibilities as parents who are not incarcerated but also the right to monthly visits provided that the prison was not too far away.[18] In addition, inmates involved in the Children's Center published a foster care handbook for women prisoners whose children had been placed in the foster care system.[19]

The success of the Children's Center did not go unnoticed by the more reform-oriented penal authorities: Modeled on the Children's Center, a similar nursery at the Taconic Correctional Facility opened in 1990 with twenty-three inmate mothers.[20]

That prisoners strive to maintain contact with their children and other family members can also be a reason not to do anything that would label them as "troublemakers" or "rabblerousers." "They [the prison staff and administration] would attack people [advocating for reform] through their emotions," stated one inmate at Bedford Hills. "Like the family would come in to visit somebody and they wouldn't find the inmate's chart and tell the family they weren't there and turn the family away at the gate."[21] Another inmate claimed that prisoners who publicly criticize the Bedford Hills personnel were often denied entry into the facility's Family Reunion Program.[22] Women inmates impregnated by prison staff may also be denied participation in the nursery program solely because of the father's status. Human Rights Watch found that two of the women they interviewed who had been sexually assaulted and impregnated by prison staff were denied entry.[23] Thus, an inmate's desire to spend (more) time with her child(ren) can also be used to dissuade her from organizing for change.

Due to their testimony against me, I went from being a somewhat pathetic drug addict to the leader of the "conspiracy". I was labeled a "master cook" with the capability of producing 1 to 3 kilos of "Ice". This is pure high grade meth of which I had never seen, much less produced. According to the testimony of my co-defendants, I was solely responsible for their ultimate decline.

On my attorney's advice, I pled guilty. He believed that I would receive three to five years. The government tried to give me life. I received 28 years instead. If I serve my complete sentence, I will be released at the age of 64. I will be destitute....I will have nothing.

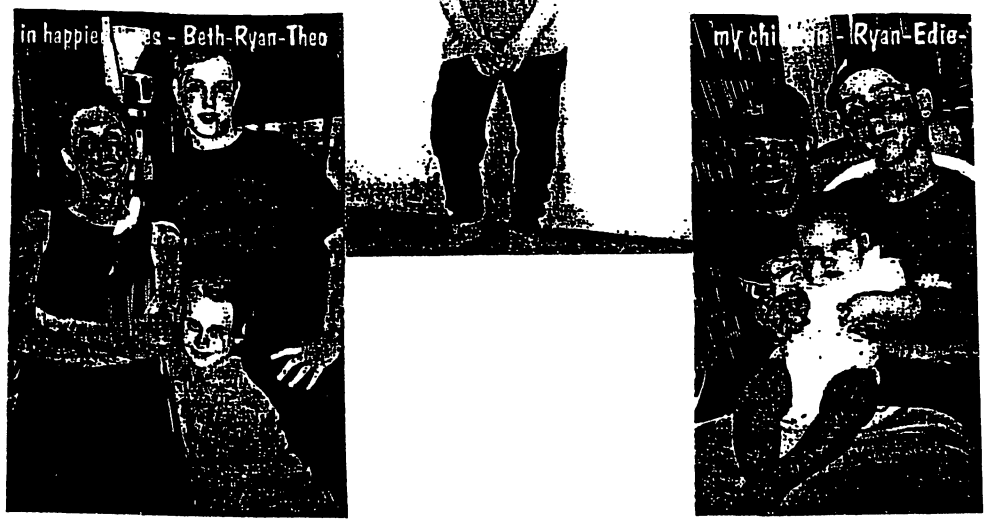
In the three years of my incarceration, I have done a lot of soul searching. I have looked at what led me to the extremely poor choices that I made. I have attended programs to enrich my life and have become a very spiritual person. I have also renewed my family ties. I am once again working as a dental technician in the prison. I am trying to overcome the shame and guilt for the damage I have done to my family. I've made a lot of progress, and I would never repeat my mistakes if I were given another chance.

I delivered my daughter alone with my leg shackled to a hospital bed. I have missed every day of her life. My sons are almost grown now. In here, you cling to any thread of hope. Any rumor of a change in the mandatory sentencing law, which you know is simply that, a rumor. You wait on justice and you wait on God. You just continue to fight the good fight and pray that you are not alone.

Thank you.....

Beth Crowen

2001 missing my children so much



Separation from children is another major issue for women inmates. In 1998, nore than a quarter million children under the age of eighteen had a mother behind bars.[1] When a 1990 American Correctional Association survey asked women prisoners to name 'the most important person[s] in your life," fifty-two percent identified their children.[2] These numbers should warrant that *all* women's prisons have family and parenting programs available. However, such is not the case. Inmate mothers, many of whom were single heads of household prior to incarceration, are left on their own to navigate the rocky path of maintaining contact and custody of their children. Faith argues that this lack is due to the idea that "no woman who has used drugs, worked as a prostitute or otherwise shown 'deviant' or criminal tendencies can be a 'good' mother."[3] Women prisoners are viewed as incapable of being good mothers and thus do not automatically deserve the same respect and treatment accorded to mothers on the outside. While this nay be the case in some instances, such as drug-addicted mothers, such a sweeping generalization ignores the fact that many inmate mothers were single heads of household, he sole provider for their children and may have been forced to rely on illegal means to upport their family. The view of the inmate mother as somehow unfit and unworthy has been used to legitimate prison and social services policies regarding the children of mprisoned parents. A 1978 directive of the Department of Social Services specified that t can refuse imprisoned parents visits with their children placed in foster care if it elieves that visits will hurt the children.[4] In 1997, the Federal Adoption and Safe Families Act (AFSA) was enacted, reducing the time in which children may remain in oster care before parental rights are terminated. Under this act, if an incarcerated parent oes not have contact with his or her child for six months, he or she can be charged with abandonment" and lose parental rights. If the child is in foster care for fifteen of the last wenty-two months, the state can terminate parental rights. Once these rights are rminated, parents have no legal relationship with their children and are not permitted to ave any contact with them.[5]

Maintaining family ties, however, is not an issue addressed by many of the male risoner activists. In this way, prison and its inmates reflect the outside world and its pectations: women are expected to be the keepers of hearth and home and, when a other is incarcerated, the burden to maintain ties to her children falls upon her. In 1998, ver two-thirds of all women prisoners had children under the age of eighteen, and, mong them, only twenty-five percent said that their children were living with the father.

In contrast, ninety percent of male prisoners with children under the age of eighteen said that their children were living with their mothers.[6] Ten percent of inmate mothers in contrast to two percent of inmate fathers stated that their children were living in a foster home, an agency or an institution.[7] Thus, mothers in prison are forced to navigate the legal maze of family law more often in order to maintain contact with and retain legal custody of their children.

A 1993 survey of women prisoners in eight states and Washington, DC, found that fifty-four percent of the inmate mothers interviewed were never visited by their children.[8] One major factor in this lack of visitation is distance: More than sixty percent of inmate mothers were incarcerated more than one hundred miles from their child's home. Less than nine percent were within twenty miles of their child.[9] However, the courts have reflected the opinion that inmate mothers have forfeited their rights to see their children. In 1987, *Pitts v. Meese* determined that prisoners have no right to be in any particular facility and may be transferred both within and out of state according to the institution's needs.[10] Such a decision gives prison authorities the power to effectively sever a woman's ability to see her child. Not only the distance, but the travel time and expenses make frequent visits less likely. For instance, while Barrilee Bannister is imprisoned in Pendleton, Oregon, her eight-year-old daughter lives with Bannister's relatives in Gloversville, New York.[11] "I'm lucky to see them every six or eight months," writes Bannister.[12] In almost every letter, she expresses her longing for her daughter: "When I was arrested, she was four months shy of becoming three years old. I've missed the best years of her life. She'll be thirteen and a half when I get out."[13] However, Bannister still retains full custody of her daughter, a rarity among inmate mothers.[14] Distancing women from their families is often used, effectively weakening, if not severing, a woman's ties from her loved ones. Maintaining parental ties has not been won through prisoner boycotts, work stoppages or hunger strikes, tools traditionally used by male inmates to challenge their conditions.[15] Rather, those women who want family maintenance programs must work with their prison administrations, a far less glamorous path for researchers and activist academics.

One example of such a program is the Children's Center at the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in New York. The Center houses a nursery where inmates and their babies are allowed to live together for the child's first year as well as a program helping the new inmate parents "learn to be mothers." Although it is staffed by inmates, the