

Resolution on the Impact of Maternal Incarceration on Families and Children

An official statement from the Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice (formerly the American Orthopsychiatric Association)

As a global behavioral health organization committed to upholding principles of human rights and social justice through policy, advocacy, community action, and systemic change, we are concerned with the impact of maternal incarceration on families and children.

About 69% of women in jail or prison are mothers of minor children, and many are single mothers. By the age of nine, about 10% of U.S. children will have experienced maternal incarceration. Research shows that children with mothers who are incarcerated are five times more likely to end up in foster care than those with fathers who are incarcerated (60% versus 15%, respectively).



A disproportionate number of incarcerated women are women of color, from extreme poverty, suffering from mental illness, dependent on alcohol or drugs, and victims or survivors of abuse - circumstances that also often affect their families and may reflect the communities where they live.

The Global Alliance recognizes that the barriers that women who are incarcerated face can result in greater impact on their children, too. As children are placed in the care of others, there are additional needs (and opportunities to address these needs) within the broader community that can contribute to improving outcomes for these children. Key areas to address include:

- (1) assistance for mothers in maintaining parental rights;
- (2) provision of quality health care, including behavioral health services;
- (3) added support for mothers who are incarcerated to continue a regular relationship with their children;
- (4) resources for addressing other factors that impact children such as poverty, housing insecurity, and trauma;
- (5) re-entry support for mothers and children.

Consistent with our values, the Global Alliance recommends that stronger support systems for women and families, such as policies that protect women's and children's rights, community health resources, and housing assistance, can help prevent women from ever coming into contact with the criminal justice system. Additionally, assisting mothers who are incarcerated with communication and connection to their families and communities, in conjunction with addressing the needs of minor children with incarcerated mothers through supportive measures at every step of their mother's involvement in the criminal justice system, can improve individual, family, and community outcomes.

Additional Resources

Turney, K. (2019). Understanding the Needs of Children with Incarcerated Parents.

<https://www.aft.org/ae/summer2019/turney>

The Marshall Project.

<https://www.themarshallproject.org/2018/12/03/how-incarcerated-parents-are-losing-their-children-forever>

Vera Institute of Justice. <https://www.vera.org/>

National Resource Center on Justice-Involved Women.

<https://cjinvolvement.org/critical-issues/>

How You Can Help

- Join our Justice Reform Task Force. Learn more at <https://www.bhjustice.org/task-forces-and-committees>
- Volunteer with a local community-based organization supporting families affected by incarceration.
- Advocate for policy reform to protect women's and children's rights for criminal justice-involved families.

Related Articles from *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*

Roos, L. E., Afifi, T. O., Martin, C. G., Pietrzak, R. H., Tsai, J., & Sareen, J. (2016). Linking typologies of childhood adversity to adult incarceration: Findings from a nationally representative sample. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/ort000144>

Goshin, L. S. (2015). Ethnographic assessment of an alternative to incarceration for women with minor children. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ort000097>

Houck, K. D. F., & Loper, A. B. (2002). The relationship of parenting stress to adjustment among mothers in prison. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0002-9432.72.4.548>

Contributors: *Resolution drafted principally by Melissa Putney with contributions from Gita Jaffe and the Global Alliance Justice Reform Task Force.*