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*“A Vital Christian Presence in Social Work”*

## **MOST AT RISK: CHILDREN OF PRISONERS**

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Children of Prisoners can't wait . . .

“Many things can wait.

Children cannot.

Today their bones are being formed,  
their blood is being made,  
their senses are being developed.

To them we cannot say “tomorrow.”

Their name is today.”

*Source: Quoted in Endangered, by Johann Christoph Arnold*

Children of Prisoners are Image Bearers

- Made in the image of God
- Known by God
- The fatherless and orphaned
- Forgotten by society
- Labeled by society
- Most likely to become prisoners
- Special opportunity to break the cycle

How many prisoners?

On June 30, 2004,

- -- 2,131,180 prisoners were held in Federal or State prisons or in local jails -- an increase of 2.3% from midyear 2003, less than the average annual growth of 3.5% since yearend 1995.
- -- there were an estimated 486 prison inmates per 100,000 U.S. residents -- up from 411 at yearend 1995.

## Most At-risk: Children of Prisoners

- -- the number of women under the jurisdiction of State or Federal prison authorities increased 2.9% from midyear 2003, reaching 103,310 and the number of men rose 2.0%, totaling 1,390,906.

What kind of offenses? <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/prisons.htm>

- ✓ Violent offenses include murder, negligent and nonnegligent manslaughter, rape, sexual assault, robbery, assault, extortion, intimidation, criminal endangerment, and other violent offenses.  
*Over half of the increase in State prison population since 1995 is due to an increase in the prisoners convicted of violent offenses.*
- ✓ Property offenses include burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft, fraud, possession and selling of stolen property, destruction of property, trespassing, vandalism, criminal tampering, and other property offenses.
- ✓ Drug offenses include possession, manufacturing, trafficking, and other drug offenses.
- ✓ Public-order offenses include weapons, drunk driving, escape/flight to avoid prosecution, court offenses, obstruction, commercialized vice, morals and decency charges, liquor law violations, and other public-order offenses.

Violence Ripples to Children

Martin Luther King, Jr.: **“Violence as a way of achieving justice is both impractical and immoral.** It is impractical because it is a descending spiral ending in destruction for all. The old law of an eye for an eye leaves everybody blind. It is immoral because it seeks to humiliate the opponent rather than win his understanding; it seeks to annihilate rather than to convert. Violence is immoral because it thrives on hatred rather than love. It destroys community and makes brotherhood impossible. It leaves society in monologue rather than dialogue. Violence ends by defeating itself. It creates bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers.”

Who are their children?

Disproportionately children of color - - Inmates by ethnicity

At midyear 2004 there were 4,919 black male prison and jail inmates per 100,000 black males in the United States, compared to 1,717 Hispanic male inmates per 100,000 Hispanic males and 717 white male inmates per 100,000 white males.

*It is estimated that there are 2 million children with incarcerated parents.*

Specific struggles for those left behind

- Developmental issues Hardships – socially, emotionally, psychologically, spiritually
- Financial issues & Poverty -- Women’s income lower
- Labeling & social stigmatism
- Community & Church expectations

Rocky roads for children of prisoners

## Most At-risk: Children of Prisoners

Children under age three who are poor face a greater likelihood of impaired development because of their increased exposure to a number of factors associated with poverty.

These risk factors include:

- inadequate nutrition
- environmental toxins
- diminished interaction due to maternal depression
- trauma and abuse
- lower quality child care
- parental substance abuse

How big is the poverty issue in US?

- ✓ Young children who live with single mothers are far more likely to be poor than those who live with married parents.
- ✓ In 2000, there were 1,288,000 poor children living in single-parent families and 751,000 poor children living with married parents.
- ✓ Poverty rates for young children vary dramatically by ethnicity and family structure.
- ✓ The poverty rate for young black and Hispanic children under age three is still three times higher than that of White children.
  
- ✓ The poverty rate among Hispanic children under age three also decreased, from 44 percent in 1992 to 30 percent in 2000. These rates, however, are still higher than the poverty rate among white children under age three—10 percent in 2000.
- ✓ Over half of all young black children and nearly half of all Hispanic young children living in single-mother families are poor.

Effects of imprisonment –

“Prisoners Once Removed” by Jeremy Travis and Michelle Waul  
<http://www.urban.org/pubs/prisoners/contents.html>

"Incarceration touches families and communities in unexpected ways. Shining a light on the struggle of families with loved ones in prison or coming home can help us to focus on the problems of the current system and the need to build upon family and community strengths. With rich and varied voices, *Prisoners Once Removed* truly helps to advance this valuable perspective."

—Carol Shapiro Executive Director, Family Justice

Uncertain Futures – behind smiling faces

- Likelihood of following the family traditions and patterns
- Lack of Job skills
- Lack of Social skills
- Numerous Educational issues

Begin early! To defeat the cycle!

“One of the strongest risk factors for juvenile delinquency is a parental history of criminality.” (Kemper and Rivera, 1993)

## Most At-risk: Children of Prisoners

### Children: Sitting on the outside

What are children with incarcerated parents to do?

What will they be allowed to do by the non-incarcerated parent?

- Write Letters – get help if necessary.
- Participate in the Storybook project – using age appropriate materials.
- Church involvement
- Get Counseling
- Get a mentor
- Parents: Sitting on the inside
- What are incarcerated parents to do?
- Write Letters – get help if necessary.
- Reading books, video taping and sending the book with tape to children at home. Storybook project.
- Angel Tree – [www.pfm.org](http://www.pfm.org)

Is it ok to be healthy and happy?

Fostering good relationships

Asset development

Who knows their name?

What are the Assets?

[www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org)

Search Institute is an independent nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide leadership, knowledge, and resources to promote healthy children, youth, and communities. To accomplish this mission, the institute generates and communicates new knowledge, and brings together community, state, and national leaders.

At the heart of the institute's work is the framework of 40 Developmental Assets, which are positive experiences and personal qualities that young people need to grow up healthy, caring, and responsible.

Don't be dismayed . . .

There are some programs that are working!

- Mentoring

Amachi: [http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/21\\_publication.pdf](http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/21_publication.pdf)  
report by Public Private Ventures

Kids Hope USA - [www.kidshopeusa.org](http://www.kidshopeusa.org)

One child, one hour is the heart of KIDS HOPE USA. One caring adult mentoring an at-risk child one hour every week. Because when kids feel loved and valued, they are better able to learn, grow, and succeed.

Other practices that are working:

## Most At-risk: Children of Prisoners

[http://www.ppv.org/ppv/youth/youth\\_initiatives.asp?section\\_id=9](http://www.ppv.org/ppv/youth/youth_initiatives.asp?section_id=9)

- Over the years, P/PV has undertaken a variety of efforts to serve high-risk youth, such as those involved in the justice system, girls who are at very high risk for teen pregnancy, and young parents with poor educational and economic prospects.

Recently, P/PV has focused on a two-pronged youth violence reduction agenda. On a national level, we have conducted evaluations of gang prevention and intervention programs; our national faith-based initiatives provide high-risk youth with mentoring, educational and employment services. We have also embarked on local projects to prevent violence or intervene with violent youths. Among these Philadelphia-based projects is the Youth Violence Reduction Partnership.

- Long Distance Dads focuses on:
  - Recognize and describe positive family values.
  - Demonstrate an increased knowledge of parenting/family skills.
  - Identify realistic strategies for connecting with their families.
  - Identify realistic strategies for fulfilling their responsibilities as fathers while

confined and upon release.

- Identify and describe the effects that behavior and incarceration has on families.
- Develop a viable family integration plan.
- Clearly communicate to their children the negative effects of incarceration, without glorifying any aspect of being an inmate or “ex-con”.

Thinking younger

- Parents who are teenagers are incarcerated
- Image bearers
- Advocacy
- Thinking and acting