

THE CHALLENGES OF CHILDREN WITH INCARCERATED PARENTS

When parents are incarcerated, children often become victims of their parent's crimes due to the emotional and psychological trauma and the financial instability the children experience during the parent's incarceration. Financial instability can also contribute to a decline in the household income, and create an increased risk for childhood poverty. *Parents in State Prisons*, a 2013 publication from The Sentencing Project (a research and advocacy reform group) reported that "mass incarceration" had contributed to 1 in every 50 children having a parent in prison. It stated that more than 40% of the incarcerated parents lived with their children prior to being incarcerated.



Incarceration of parents has influenced the growth of single parent households, separation of families and childhood poverty. More than two thirds of men in prison were employed prior to incarceration according to *Collateral Costs: Incarceration's Effect on Economic Mobility* from the Pew Charitable Trusts. *Collateral Costs* noted that in the United States, 2.7 million minor children (under age 18) had an incarcerated parent (1 in 28 children) who was in jail or prison in 2010.

U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder at a Fatherhood Town Hall meeting at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, described the circumstances of parent incarceration, "sometimes people make bad choices and end up in prison or jail, but we can't permit the incarceration of parents to punish an entire family."

http://www.sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/cc_Parents%20in%20State%20Prisons%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf

https://www.prisonlegalnews.org/media/publications/western_and_pettit_incarcerations_effect_on_economic_mobility_2010.pdf

<http://www.justice.gov/ag/speeches/2009/ag-speech-091215.html>

The *World Prison Population List* (October 2013) from the International Centre for Prison Studies, reported that with more than 10.2 million people held in penal institutions (prisons) in the world, the U.S. has more prisons than any other country. The Tennessee Department of Corrections (TDOC) *FY2013 Statistical Abstract*, reports that the department's prison inmate population is 24,776. This number is projected to increase, so that there will be more incarcerated than the number of currently available beds for. TDOC's FY2013 Annual Report indicates that there are 14 prisons in the state, 4 that are in Davidson County (more than any other county in Tennessee).

<http://www.tn.gov/correction/pdf/AnnualReport2013.pdf>

<http://www.tn.gov/correction/pdf/StatisticalAbstract2013.pdf>

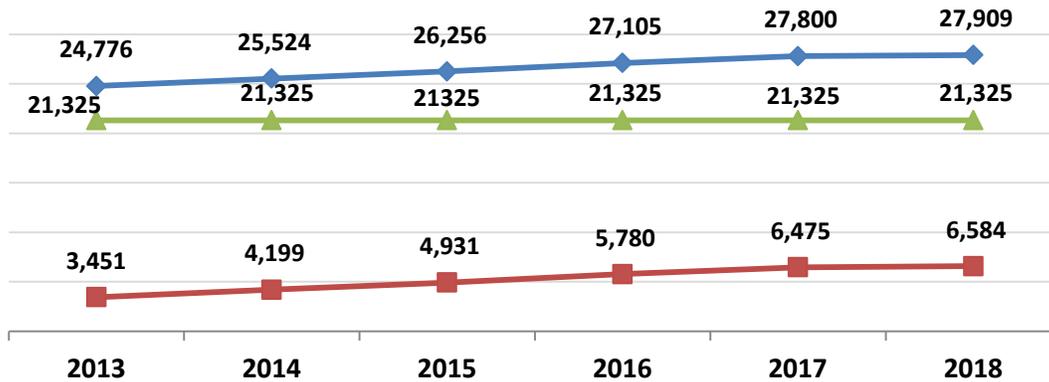


Chart 1 shows the TDOC projections from the FY2013 to FY2018, which would result in the number of inmates exceeding the prison beds.

Because of the projected growth of the total prison population in Tennessee, it is likely that even more prison beds would be proposed. Chart 1 also shows the TDOC’s operating capacity at 21,325 for that 6-year period, which is projected to remain unchanged.

Chart 1: TDOC Inmate Projected Population and Operating Capacity

(Projected for July 1, 2013- June 30, 2018)



Source: Tennessee Department of Correction’s FY2013 Statistical Abstract

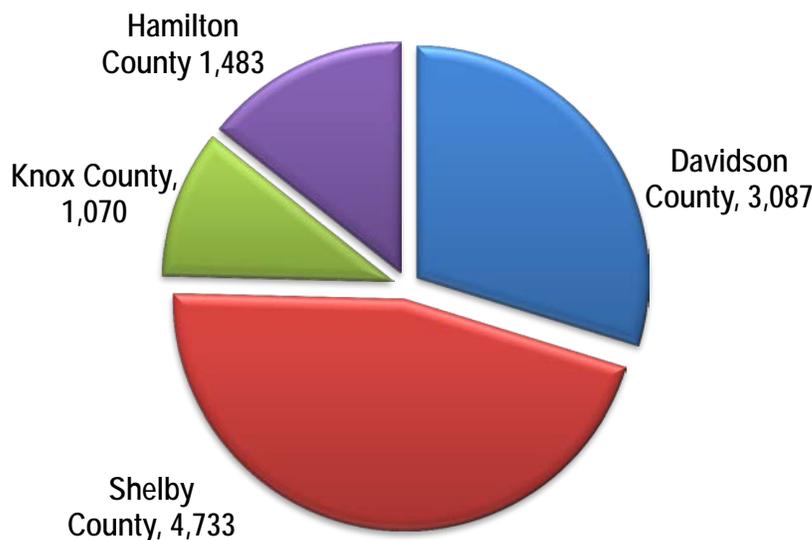
In addition to those in Tennessee’s prisons, thousands of others are in county jails. The *Statewide Jail Summary Report* by the TDOC indicated that in May 2014, Davidson County had 3,087 inmates, which was the second largest jail population following Shelby County in the state. Chart 2 shows that the 4 largest counties in Tennessee also with the largest number of jail inmates. Shelby County at 4,733 had the largest jail population followed by Davidson County at 3,087 inmates.

<http://www.tn.gov/correction/pdf/JailMay2014.pdf>

Chart 2: Jail Population

Davidson, Shelby, Knox, Hamilton Counties, Tennessee

(Month ending 5/31/14)



Source: TDOC Statewide Jail Summary Report for the Month Ending May 31, 2014

The Growth of Incarceration in the United States (2014) by the National Academy of Sciences involved in-depth research and analysis of the increase of incarceration and the affects. It found that the sizes and demographics of penal institutions are likely to have significantly increased poverty in America. The high rates of incarceration have also contributed to social, economic and political inequalities in the U.S.

Even for former prisoners especially those with felony convictions, punishments have extended beyond their confinement in prison, due to laws that restrict and render them as second-class citizens. The prison population is largely from the most disadvantaged populations in the nation. They are often under age 40, minority, poorly educated, drug and alcohol addicted, mental and physical illnesses, and lack of job skills or experience. It stated that 1 in 5 African American men who have never been to college and over half of all high school dropouts have served time in state or federal prison at some time in their lives. Prisons were found to be powerful social settings where prisoners experience many psychological, physical, and behavioral pressures to which they must adjust.
http://nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=18613

According to *Why Are So Many Americans in Prison*, by Steven Raphael and Michael Stoll of the Department of Public Policy at University of California, the social costs of incarceration is difficult to measure because of the impact on long-term unemployment for former inmates, the effects on public health, such as the HIV/AIDS epidemic and other infectious diseases, as well as the impact on their children and families.
[https://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/Steven\(2\).pdf](https://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/Steven(2).pdf)

Rutgers University's 2014 *Children and Families of the Incarcerated Fact Sheet* explained that when a parent is incarcerated, their children are at increased risk of unstable households and many other problems. It stated that parental incarceration creates adverse childhood experiences that consist of a combination of trauma and humiliation. As for children who may have witnessed the arrest of a parent, they were 57% more likely to experience posttraumatic stress symptoms than the children who did not witness the arrest. *Children and Families* noted, "The growing number of children with an incarcerated parent represents one of the most significant collateral consequences of the record prison population in the U.S."

It also explained that in the U.S.:

- About half the children with incarcerated parents are under age 10.
- Approximately 10 million U. S. children have experienced parental incarceration at some point.
- The rate of incarceration varies, from 11.4% African American, 3.5% Hispanic and 1.8% white children who have an incarcerated parent.

<http://nrccfi.camden.rutgers.edu/files/nrccfi-fact-sheet-2014.pdf>

According to *Parents in Prison and their Minor Children*, from the U.S. Department of Justice, black children were 7.5 times more likely than white children to have a parent in prison and Hispanic children were more than 2.5 times more likely than white children to have a parent in prison.

Unfortunately, more than a third of minor children in the U.S. will reach age 18 while their parent is incarcerated. The report also stated that incarcerated mothers and fathers had been involved in the lives of their children prior to incarceration. Of those in state prisons, more than 6 in 10 parents reported that their children lived with them prior to incarceration. In state prisons, more than 4 out of 10 mothers who had children under age 18 were living in single parent households before being incarcerated.

<http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/ascii/pptmc.txt>



Through the Eyes of a Child with a Mother in Prison (2003), by the Wilder Research with Volunteers of America, indicates that many children of incarcerated mothers face the loss of their homes, friends and their emotional support systems. It also reported that when the child's father goes to prison, the child is usually in the care of their mother.

Unfortunately, when the mother goes to jail, the child is more likely to be placed in the care of someone else than the other parent, usually a grandparent or other relative. However, in approximately 11% of the cases in which the mother is incarcerated, children are placed in foster care, which often separates them from their parent, siblings and others. The report explained that children of incarcerated parents need strong emotional support and stability to address their vulnerability to serious emotional and behavioral problems, as well as the risk of poverty.

<http://www.voa.org/through-the-eyes-of-a-child>

The sudden separation of a child from their primary caregiver can strongly impair their emotional well-being, according to *Promoting Social and Emotional Well-Being for Children of Incarcerated Parents*, from the Federal Interagency Working Group for Children of Incarcerated Parents in 2013. It stated that the parent-child relationship begins in infancy when the child's foundation to develop relationships is formed which helps the child to develop healthy interpersonal skills. Such vulnerability in young children with parents that are incarcerated makes them very fragile for healthy childhood development.

Children separated from their loved ones are more likely to experience problems with behavior and school performance. Children of incarcerated parents are also at risk of dropping out of school and being influenced by negative peer pressures.

<http://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Promoting-Social-and-Emotional-Well-Being-for-Children-of-Incarcerated-Parents.pdf>