

Report Shows One in 14 Million U.S. Children Have Imprisoned Parent



Washington, October 30 (RHC)-- More than five million U.S. children under 18 have at least one parent in prison and children in these situations suffer from low self esteem, poor mental and physical health, and other problems, according to a new report.

About one in every 14 children, or 7 percent, has had a father or mother incarcerated, according to Child Trends, a research organization based in Bethesda, Maryland.

The report says that for Black children, the rate was one in nine. African- American children are twice as likely to have an imprisoned parent, with nearly 14 percent of all Black youths currently between the ages of 12 and 17 having seen a parent go behind bars in their lifetimes.

The report was based on data from the 2011-12 National Survey of Children's Health that collected input from parents and other caregivers and was sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Parental incarceration is distinguished from other childhood troubles by a combination of shame, stigma and trauma, say experts who study these children or work with them. Research indicates that many of these children face increased risk of problems with behavior, academics, self-esteem and drug abuse. In some cases, the result of parental incarceration is that criminality is passed from one generation to the next.

"Most research finds negative outcomes for these children, such as childhood health and behavioral problems and grade retention," said Child Trends researcher and the report's lead author David Murphey. "Children who grow up with a parent in prison are more likely to suffer from poor mental and physical health in adulthood."

Only about 42 percent of incarcerated parents with children under 18 get visits from their kids, according to federal statistics.

"These kids are overlooked and invisible in our society," said Jody Becker-Green, a deputy secretary of Washington's corrections department. "They feel shame, they feel guilt in having a parent incarcerated."

While the U.S. represents nearly five percent of the world's population, it incarcerates about 25 percent of the global prison population, making it the world's largest jailer, according to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).

Imprisonment of America's 2.3 million prisoners costs \$24,000 per inmate each year and \$5.1 billion in new prison construction.

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