



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Administration for Children and Families  
Office of Family Assistance

# NRFC Quick Statistics



[www.fatherhood.gov](http://www.fatherhood.gov)

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## Incarcerated Fathers

### Estimated Number of State and Federal Prisoners with Minor Children, by Gender, 1991 and 1999

	State Prisoners			Federal Prisoners			State and Federal Prisoners
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
<b>Number of Parents</b>							
<b>1991</b>	413,100	386,500	26,600	39,400	36,500	2,900	452,500
<b>1999</b>	642,300	593,800	48,500	79,200	74,100	5,100	721,500
<b>Number of Minor Children</b>							
<b>1991</b>	852,300	794,500	57,800	84,200	78,300	5,900	936,500
<b>1999</b>	1,324,900	1,209,400	115,500	173,500	163,300	10,600	1,498,400

Source: Adapted from Incarcerated Parents and Their Children. Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, NCJ 182335

- The number of children with incarcerated parents increased greatly in the 1990s. In 1991, approximately 936,500 children under the age of 18 had a parent in prison; by 1999, that number had risen to an estimated 1,498,800.
- In 1999, about 1,372,700 children had fathers who were incarcerated, up from about 872,800 in 1991.

### Percent of State and Federal Male Prisoners with Minor Children, 1999

Minor Children	% State Prisoners	% Federal Prisoners
Any	54.7%	63.4%
1	24.0%	24.0%
2	15.6%	18.7%
3 or more	15.2%	20.8%

Source: Adapted from Incarcerated Parents and Their Children. Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, NCJ 182335

- In 1999, more than half of male prisoners had minor children (54.7 percent of state prisoners and 63.4 percent of federal prisoners).

### Minor Children with a Parent in Prison by Race/Ethnicity, 1999

Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percent
U.S. Total*	1,498,800	2.1%
White	384,500	0.8%
Black	767,200	7.0%
Hispanic	301,600	2.6%

\*Includes children of other races.

Source: Adapted from *Incarcerated Parents and Their Children*. Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, NCJ 182335

- Non-white children are more likely to have a parent in prison. In 1999, 2.1 percent of all children in the U.S. had a parent in prison. However, 7 percent of black children and 2.6 percent of Hispanic children had a parent in prison as compared to only 0.8 percent of white children.

### Living Arrangements for Children with Parents in State Prisons, 1997

	Male	Female
Lived with Children Prior to Admission	43.8%	64.3%
Current caregiver		
Child's other parent	89.6%	28.0%
Child's grandparent	13.3%	52.9%
Other relative	4.9%	25.7%
Foster home/agency	1.8%	9.6%
Friends/other	4.9%	10.4%

Source: Adapted from *Incarcerated Parents and Their Children*. Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, NCJ 182335.

- Less than half (43.8 percent) of incarcerated fathers in state prisons were living with their children prior to their admission to jail.
- The vast majority (89.6 percent) of children with a father in state prison live with their mother. By comparison, only 28 percent of children with an incarcerated mother live with their father.

### Frequency of Contact (Phone, Mails, Personal Visits) with Children for Parents in State Prisons, 1997

Frequency	Fathers	Mothers
Daily or almost daily	9.5%	17.8%
At least once a week	30.3%	42.4%
At least once a month	22.6%	18.0%
Less than once a month	16.6%	9.7%
Never	21.1%	12.2%

Source: Adapted from Incarcerated Parents and Their Children. Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, NCJ 182335.

- Mothers in state prisons were far more likely than fathers to report contact with their children at least once a week or daily/almost daily (60.2 percent as compared with 39.8 percent).
- More than one in five fathers in state prisons (21.1 percent) never had contact with their children as compared with only 12.2 percent of mothers.

### Frequency of Telephone, Mail, and Personal Contacts with Children for Parents in State Prisons, 1997

Type of Contact	Percent of State Inmates Reporting Monthly Contact with Their Children, 1997	
	Male	Female
Any	62.4%	78.4%
Phone	42.0%	53.6%
Mail	49.9%	65.8%
Personal Visits	21.0%	23.8%

Source: Adapted from Incarcerated Parents and Their Children. Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, NCJ 182335.

- Parent-child contact in the form of phone, mail, or personal visits while in state prison is less for incarcerated fathers than it is for incarcerated mothers; 78.4 percent of mothers report monthly contact as compared to 62.4 percent of fathers.
- Less than one in four incarcerated parents reported having monthly visits with their children (21 percent for fathers and 23.8 percent for mothers).

### Age Distribution of Minor Children with Parents in State or Federal Prison, 1997

Age Range	Percent
<1 year	2.1%
1-4 years	20.4%
5-9 years	35.1%
10-14 years	28.0%
15-17 years	14.5%

Source: Adapted from Incarcerated Parents and Their Children. Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, NCJ 182335.

- In 1997, the majority (57.6 percent) of minor children with parents in prison were under 10 year of age.
- Of children with incarcerated parents, 22.5 percent were less than 5 years old.

### Maximum Sentence Length for State and Federal Prisoners with Minor Children, by Gender, 1997

	State Prisoners			Federal Prisoners		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Less than 12 months	3.1%	2.8%	7.3%	2.3%	2.1%	5.1%
12-35 months	13.1%	12.5%	20.3%	10.6%	9.5%	26.3%
36-59 months	13.2%	12.7%	19.9%	13.2%	13.0%	16.2%
60-119 months	22.5%	22.4%	23.2%	30.0%	30.6%	22.4%
120-179 months	14.0%	14.3%	10.7%	19.6%	19.7%	18.1%
180-239 months	8.9%	9.1%	6.3%	9.0%	9.2%	5.2%
240+ months	19.1%	19.9%	9.4%	12.2%	12.7%	5.8%
Life/death	6.1%	6.3%	2.8%	3.1%	3.3%	0.7%
Mean	146 mo.	150 mo.	94 mo.	121 mo.	124 mo.	80 mo.

Source: Adapted from Incarcerated Parents and Their Children. Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, NCJ 182335

- On average incarcerated fathers serve longer sentences than mothers. In 1999, the mean sentence length for a father incarcerated in state prison was 150 months as compared to 94 months for a mother. In federal prison, fathers averaged 124 months as compared to 80 months for mothers.
- In state prison, almost three out of four fathers (72 percent) were serving sentences 60 months (5 years) or longer. By comparison only about half (52.4 percent) of mothers were served sentences of this length. The same pattern holds for federal prison.