



## OKLAHOMA COMMISSION ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH

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### OKLAHOMA COMMISSION ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH RELEASES ANTICIPATED REPORT ON LIVING CONDITIONS OF CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS AND THEIR CARETAKERS PERSPECTIVES

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma - Oklahoma continues to lead the nation in the rate of incarceration for females. While this makes headlines, often times what's not mentioned is what happens to their children during their incarceration. This landmark study begins to answer many of the questions related to the children such as how many children are effected? Where are they? Who is supporting them? What are the unique issues that they face? Surprisingly only 5 % of the children are in foster care. This means that the vast majority are placed with relatives or friends where access to services is limited by a bureaucratic system and the stigma of being the child of a parent who is in jail.

The study used the eight traumatic childhood events outlined in the Adverse Child Experience (ACE) study conducted by Vincent Felitti. The eight events are: emotional abuse, sexual abuse, physical abuse, growing up in a household with someone with a drug or alcohol problem, growing up in a household with someone with a mental illness, growing up in a household with someone being incarcerated, growing up without one of the biological parents in the household or growing up with the mother being treated violently. The women interviewed reported significantly more traumatic childhood experiences than women who have not been incarcerated. This in effect creates a cyclical pattern resulting in the children of incarcerated women being more likely to suffer from trauma and be incarcerated themselves.

Some of the key findings are as follows:

- Approximately 1/3 of the caretakers reported that the Department of Human Services had lost their paperwork to be considered as a placement for the child. This resulting in an unnecessary bureaucratic time delay for the child being placed.
- The study also suggests that instead of incarceration being a deterrent to criminal activity, it seemed to serve as an accelerant for some families. Specifically, this was evidenced by the intergenerational imprisonment. Approximately 28% of the mothers reported that their parents had been imprisoned, while 18% reported that their children had been in trouble with the law.
- When the researcher applied the Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) scores to the incarcerated mothers, it was found that approximately 20% of the incarcerated women had an ACE score of 6 or higher. Approximately 50% of the women surveyed had an ACE score of 4 or higher. (0-8 range) The higher the ACE score the more likely the person will suffer from "organic disease, social malfunction, and mental illness".
- Approximately 50% of the mothers reported that they have had children with different fathers.