

# Arizona Criminal Justice Commission



## Statistical Analysis Center Publication

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# Children of Incarcerated Parents: Measuring the Scope of the Problem

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## **Introduction**

According to data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics's (BJS) National Corrections Reporting Program, and more recent data from the Arizona Department of Corrections, from 1997 to 2007 the number of inmates incarcerated in Arizona at the end of each calendar year has increased by 60.7 percent from 23,484 in 1997 to 37,746 in 2007. Research conducted by BJS in 2000 and again in 2007 (Mumola 2000, Glaze and Maruschak 2007) on parental incarceration found that more than half of state inmates reported having a child under the age of 18. As the prison population in Arizona and the nation has increased, so too has the challenge of meeting the needs of children of incarcerated parents.

Research on the impact of parental incarceration reveals that families with a parent who is incarcerated are more likely to face financial instability, material hardship, and instability in family relationships (Garfinkel et al, 2007). Research on risk and protective factors for youth delinquency suggest that youth who grow up in families with poor family management practices and in families with high levels of conflict are more likely to get involved with substance abuse, delinquent behavior, and other anti-social behaviors (Hawkins et al. 2000). The children of incarcerated parents are also more likely to have school behavior and school performance problems and suffer from shame, and social and institutional stigma (Hairston 2007). Additionally, risk and protective factor research also reveals that youth who perform poorly in school and lack a commitment to their school are at higher risk of delinquency and youth violence (Hawkins et al. 2000). Together, these findings from research on the impact parental incarceration on families, growing up the child of an incarcerated parent, and risk and protective factors for delinquency, drug use, and anti-social behavior illustrate the potential value and impact of programming directed at children of incarcerated parents.

Identifying the number of children of incarcerated parents in Arizona is a first step toward the development of data-driven strategies at the state and local level that address the issues facing children of incarcerated parents. To accomplish this task, the Parent's Commission on Drug Education and Prevention provided financial support to the Arizona Criminal Justice Commission (ACJC) and Arizona State University (ASU) to use Arizona Department of Corrections (ADC) administrative data and information collected directly from male and female inmates to estimate the number of children who have parents in the Arizona prison system.

In addition, recognizing the value of regularly and systematically collected data to inform policy and monitor program performance, the Parent's Commission also supported a project to review the data that is currently being collected in Arizona on children of incarcerated parents. The goal of the data infrastructure review is to assess the ability of information systems currently used by state agencies and organizations, and the information they contain, to consistently and routinely measure the number of children of parents incarcerated in Arizona's state prison system.

## **Scope of Project**

Current trends in incarceration practices have inevitably affected a large number of children. A recent report published by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2008) estimates that slightly less than two million children have a parent incarcerated in the state or federal prison system, which

accounts for approximately two percent of the total minor population in the United States. With support from the Arizona Governor's Office on Children, Youth, and Families, researchers from the Arizona Criminal Justice Commission and Arizona State University conducted a statewide study on children of incarcerated parents with two primary goals:

1. To arrive at a reliable estimate of the number of children of parents currently incarcerated in the Arizona Department of Corrections.
2. To develop and implement a clearly defined strategy through which data on the number of children with incarcerated parents in Arizona is obtained and reported on an annual basis.

Data collection efforts entailed an extensive review of records from the Arizona Department of Corrections. This included electronic data from the institutional data management system as well as prisoner case file contents. Research has found that confined subjects are far less likely to disclose personal information to staff for fear that information will be used against them or negatively affect others (e.g., family members, friends). Accordingly, independent, non-justice system interviewers also conducted face-to-face interviews with incarcerated mothers and fathers.

Phase one of the project involved a review of institutional records from a random sample of men (N=600) and women (N=600) prisoners who were in custody during July 2009. Since the Arizona Department of Corrections collects the number of overall dependents of prisoners, we reviewed these data to identify the percentage of prisoners who had dependents and the average number of overall dependents. Researchers then reviewed case files for a subsample of men (N=300) and women (N=300) prisoners who according to institutional data management records were classified as having at least one dependent. This exercise was extremely important as it revealed the extent to which the institutional record measure of overall dependents represented a proxy for minor children.

Phase two of the study entailed original data collection by Arizona State University researchers who have experience collecting sensitive information from confined populations. Specifically, researchers conducted face-to-face interviews with incarcerated fathers (N=300) and mothers (N=300) in custody at the Arizona State Prison Complex-Phoenix Alhambra Reception and Treatment Center and the Arizona State Prison Complex-Perryville, San Pedro, Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz, Santa Maria and Piestewa Units. Conducting interviews during the intake and reception process allowed for sampling of various types of male prisoners and maximized the use of limited resources by eliminating the need to travel to all ADC facilities. Since nearly three-fourths of female inmates in ADC are housed in minimum security units, interviews with women prisoners were conducted in three minimum security units and in one unit that housed a combination of both minimum and medium security prisoners in an effort to obtain a representative sample of the female prisoner population.

## **ADC Institutional Records and Case File Review**

Institutional records of a random sample of men (N=600) and women (N=600) prisoners revealed that 60.2 percent of men and 63.7 percent of women reported having at least one dependent. In order to determine whether these data could be used to estimate the number of children with an incarcerated parent, researchers reviewed a sample of 300 male and 300 female case files of prisoners who based on institutional records had at least one dependent.

Among case files of the 300 men, 10.3 percent (N=31) of files had no information on adult or child dependents, 5.3 percent (N=16) of case files noted that prisoners did not have children, and 84.4 percent (N=253) of case files stated that prisoners had at least one child. Among those cases where a child was noted, 86 percent (N=217) indicated the child was a minor. Based on this review, only 217 or 72.3 percent of the 300 male prisoners noted to have dependents could be confirmed as having minor children.

Data from case files of the 300 women revealed that 1.3 percent (N=4) had no information on adult or child dependents, 1.3 percent (N=4) of case files noted that prisoners did not have children, and 97.4 percent (N=292) of case files stated that prisoners had at least one child. Among those cases where a child was noted, 92.1 percent (N=269) indicated the child was a minor. Based on this review, 269 of the 300 women prisoners noted to have dependents (89.7 percent) could be confirmed as having minor children.

## **ADC Prisoner Interview Data**

In order to ensure that data from the face-to-face interviews with prisoners was representative of the general prison population, ASU researchers worked with ADC staff to create a data collection process that minimized the role of ADC staff in seeking prisoner cooperation. Researchers were able to track all prisoners who were approached for study participation. This process was particularly important as it enabled researchers to assess any significant differences among prisoners who agreed to be interviewed versus those that declined study participation. This is an important methodological distinction from a previous statewide study on children of incarcerated parents.

Researchers set out to conduct interviews with 300 men and 300 women. Of the 1,005 prisoners approached by ASU researchers, 554 were men and 451 were women. These figures are presented in Table 1. Among those approached, only 6.7 percent of men and 3.5 percent of women refused to participate in the study. Because the focus of the project centered on prisoners with minor children, not all prisoners who agreed to participate in the study were eligible. For example, nearly 30 percent of men and 14 percent of women reported that they did not have any children, 10.4 percent of men and 17 percent of women indicated that all of their children were 18 years or older and approximately 2 percent of men reported that their children were either deceased or not yet born (e.g., mother is currently pregnant). Accordingly, the sample of prisoners in the study included those who reported being the parent of at least one minor child (58 percent of men and 68.9 percent of women).

**Table 1. Interview Participation among Prisoners by Gender**

	Men	Women
Total approached	554	451
Refused to participate	6.7% (37)	3.5% (16)
Agreed to participate	93.3% (517)	96.5% (435)
No children	29.3% (151)	14.1% (61)
No minor children	10.4% (54)	17.0% (74)
Other	2.3% (12)	0.0 (0)
Minor children	58.0% (300)	68.9% (300)

*Note:* The “other” category refers to prisoners who reported having unborn or deceased children.

Researchers examined whether there were significant racial and ethnic differences between prisoners who were approached, and prisoners who agreed to participate, compared to the total ADC prisoner population. As shown in Table 2, among prisoners who were approached to participate in the study, Latinos were underrepresented (36.5 percent vs. 41.3 percent) while Native American men (7.6 percent vs. 5.0 percent) and “other” males (2.5 percent vs. 1.5 percent) were overrepresented. Similarly, Native American men were also overrepresented among prisoners who agreed to partake in the study (7.0 percent vs. 5.0 percent). In contrast, the sample of White and African American male prisoners who were approached and agreed to participate were representative of the ADC population. Likewise, our sample of women prisoners who were approached and who agreed to participate were representative of the total ADC population across all racial and ethnic groups. Researchers concluded that the few significant differences in race and ethnicity did not raise concerns about representativeness and generalizability of findings.

**Table 2. Interview Participation among Prisoners by Race/Ethnicity Compared to ADC Prisoner Population**

	ADC Population		Approached		Refused		Agreed		No Children		No Minors		Other		Minors	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
White	38.6	50.2	38.3 (212)	47.2 (213)	43.2 (16)	43.8 (7)	37.9 (196)	47.4 (206)	53.0 (80)	45.9 (28)	51.9 (28)	51.4 (38)	16.7 (2)	0.0 (0)	28.7 (86)	46.7 (140)
African American	13.4	10.7	15.2 (84)	11.8 (53)	13.5 (5)	6.2 (1)	15.3 (79)	12.0 (52)	11.3 (17)	9.8 (6)	20.4 (11)	13.5 (10)	8.3 (1)	0.0 (0)	16.7 (50)	12.0 (36)
Latino/a	41.3	29.8	<b>36.5*</b> <b>(202)</b>	31.0 (140)	21.6 (8)	37.5 (6)	37.6 (194)	30.8 (134)	29.8 (45)	27.9 (17)	18.6 (10)	29.8 (22)	50.0 (6)	0.0 (0)	44.3 (133)	31.7 (95)
Native American	5.0	8.3	<b>7.6**</b> <b>(42)</b>	8.9 (40)	16.2 (6)	12.5 (2)	<b>7.0*</b> <b>(36)</b>	8.7 (38)	4.0 (6)	14.8 (9)	7.4 (4)	5.3 (4)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	8.7 (26)	8.3 (25)
Other	1.5	1.0	<b>2.5**</b> <b>(14)</b>	1.1 (5)	5.4 (2)	0.0 (0)	2.3 (12)	1.1 (5)	2.0 (3)	1.6 (1)	1.9 (1)	0.0 (0)	25.0 (3)	0.0 (0)	1.7 (5)	1.3 (4)
<b>N =</b>	<b>37,144</b>	<b>3,467</b>	<b>554</b>	<b>451</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>517</b>	<b>435</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>300</b>

Notes: \*\*  $\rho \leq .01$ ; \*  $\rho \leq .05$ .

**Estimate of Minor Children of Incarcerated Parents**

Table 3 contains the measures of dependents and minor children captured from the three different data sources. According to ADC institutional records, the mean number of dependents is 2.1 for both men and women prisoners. Data from case files show that the mean number of minor children for men is 1.9 and 2.3 minor for women prisoners. Self-reported data from interviews with prisoners revealed that men on average reported 2.2 minor children compared to 2.4 minor children reported by women.

**Table 3. Number of Children among Prisoners by Gender**

<b>Number of Children</b>	<b>Men Mean; SD</b>	<b>Women Mean; SD</b>
Number of dependents <sup>a</sup>	2.1; 1.5	2.1; 1.6
Number of minor children <sup>b</sup>	1.9; 1.5	2.3; 1.5
Number of minor children <sup>c</sup>	2.2; 1.4	2.4; 1.5

<sup>a</sup> Official ADC measure

<sup>b</sup> ADC case file measure

<sup>c</sup> Self reported prisoners

In order to construct an estimate of children of incarcerated parents, we rely on data obtained from the face-to-face interviews. Table 4 presents several estimates based on self-reported data from prisoners and the general ADC population. According to the data, the number of ADC prisoners in custody who are parents ranges between 21,673 and 26,103. In terms of their child, estimates indicate that there are currently between 48,025 and 58,109 minor children who have a mother or father currently in ADC custody. These figures include biological, step, adopted or other statuses of children.

**Table 4. Statewide Estimates**

	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Lower Limit</b>	<b>Upper Limit</b>
ADC Population	36,735	3,742	40,477		
Identified Parents	58%	69%			
Estimate Number of Parents in ADC	21,306	2,581	23,887	<b>21,673</b>	<b>26,103</b>
Mean # of Minor Children	2.2	2.4			
Estimate # of Minor Children	46,873	6,194	53,067	<b>48,025</b>	<b>58,109</b>

*Note:* ADC population in June 2010; Estimates based on a 95 percent confidence interval.

## **Reviewing Arizona’s Children of Incarcerated Parents Data Infrastructure**

A data infrastructure that allows for monitoring the number of children of incarcerated parents is instrumental to informing and supporting data-driven practices and policies addressing this issue. A data infrastructure that captures detailed information on children of incarcerated parents and the parents themselves would allow for programs to be developed based on the scope of the problem of children of incarcerated parents in Arizona and what is known about the impact of parental incarceration on prisoners’ families, children, and the agencies that serve them. This report describes the current state of data collected on children of incarcerated parents in Arizona and the strengths and weaknesses of the data that are currently being collected by the agencies that work with those involved with the criminal justice system. Finally, because previous research has effectively argued that children of incarcerated parents are a small subset of a larger group of at-risk youth whose parents are involved with the criminal justice system (Phillips and Gleason, 2007), included in this review are comments on a variety of data that could also provide information on *children of justice-system-involved parents*, not just children whose parents have been sentenced to ADC.

## **Data-Driven Criminal Justice Strategies**

Although criminal justice and social service agencies have been collecting information for decades on the men and women with whom they work, advances in management information systems have increased access and the timely recoverability of that information. In turn, data and information are being used more frequently to improve organizational practices and policies. Data collected by criminal justice agencies are also being used to better understand the nature and extent of criminal justice and related social problems, which allows for resources to be used in a more efficient and effective manner. Three examples of data-driven policy and programming are provided to illustrate the value of using data to directly inform criminal justice planning and policy.

### CompStat

CompStat is one of the best known applications of a data-driven policing strategy. CompStat is a data driven approach to crime reduction, improving quality of life, and resource management most well known for its use by the New York City Police Department. Using data routinely collected by the department, personnel from each of the city’s precincts, police service areas, and transit districts compile a data summary of the week’s activities. Precinct commanders use these data to identify emerging and established crime trends in their precincts. This information allows police executives to monitor neighborhood issues and the department’s response, share information on successful crime prevention strategies, and allocate resources to most effectively reduce crime and improve police performance. Recognizing that there were a number of activities in addition to CompStat implemented in the late 1990s and early 2000s to address crime in New York City, from 1995 to 2003 murders in New York City declined from 1,181 to 596. The success of CompStat and the contribution it made to reduce

violence in New York City has led to the adoption of CompStat like strategies in law enforcement agencies all across the country.

### Reentry Mapping

Reentry mapping refers to using location data to better understand the community and service delivery impacts of returning ex-prisoners. This effort, utilized in jurisdictions all over the country, has consistently documented that a few neighborhoods typically absorb a disproportionate share of returning ex-prisoners. Indeed, work conducted by the Justice Mapping Center of the JFA Institute identified six zip codes in the Phoenix metropolitan area where a disproportionate share of state correctional expenditures is being spent. It is these same neighborhoods where focused reentry planning, services, and prevention strategies are being implemented by local, state, and federal entities to address the needs of returning ex-prisoners and their communities.

### Arizona Substance Abuse Partnership

The Arizona Substance Abuse Partnership (ASAP) was established by Executive Order 2007-12 in June 2007. ASAP is composed of representatives from federal, state, and local agencies, and community-based service organizations. ASAP serves as the single statewide council on substance abuse prevention, enforcement, and treatment. ASAP's mission is to ensure community driven, agency supported outcomes to prevent and reduce the negative impacts of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs by building and sustaining partnerships between prevention, treatment, and enforcement. Through coordination among its members and their agencies and organizations ASAP strives to ensure that substance abuse funding is spent in the most efficient and efficacious manner.

Among the subcommittees formed to further the mission of ASAP, the Substance Abuse Epidemiology (Epi) Work Group continuously evaluates new and existing data collection strategies related to substance abuse to support a data-driven process to substance abuse prevention and intervention at the state and local levels. Through the collection, maintenance, and dissemination of substance abuse data from multiple agency sources, the Epi Work Group informs ASAP and member agency activities through the use of the most current and relevant information available.

These examples, and many others like them, illustrate the value of building a data infrastructure that informs policy and practice. Obtaining quality data on children of incarcerated parents and using the data to inform policy and practice increases the likelihood of successful prevention and intervention, and breaking the inter-generational cycle of crime and incarceration.

## The Data on Children of Incarcerated Parents

### Arizona Department of Corrections

The mission of the Arizona Department of Corrections (ADC) is, “To serve and protect the people of Arizona by imprisoning those offenders legally committed to the Arizona Department of Corrections and by providing community based supervision for those conditionally released” (www.azcorrections.gov/Minh\_mission.aspx). The review of available data on children of incarcerated parents begins with ADC because of their statutory obligation to provide secure custody and community supervision of convicted felons.

### *Measuring Children of Incarcerated Parents*

Upon commitment to ADC, the men and women sentenced to a term of incarceration in an ADC facility are processed through a centralized reception and classification facility. During the reception and classification process, inmates are asked a set of questions that are used to assess their security and custody risk level, and their medical, mental health, and substance abuse treatment needs. In addition, the reception and classification process also assesses new inmates’ programming needs for education, vocational training, and work skill development. Of the many questions asked of new inmates during the reception and classification process, is a question asking whether they have ‘dependents.’ The wording of this question is important because asking about ‘dependents’ could elicit responses that include adults and other dependents that are not necessarily children or minor children of the inmates.

A comprehensive review of a random sample of ADC administrative inmate files identified that the ‘dependent’ measure collected during the reception and classification process matches the number of minor children identified in the file review in less than 60 percent of files (Table 1). This suggests that the ‘dependent’ measure obtained during the reception and classification process likely captures information on children and other dependents.

<b>Table 1: Information Collected at Intake and in File (N=651)</b>				
	<b>Dependents Reported at Intake?</b>	<b>Children Documented in File?</b>	<b>Minor Children Documented in File?</b>	<b>Intake Info. Match File Info?</b>
<b>Yes</b>	92.5	94.2	77.5	57.9
<b>No</b>	7.5	5.8	13.1	32.7
<b>Missing</b>	0	0	9.4	9.4

### *Strengths of the Measure*

Getting information directly from prisoners has several strengths. First, the number of dependents generated from this measure is not an estimate, but instead, an absolute count

of the number of individuals who are dependent upon the prisoner. Counts, when reportedly accurately and completely, provide more precise measures than estimates derived from a sample of inmates. Second, because this information is collected as part of the routine intake and classification process, it allows for consistency in how the question is asked and in the information obtained. Third, collecting these data over time in a consistent manner allows for a monitoring of trends over time in the number of dependents reported by inmates. Trend data also allows for the regular reassessment of the scope of the problem and the concomitant resources needed to serve this population. Fourth, inmate-specific information allows for targeted programming directed at only those inmates and their children who could benefit from the programming making the best use of limited resources.

#### *Weakness of the Measure*

The primary weakness of the dependent measure as it pertains to the issue of children of incarcerated parents is that it allows for inmates to report as dependents, individuals who are not their children. This limits the value of the data as a measure of the number of children of incarcerated parents, and its ability to inform inmate- or children-focused programming.

It is worth noting that when ADC was approached about the availability of data on children of incarcerated parents, staff recognized and acknowledged the barriers to their obtaining accurate information on the children of incarcerated parents. Some of these barriers exist even if ADC were to revise the question on dependents or added an additional question specifically asking about inmates' children. For example, it is reasonable to expect that many new inmates going through the reception and classification process would not be truthful if asked about their children by correctional staff. The reasons given by ADC staff for expecting some inmates to be untruthful about their children include absent fathers not wanting information about their children and child support obligations to become known to ADC and newly incarcerated mothers not wanting to risk the revocation of their parental rights because of their felony convictions and subsequent prison sentences.

#### Arizona Department of Juvenile Corrections

The mission of the Arizona Department of Juvenile Corrections (ADJC) is to provide secure custody and programming for delinquent youth committed to the department by county juvenile courts. The department promotes public safety through the management of the state's secure juvenile facilities and the development and implementation of a continuum of rehabilitative, treatment, and educational services for juvenile offenders ([www.azdjcc.gov](http://www.azdjcc.gov)).

### *Measuring Children of Incarcerated Parents*

The ADJC collects information on both the number of children of incarcerated youth in their care and the number of ADJC youth who have parents who are currently or have ever been incarcerated.

#### *Strengths of the Measure*

Generally speaking, research on children of incarcerated parents focuses on young children of adult inmates. In contrast, ADJC information captures data on children of juvenile inmates. Having information on a younger population of inmates and their children, especially when combined with information on the incarceration history of their parents, provides opportunities for developing a deeper understanding of the generational effects of parental incarceration. Additional strengths of this measure mimic the strengths of the data collected from adult inmates including, a higher level of accuracy for counts than for estimates, the ability to monitor trends over time among the juvenile inmate population, and focused information that can inform directed prevention and intervention strategies.

#### *Weakness of the Measure*

As is common with self-reported data collected from justice system involved individuals by representatives of a correctional institution, ADJC research staff shared concerns about the accuracy of the data obtained. Based on their experiences, staff believes that the data obtained from the females are more reliable than the information collected from the males because it is perceived that young males in their custody may be intentionally deceptive about the number of children they have fathered or do not know the true number of children they have fathered.

### Administrative Office of the Courts

#### Adult Probation Service Division

The Adult Probation Services Division (APSD) oversees the statewide administration of adult probation programs and services. The APSD works with courts, probation departments, and other agencies to ensure the effective supervision and treatment of adults who have been sentenced to probation.

### *Measuring Children of Incarcerated Parents*

Because the primary responsibility of the APSD is to oversee probation programs and services, the APSD does not conduct targeted data collection on inmates and their children. However, the Arizona Probation Enterprise Tracking System (APETS), which is maintained by APSD staff, has a field for “number of children” that is collected for risk and needs assessments. Additionally, there are APETS fields that capture information from pre-sentence investigations. Thus, if the sentences handed down by the court are

entered into APETS, the system would have the capacity to generate information by sentence received, providing an opportunity for monitoring the number of children of parents sentenced to a prison term, in addition to other sentencing options.

*Strengths of the Measure*

The strength of APSD's data is the ability to capture statewide information on men and women involved with the criminal justice system. Using the data in APETS, AOC has the ability to report offenders' children information by type of sentence, including incarceration in the Department of Corrections. Information on children of adults involved with Arizona's criminal justice system, if entered into APETS, provides an opportunity to develop estimates of the number of children of incarcerated parents, but also a more nuanced understanding of the problem and challenges facing children of justice system involved parents.

*Weakness of the Measure*

The major weakness of APSD information is the incompleteness of the information in APETS. Not all departments and probation officers use APETS to capture risk and needs assessment information. If local users of APETS are not using the system to capture information on children of justice involved parents, it will not be accessible through the statewide APETS. Additionally, although pre-sentence reports are required in many cases, exceptions are made when the offender can only be sentenced to less than one year in prison or jail or if the defendant requests that sentence be pronounced earlier than 15 days post conviction (see, 16A A.R.S. Rules Crim. Proc., Rule 26.4).

*Juvenile Justice Services Division*

The Juvenile Justice Services Division (JJSD) of the Arizona Supreme Court, Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), is responsible for administering juvenile justice programs for delinquent youth in coordination with the juvenile courts. These programs include delinquency prevention, treatment, and probation services.

*Measuring Children of Incarcerated Parents*

The Juvenile On-Line Tracking System (JOLTS) maintained by the AOC contains a wealth of information on youth involved with Arizona's juvenile justice system. Among the information collected on juvenile justice system involved youth is whether the youths' parents are currently incarcerated.

In addition to information on whether adjudicated youth have a parent who is currently incarcerated, JOLTS also captures information on whether adjudicated youth have children of their own. This information is captured through a standard risk and needs assessment tool that is available to all Arizona probation departments via the AOC probation data system. The risk and needs assessment tool provides probation officers with information needed to develop individualized probation plans that address the

adjudicated youths' needs. One of the questions included in the assessment asks whether the youth is a parent. Although this measure is not of incarcerated youth and their children, it does measure whether juvenile justice system involved youth who are not serving a sentence in the Arizona Department of Juvenile Corrections have children.

Finally, AOC is piloting an updated risk and needs assessment tool, which will include questions that capture whether the youths' parent(s) have ever been incarcerated or are currently incarcerated. When the new risk and needs assessment tool is fully implemented, it will have the potential to provide statewide information on adjudicated juveniles who have a parent who has previously or is currently incarcerated.

#### *Strengths of the Measure*

Although the AOC-JJSD data does not capture information on incarcerated juveniles and their children, it does capture information on delinquent youth who are parents. In addition, AOC data allows for a better understanding of the number of adjudicated youth who have an incarcerated parent. In conjunction with ADJC data that captures information on whether incarcerated juveniles are children of incarcerated parents and/or have children of their own, the AOC data has the potential to expand our understanding of the effect of juvenile justice system involvement on the children of adjudicated delinquents by capturing information on the children of youth adjudicated delinquent but not sentenced to a term in an ADJC facility.

#### *Weakness of the Measure*

Although the JOLTS-based risk and need tool is available to all probation departments in all counties, the tool is not being used by probation staff for all adjudicated youth in all counties. This limits the degree to which these data can provide a valid and reliable measure of children of adjudicated delinquent, but not incarcerated, youth. The same is true for measures of adjudicated delinquent, but not incarcerated, youth with previously or currently incarcerated parents.

#### Arizona Criminal Justice Commission

Established in 1982, the Arizona Criminal Justice Commission (ACJC) is an independent state agency created for the purpose of sustaining and enhancing the coordination, cohesiveness, and effectiveness of Arizona's criminal justice system. ACJC's primary role is to serve as the State Administering Agency for several federal and state grant programs. In addition, ACJC has a range of mandates including oversight of the Arizona Statistical Analysis Center (AZSAC).

The AZSAC is a unique division within ACJC. Historically, the AZSAC serves as a conduit through which stakeholders can obtain juvenile and criminal justice data. In addition, AZSAC is responsible for a number of ACJC's statutory requirements including an annual gang threat assessment, an annual assessment of sexual assault reporting to the state's criminal history repository, an analysis of state and local drug trends, a reporting

of grant activities to reduce case processing times, and a comprehensive assessment of the trends in crime and criminal justice system activity in Arizona.

### *Measuring Children of Incarcerated Parents*

One method for assessing the prevalence and frequency of substance use by Arizona's youth is through the biennial Arizona Youth Survey (AYS). The AYS collects information from a random sample of schools statewide that serve 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students. The information collected through the survey includes youth drug use, anti-social behaviors, and risk and protective factors among other topics. The 2010 AYS collected information on the attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of more than 63,000 youth in Arizona.

New to the 2010 administration, the AYS survey instrument now includes two questions that ask youth whether they have relatives who have been, or are currently, incarcerated in a prison or jail. The response categories consist of 14 different familial relationships from grandparents to siblings, including, mother, stepmother, father, and stepfather.

### *Strengths of the Measure*

At the state level, the large sample size obtained allow for reliable estimates to be created for a variety of measures including the percentage of 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade youth in Arizona who have ever had a parent incarcerated and/or currently have an incarcerated parent. Additionally, the data allows for an investigation of the relationship between measures of parental incarceration and many other individual, peer group, school, family, and community factors deepening the understanding of factors associated with children of incarcerated parents and how they interact. Finally, because questions about familial incarceration are now part of the AYS instrument, the AYS data on children of incarcerated parents will be collected every two years to monitor trends over time.

### *Weakness of the Measure*

Although estimates of the number of 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students with a current or formerly incarcerated family member are reliable, the question remains as to the generalizability of the estimates to other youth who are not part of AYS data collection. Previous research has estimated that the national average age of children with an incarcerated parent is eight years old. Additionally, according to ADC, approximately 2/3rds of the inmates incarcerated in Arizona's state prison system as of December 2007 were under the age of 40. Finally, because the AYS is a school-based survey, youth who are absent, regularly truant, or who have dropped out of school do not participate in the AYS.

### Arizona State University: Arizona Arrestee Reporting Information Network (AARIN)

The Arizona Arrestee Reporting Information Network (AARIN) is a project administered by Arizona State University, Center for Violence Prevention and Community Safety and

is designed to collect, analyze, and report drug use and drug related activities of arrestees in Maricopa County. AARIN is currently implemented in Maricopa County only. ASU research staff interview adult arrestees as they are booked into Maricopa County jail and juveniles as they are processed through Maricopa County's juvenile detention center. The focus of the interviews is on the arrestee's drug use and related behavior that brought them to the attention of the justice system.

### *Measuring Children of Incarcerated Parents*

AARIN data collection instruments capture the number of biological children of Maricopa County adult and juvenile arrestees and the number of people that lived in the same house as the arrestee by type of relationship (e.g., children, step-children, etc).

### *Strengths of the Measure*

Modeled after the Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (ADAM) program, AARIN instruments and data collection processes are well documented and follow data collection protocols used by many jurisdictions in the country. Additionally, because the project provides training to staff collecting the data, the data collected is of high quality (i.e., accurate and complete).

### *Weakness of the Measure*

The primary weakness of the AARIN data is that it cannot be used to estimate the number of children of incarcerated parents because of the focus on those newly arrested. Additionally, Maricopa County is the only jurisdiction that is supporting and implementing AARIN; thus the data is very valuable to Maricopa County but has limited utility to the state overall.

## **A Strategy for Monitoring the Number of Children of Incarcerated Parents in Arizona**

Children of incarcerated parents face many challenges including financial instability, material hardship, and instability in the family relationships. Children of incarcerated parents are also more likely to have school behavior and school performance problems. The challenge for Arizona's correctional and youth serving agencies is how best to meet the needs of the children of incarcerated parents who are at higher risk of negative outcomes in their lives because of their parent's behavior and subsequent involvement with the criminal justice system. Having accurate information on the number of children who have an incarcerated parent and the needs of the children are key to effective and efficient policy and programming designed to serve this population.

A review was conducted of Arizona's data infrastructure and its ability to generate consistent and reliable estimates of the number of children of incarcerated parents to identify gaps that are barriers to data-driven policymaking to address this issue. Additionally, detailed information on the family and community context in which these

children live would aid in data-driven program development tailored to the needs of children of incarcerated parents. Access to accurate data that describes the scope of the problem and detailed information about the children of incarcerated parents would also provide the opportunity to conduct policy and practice relevant research that attempts to better understand the impact of parental incarceration and how it affects the lives of the children.

### Aggregate Data on Children of Incarcerated Parents

At this time, Arizona's criminal justice data infrastructure is unable to provide an accurate count of the number of children of incarcerated parents. On the surface, the most logical source of information to identify the number of children of incarcerated parents living in Arizona is the Arizona Department of Corrections. But, as described above, ADC routinely collects and automates data on inmates' 'dependents' but not their minor children. A review of inmate case files for information about minor children yields a average number of minor children that is similar to the average number of dependents from the intake data (1.9 for the fathers, 2.3 for the mothers, and 2.1 for both fathers and mothers, respectively). The mean number of 'dependents' generated from the standard ADC intake process for new inmates and the case file review is slightly less than the mean number of minor children generated from face-to-face interviews with the male (2.2 children) and female (2.4 children) inmates with minor child. In the absence of more precise measures, the ADC dependent measure appears to be a yield a reasonable proxy measure of the number of children on incarcerated parents. Given the number of men and women incarcerated in Arizona's state prison system, it is unrealistic to think that a precise count of the number of children of incarcerated parents is attainable without the use of significant resources. Instead, the research described in this report suggests that for an aggregate estimate of the number of children of incarcerated parents, ADC 'dependents' measure is sufficient. It is important to note that although the ADC 'dependent' measure may be a reasonable proxy, it does underestimate the true number of children of incarcerated parents.

A second option for measuring the number of children of incarcerated parents that would also broaden our understanding of the number of minor children whose parent(s) are involved with the criminal justice system more generally was found in APETS, the probation tracking system maintained by the Arizona Office of the Courts. The APETS contains fields in which information from pre-sentence investigations can be entered, including information on the number of minor children of convicted offenders (i.e., offenders for whom pre-sentence investigations are conducted). As with other opportunities to capture information on the children of incarcerated parents, the incompleteness of the information is a barrier to a comprehensive understanding of the problem. Although training staff to collect and document this information can be done, additional challenges to the completeness of this information that exist in the rules of criminal procedure cannot be overcome with training. For example, although pre-sentence reports are required in many cases, exceptions are made when the offender can only be sentenced to less than one year in prison or jail or if the defendant requests that

sentence be pronounced earlier than 15 days post conviction (see, 16A A.R.S. Rules Crim. Proc., Rule 26.4).

Although children of justice system involved parents, more generally, is outside the scope of this project, the APETS system provides a unique opportunity to better understand the number of children who have a parent that has been arrested and processed through the criminal justice system even if sentence does not include a prison term. Pre-sentence investigations, as described above, are conducted on most recently convicted offenders regardless of sentence type. If fully utilized, APETS gives the state the ability to better estimate the number of children of incarcerated parents, but also the number of children of parents sentenced to jail and probation.

### Individual Level Data on Children of Incarcerated Parents

Aggregate data that describes the scope of the problem assists policymakers in the difficult task of prioritizing issues and identifying the resources needed to effectively address them. Complementing the aggregate data, individual level data on children of incarcerated parents assists program developers and researchers in better understanding the circumstances in which children of incarcerated parents live and how parental incarceration affects the lives of the children affected.

In 2010, the Arizona Criminal Justice Commission's Statistical Analysis Center added two items to the Arizona Youth Survey that capture information on whether respondents have a relative who is currently in prison or jail, or if they have a relative who has served a prison or jail sentence in the past. Although these data are useful as a source of aggregate estimates of children with a parent in the secured custody of the criminal justice system (i.e., prison or jail), ongoing analysis of the AYS data on children of imprisoned and jailed parents has the potential for furthering our understanding of the impact of parental incarceration on the lives of the children. The amount of information collected by the survey and the large sample size would allow for an analysis of the effects of parental incarceration on Arizona youth while controlling for a large number of factors that might also be relevant predictors of youth outcomes (e.g., risk and protective factors for delinquency and drug use).

### **Summary**

Based on interviews with 300 men and 300 women currently incarcerated in the Arizona Department of Corrections, there are an estimated 53,067 minor children of parents incarcerated in Arizona's state prison system. This includes approximately 46,873 minor children of incarcerated fathers and 6,194 minor children of incarcerated mothers. The estimated number of minor children with an incarcerated parent is equivalent to three percent of all youth under the age of 18 living in Arizona (<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/04000.html>). Although three percent is a relatively low percentage, it represents a subset of the youth population in Arizona who are at greater risk for negative outcomes, arguably, through no fault of their own. The challenge for Arizona policymakers and practitioners is to consider the scope of the problem and the resources

needed to serve this population in the current context of significant demand for dwindling limited federal, state, and local resources.

To assist policymakers and practitioners in identifying and developing specific strategies for serving this population, Arizona should support a specific research agenda that leverages existing data collection strategies to better understand the consequences of parental incarceration on their minor children. Every two years, the Arizona Youth Survey collects detailed information on 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade youth in Arizona. With the addition of the incarcerated relative questions to the survey, which already includes self-reported measures of risk and protective factors, delinquency, drug use, and other relevant measures, AYS data has the potential to help us better understand the circumstances under which these youth live and the impact of parental incarceration on their lives. This is the type of information that will assist policymakers and those serving youth in the development of effective programming and policies that support these youth and increase the likelihood that they will not follow in the footsteps of their incarcerated parent.

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