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CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS

AN ANALYSIS CONDUCTED BY THE ALLEGHENY COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES



Contributors & PROJECT PARTNERS

The Allegheny County Department of Human Services, Allegheny County Jail, Allegheny County Adult and Juvenile Probation, Allegheny County Correctional Health Services Inc., the Pittsburgh Youth Study team at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, and the Pittsburgh Child Guidance Foundation all joined together to support this project. The project partners graciously provided data, analysis, programmatic and other support to the initiative. Critical funding for this project was provided by the Urban Institute through the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Department of Human Services

The Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) is responsible for providing and administering human services to Allegheny County residents. DHS is dedicated to meeting these human services needs, most particularly to the county's most vulnerable populations, through an extensive range of prevention, early intervention, crisis management, and after-care services provided through its program offices.

DHS services include programs serving the elderly; mental health services (includes 24-hour crisis counseling); drug and alcohol services; child protective services; at-risk child development and education; hunger services; emergency shelters and housing for the homeless; energy assistance; non-emergency medical transportation; job training and placement for youth and adults; and services for individuals with mental retardation and developmental disabilities. In 2006, DHS provided services to 182,000 individuals, nearly 16 percent of the population of Allegheny County.

The Department of Human Services' Office of Children, Youth and Families (CYF) is the County's public office that is mandated by law to protect children from abuse and neglect. The mission of CYF is "to protect children from abuse and neglect; to preserve families, whenever possible; and to assure permanency, that is, to provide permanent safe homes for children either by assuring safety within the child's own family, or by finding an adoptive home or another permanent setting for those children who cannot be reunified with their family" (Department of Human Services, CYF, 2007).

In 2006, CYF received a total of 7,236 calls concerning the possible abuse or neglect of a child. Of that total, 2,171 families received information about community services; 5,065 families were assessed and 3,276 of those were accepted for CYF services (2007).

The Department of Human Services' Office of Behavioral Health (OBH) is the County's public office responsible for providing Allegheny County residents with a coordinated, community-focused system of high-quality and cost-effective mental health and substance abuse services including prevention, crisis intervention, treatment, case management, and community support services. In 2006, OBH served 66,765 individuals with mental health and drug and alcohol services (Department of Human Services, OBH, 2007).

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The Allegheny County Jail

The Allegheny County Jail (ACJ) opened in 1995 with the capacity to hold up to 2,850 offenders. In addition to serving as an incarceration/detention facility, the ACJ detains between 80 and 100 arrestees per day who are held, pending formal identification by the City of Pittsburgh Bureau of Criminal Identification, for City Magistrate and District Justice pre-arraignment hearings. Further, on a daily basis, the ACJ handles more than 350 temporary and permanent movements of individuals. In addition, on a typical day, 100 arrestees come through the intake department and after their arraignment, the individuals who are unable to make bond are committed to ACJ. In 2006, a total of 25,586 offenders came through the facility and of that group, 2,637 individuals were sentenced to the ACJ (Allegheny County Jail, 2006).

Allegheny Correctional Health Services, Inc.

Allegheny Correctional Health Services, Inc. offers physical health, mental health, and drug and alcohol treatment to inmates in the Allegheny County Jail. These services include, but are not limited to, psychiatric evaluation, medication management, and case management by social workers.

Allegheny County Juvenile Probation

Allegheny County Juvenile Probation is committed to implementing the principles of balanced and restorative justice: community protection, victim awareness, and youth competencies. Its mission is to reduce and prevent juvenile crime; promote and maintain safe communities; and improve the welfare of youth and families who are served by the court (Allegheny County Juvenile Probation Annual Report, 2006).

Pittsburgh Child Guidance Foundation

The Pittsburgh Child Guidance Foundation works to improve the emotional health of children age 12 and under in Allegheny County by joining with public and private organizations of many kinds and sizes, including grassroots and faith-based groups. The Foundation's activities are divided between direct action to raise awareness and grants to external organizations. In 2003 the Foundation launched a six-year initiative, "Advocating for Children of Prisoners." Since then the Foundation has devoted its resources to understanding and communicating the losses children experience when their parents are arrested and incarcerated.

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Background

SERVING THE CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS

Much of the recent media attention on incarceration has focused on the incarcerated population, the facilities in which they are housed, and the cost of their stay. However, the discussion rarely centers on the children of the incarcerated. National estimates suggest that more than two million children have at least one parent who is incarcerated and in Allegheny County alone, there are an estimated 7,000 children with an incarcerated parent (Walker, 2005).

Higher foster care caseloads

The number of children in foster care rose dramatically in the mid-1980s and many attributed this increase to the emergence of crack cocaine and the onset of HIV. However, research conducted by Swann and Sylvester (2004), which focused on the six states with the highest foster care caseloads, found a significant positive relationship between the rate of foster care caseloads and the rate of female incarcerations between 1985 and 2000. The researchers determined that each additional incarceration per 100 women was associated with a 12 percent increase in foster care cases.

Developmental challenges

We know that children of incarcerated parents face a variety of potential developmental effects resulting from that incarceration including impaired parent-child bonding, anxiety, developmental regression, acute traumatic stress, and survivor guilt (Simmons, 2000).

Background

Economic hardships

Further, children of incarcerated parents face economic hardships resulting from the loss of parental income, caregiver instability, and parental substance abuse. They demonstrate below-average academic performance even when compared to similarly disadvantaged children, and one study finds a causal relationship between parental incarceration and a child's impaired mental health, drug use, and unemployment (LaVigne, Davis, and Brazell, 2008).

Propensity for incarceration

Children with an incarcerated parent often become incarcerated themselves. Two rigorous longitudinal studies conducted in Europe find a strong connection between parent-child incarcerations – one study concludes that the number of times a parent was incarcerated predicted the number of offenses committed by the child later in life (Murray, Janson, and Farrington, 2007).

Addressing children's needs

Despite recent interest and concern for children of inmates, very little is known about their unique characteristics and needs. A 2005 study of our own community found that this population is “invisible” within the system: no records are kept or data collected on them; no official policies about their rights and treatment are in place; no special supportive services or community-based services exist to help parents, caregivers, and children; and there is no simple way to grant caregivers authority for medical care or school (Walker, 2005). We also know that current policies may hinder contact between children and parents.

Despite the benefits of visiting for both adults and children (such as correcting frightening images, improving communication and explaining circumstances, release planning, emotional healing, and even the preventing the termination of parental rights), few parents interviewed in the Allegheny County Jail had seen their children since their incarceration (Adalist-Estrin, 2003). Long waits and poor accommodations for children created a struggle between correctional staff and caregivers, and led to poor visits. Further, very few inmates are permitted to have contact visits — inmates with court orders, who participate in certain drug and alcohol programs, or who have “worker status” fall into this category. It is important to note that inmates may only make collect phone calls (that currently have an additional surcharge), which further compounds the financial burden placed on families by the incarceration of a parent (2005).

Background

Much has been accomplished since 2005 when this report was first published. In response to the study, collaborative efforts between the Pittsburgh Child Guidance Foundation, the Allegheny County Jail, and the Department of Human Services have been implemented to address the opportunities and concerns raised.¹ These efforts have produced:

- Arrest protocol that details how law enforcement officials identify and handle arrest situations when there is a child present;
- Updated visit protocol;
- Opening of the Family Activity Center, a waiting area specifically for children and their caregiver to wait until a visit starts;
- Formation of committees to address specific social service needs; and
- Improved data collection efforts.

This report takes another step toward identifying and studying children of incarcerated parents. Several approaches were used, including examining jail offender self-report data, reporting on a special analysis of a longitudinal survey of Pittsburgh boys, and examining children involved in foster care that have a mother with an incarceration history.² Broadly, the goals are to explore who these children and parents are and, to the extent possible, describe their experiences in the child welfare and human services systems and the impact that a maternal incarceration had on their entry into foster care placement. This report is intended to start the discussion about the full spectrum of needs that these children may have and how we can better serve them. This information will also be used to further programs and policies that strive to increase positive outcomes for youth; to minimize individuals moving from the child welfare to the juvenile and criminal justice systems; and to enhance family-friendly and pro-reunification and reintegration strategies for families.

¹ In addition to the core organizations named, numerous other organizations and people work together on issues related to the children of incarcerated parents. For a list of partners, see the Pittsburgh Child Guidance Foundation's Second Report of the Community on Children of Incarcerated Parents. http://www.foundationcenter.org/grantmaker/childguidance/linked_files/pcgf_report2.pdf

² At present time, the Department of Human Services can only reliably link a child in foster care to his or her mother. For this reason, only maternal incarcerations are examined. In the future, we hope to extend the analysis to include paternal incarceration patterns and their impacts on children.

Methodology

DATA SOURCES AND APPROACH TO ANALYSIS

Department of Human Services

The Department of Human Services has an integrated data warehouse which stores information from many sources, including those used in this project: the child welfare system, the behavioral health system, the juvenile probation office, and the Allegheny County Jail. Data are integrated using a matching algorithm³; for additional information about the matching algorithm, see Appendix A. The DHS Data Warehouse contains more than 15 million client records, currently supplied from more than 24 independent operating systems, both internal and external to DHS.

Allegheny County Jail

The ACJ keeps records on all individuals booked. These electronic files date back to 1988 and include demographic information, address, charges, and entry and exit dates.

Allegheny County Correctional Health Services, Inc.

Allegheny County Correctional Health Services, Inc. surveys jail entrants on a number of topics, including physical and behavioral health, education, and employment. The analysis in this report relies on a sample of the data collected at intake to the ACJ by Allegheny Correctional Health Services, Inc. in 2006, made up of 3,003 individuals who were asked about their minor children. Examining data on inmates booked in the ACJ allowed us to develop conservative estimates of the percentage of the ACJ population that have children under 18, as well as extract information about who is taking care of the children, that person's connections to the child welfare system, and his or her relationship with the incarcerated parent.

Pittsburgh Youth Study

The Pittsburgh Youth Study is a longitudinal study of a community sample of inner-city boys that began in 1987 and was conducted by Drs. Rolf Loeber and Magda Stouthamer Loeber. The 1,517 boys in the study were selected from the first, fourth, and seventh grades of Pittsburgh Public Schools (called the youngest, middle, and oldest sample, respectively). After an initial screening (85% of the randomly selected families participated), 30 percent of the most antisocial boys (based on parent, teacher and participant information) were included in the sample for follow-up, along with 30 percent randomly selected from the remainder. Just over half of the sample is African American, and the remainder Caucasian. Over 90 percent lived with their natural mother (see Loeber, Farrington et al., 1998 for details). For more information on the study, see <http://www.wpic.pitt.edu/research/famhist/PYS.htm>.

³ In order to triangulate community and social problems it is helpful to integrate numerous data sources. For example, understanding the relationship between individuals in mortgage foreclosure and their use of DHS services (historically or actively) may point to strategies to prevent and/or mitigate these foreclosures.

Methodology

The Pittsburgh Youth Study followed this cohort of boys for 17 years, initially interviewing them and their parents every six months, with additional information gathered from their teachers. As the boys grew, the interviews were conducted annually, and after high school did not include parents or teachers. The interviewer did not specifically ask about the incarceration of a parent but some children, parents, and teachers volunteered this information. At the request of the Pittsburgh Child Guidance Foundation, principal investigator Dr. Rolf Loeber examined the data in the context of this study and identified 48 boys whose parents had been incarcerated during the study; these boys were matched to 48 boys similar in every way except parental incarceration. Note that the results do not mean that the parents were incarcerated at the time of the measurements (the data do not include that specific information).

Juvenile Probation Office

The Juvenile Probation Office collects information on all juveniles under court supervision. This information includes demographics and activity dates. The Juvenile Probation Office's data were imported into the DHS Data Warehouse in May 2007. At that time, DHS received a full data dump of JPO's database, including information on all clients who entered supervision since the 1980s and their current activity status.

Data Analysis

To match data, we use an algorithm to compare external data sources with our DHS client data. This matching algorithm goes through a series of steps to confirm a client's presence in both data directories, looking at his or her social security number, first and last name, date of birth, and gender. In cases where the data may not match exactly, this process takes further steps to confirm identity, using Soundex, a phonetic algorithm for indexing names by pronunciation, and anagrams of social security numbers.

⁴ In 2006, the Allegheny County Jail received 25,586 inmates. Using a conservative estimate, one child per inmate for those reporting a minor child, an estimated 13,795 instances would occur where a child was separated from his or her parent due to an incarceration. These estimates are likely low given possible underreporting coupled with this conservative estimate of only one minor child per inmate. However, since the data includes repeat entries by parents, this estimate includes children impacted by multiple parental incarcerations.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Incarcerated parents

Many jail inmates report having and living with their minor child/children – more than half (61% of women and 53% of men) of ACJ clients report being the parent of a minor child. Given this, a conservative estimate suggests that in 2006 there were 13,795 instances in which parents were separated from their children due to an incarceration.⁴ Thirty-six percent of those who reported having a minor child indicated that they were living with their child at the time of their incarceration.

A relatively small but growing percentage of children in foster care have a mother in jail. Seventeen percent of children first placed in the years 2001-2004 have a mother with a history of incarceration in the Allegheny County Jail. This percent has increased 50 percent between 2001 and 2004.

Data Analysis

While only a small percentage of the children first placed in foster care in 2001-2004 have an incarcerated mother in the ACJ, when there was one incarceration, there frequently were many. These 455 women were arrested 3,458 times during the time period studied, for an average of more than seven arrests per woman. Women were most frequently booked on a variety of misdemeanor, drug, theft, and prostitution charges, criminal activities that may often have been related to behavioral health disorders.

Mothers with a child first placed in 2001-2004 and with an incarceration history accessed markedly more drug and alcohol (83% vs. 35%) and mental health (91% vs. 59%) services than their counterparts in the foster care system without incarcerations.

Similar to findings from the Vera Institute of Justice, we found that the frequency of a mother's bookings increased steadily in the years before placement and spiked in the year of her child's first placement (Ross, 2004). However, the Vera analysis found the number of convictions in the years following the children's placement in foster care declined slightly; we found the number of ACJ bookings continued to rise in the years following that first placement.

Following similar studies, we examined the first placement date and compared this date with the closest maternal arrest date. Perhaps contrary to prevailing wisdom, women are twice as likely to go to jail after their child's placement as before. However, the proximity of placement to arrest suggests a strong relationship between the two. Fifty-two percent of arrests occurred within two months (either before, after, or at the same time as) a child's first placement.

Children's outcomes

Foster care children of incarcerated mothers tend to be younger than their counterparts and more than two-thirds come from severely disadvantaged communities (for the purpose of this report, communities are deemed disadvantaged if they meet specific criteria outlined by the Annie E. Casey Foundation; more information may be found in Appendix B). These children are statistically more likely to be placed in a foster home setting and less likely to be placed in a group home than their counterparts. They are also more likely to have adoption as their last placement goal, even when factoring in age.

Data Analysis

Children with an incarcerated parent performed worse on several key outcomes than a control group. Findings from the Pittsburgh Youth Study suggests that children with a parental incarceration were more likely to commit multiple serious delinquent acts than the controls (38% vs. 19%) and repeated a grade in school twice as often (67% vs. 35%). However, judging from juvenile court records, they did not differ in terms of arrests and were less likely to be involved with the juvenile justice system than their counterparts (11% vs. 20% of 12- to 17-year-olds). More than three times as many qualified for a diagnosis of substance abuse or dependence by late adolescence (55% vs. 18%), and twice as many of their parents had sought help for the child on more than three occasions (35% vs. 18%).

MAJOR FINDINGS

The findings in this section are grouped according to the data sources that support them. Data sources are described in more detail in the Methodology section of this document.

Allegheny County Correctional Health Services, Inc.: Intake surveys, 2006

What percentage of ACJ inmates report being parents?

Nearly all (99%) of the ACJ intake population responded to the inquiry of whether they had a child under the age of 18. Of all those that responded, 55 percent reported affirmatively. Broken down by gender, we find that 61 percent of women and 53 percent of men⁵ reported having a child under the age of 18.

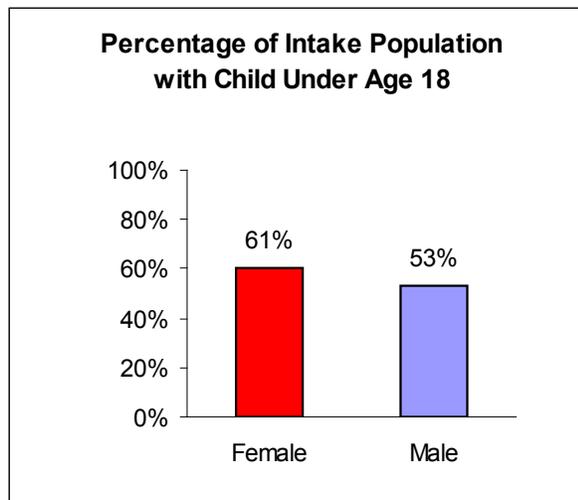


Figure 1: Percentage of intake population with child under age 18

⁵ A similar analysis conducted of 16,383 male inmates booked in 2006 reveals that 53 percent of males report having a minor child (Yamatani, 2006).

Data Analysis

Each year, how many children potentially lose parents to a booking in the Allegheny County Jail?

Although we don't know how many children each inmate has, a conservative estimate would suggest that each year, the parents of nearly 14,000 children come through the jail.⁶

What percentage of incarcerated parents report being the custodial parent of their child?

Of the inmates who report being parents of a minor child, 31 percent (52% of women and 26% of men) report being a custodial parent to their child. A small percentage of women (6%) and a larger percentage of men (16%) reported that they shared custody. For this analysis, custody is defined as a parental relationship or bond with a child; it is not to be interpreted as a court-ordered custodial arrangement.

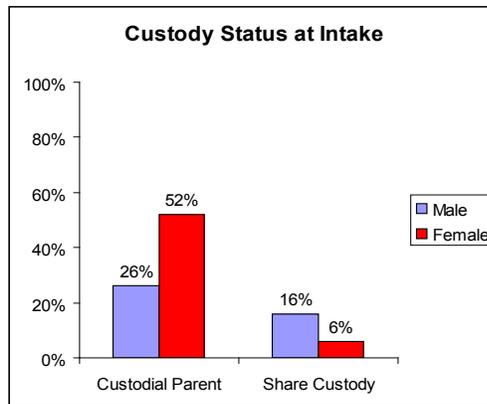


Figure 2: Percentage of parents who report having custody of their child at jail intake

What percentage of parents booked in the Allegheny County Jail report living with their child at the time of their incarceration?

Thirty-six percent of ACJ parents indicated that they were living with their child at the time of their incarceration. Given this conservative estimate, more than 5,000 children lose a parent or caretaker to incarceration each year.⁷

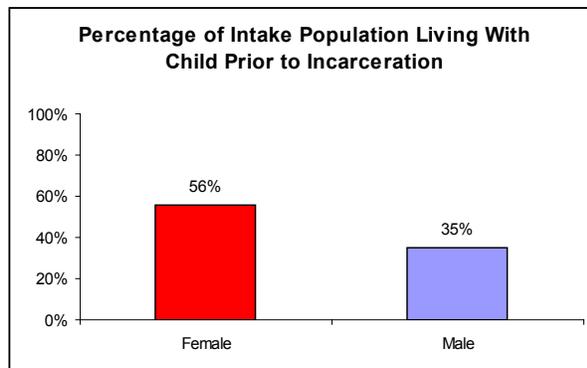


Figure 3: Percent of intake population living with child prior to incarceration

⁶ See Note 2, on page 2, for additional explanation of how this estimate was determined.

⁷ In 2006, the Allegheny County Jail received 25,586 inmates. Twenty percent of the entire sample reported living with their minor child prior to incarceration. If applied to the entire jail population, this would suggest that more than 5,000 children lose a parent to incarceration each year. This analysis cannot account for parents having multiple children nor parents being booked in the jail more than once per year.

Data Analysis

What percentage of parents report that their child(ren) are involved in the child welfare system?

For ACJ inmates for whom the question was applicable (61% of women and 55% of men), more than 90 percent provided a response; 37 percent of female respondents and 11 percent of male respondents reported that their child(ren) were involved with the child welfare system. There is good reason to believe this estimate is conservative since individuals may be reluctant to divulge information about, or may not know of, their child's involvement in the child welfare system.

Pittsburgh Youth Study, Drs. Rolf Loeber and Magda Stouthamer Loeber

How do boys with an incarcerated parent compare to a control group of similar boys?

Overall, children of parents who had been incarcerated fared worse than similar boys in a control group (personal correspondence Dr. Rolf Loeber to Claire Walker, April 2004). Boys with a parental incarceration were more likely to commit multiple serious delinquent acts than boys in the control group (38% vs. 19%) and twice as many repeated a grade in school (67% vs. 35%). However, judging from juvenile court records, they did not differ in terms of arrests. Twice as many boys with a parental incarceration qualified for a diagnosis of substance abuse or dependence by late adolescence (55% vs. 18%), and nearly twice as many of their parents had sought help for the child on more than three occasions (35% vs. 19%). In summary, children of incarcerated parents showed significantly more handicaps than the controls in several functional areas.

Age	Boys with a Parental Incarceration	Control
Committed Multiple Serious Delinquent Acts	38%	19%
Arrest	No Difference	No Difference
Repeated a Grade in School	67%	35%
Substance Abuse Disorder in Adolescence	55%	18%
Parents Sought Help for Child Three or More Times	35%	19%

Table 1: Boys with a parental incarceration compared to control

Allegheny County Department of Human Services; Data Warehouse

What percentage of foster care children have mothers who were incarcerated?

On average, nearly 17 percent of children first placed in out-of-home care between 2001 and 2004 had a mother with a booking in the Allegheny County Jail. These numbers grew significantly over that time period – 50 percent in just four years. This growth follows and may be related to the 78 percent growth in female jail admissions between 1991 and 2005.

Data Analysis

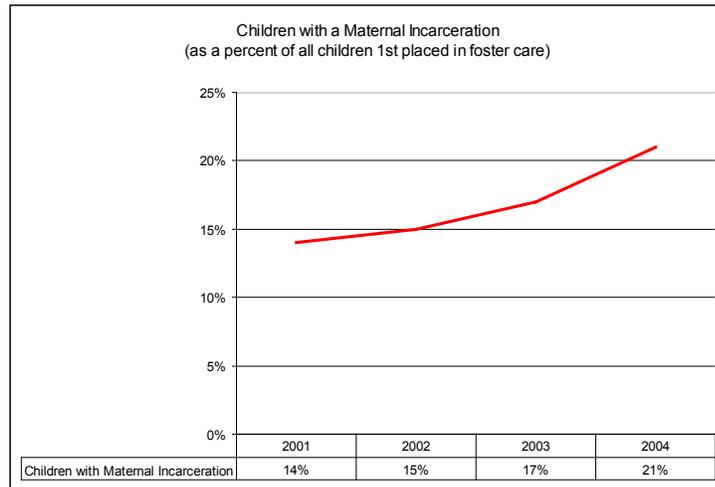


Figure 4: Children with a maternal incarceration (as a percent of children first placed in foster care in years 2001-2004)

Are children with a maternal incarceration demographically similar to other children entering foster care between 2001 and 2004?

Children with incarcerated mothers were statistically more likely to be under age 12 than foster care children whose mothers were not incarcerated (77% vs. 53%). There were no significant differences in the gender and racial composition of the two groups.

	Children First Placed in 2001 - 2004		Children First Placed in 2001- 2004, with an Incarcerated Mother	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Gender				
Male	1,685	50%	351	50%
Female	1,716	50%	348	50%
Race				
Black	1,804	53%	347	50%
White	1,255	37%	259	37%
Other	349	10%	95	13%
Age				
Less than 1	347	10%	130	18%
1 – 4 years	671	20%	194	28%
5 – 11 years	787	23%	216	31%
12 – 17 years	1,575	46%	158	23%
18 & older	68	2%	3	<1%

Table 2: Demographic comparison, all children first placed in foster care and those with an incarcerated mother; 2001-2004

Where do children with a maternal incarceration live?

More than two-thirds of the children with a maternal incarceration come from communities of disadvantage as defined by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (see Appendix A). These communities are also home to most of the children first placed in out-of-home care between 2001 and 2004. The map below shows the concentrations of residences of children with an incarcerated parent in Allegheny County overlaid on distressed community status.

Data Analysis

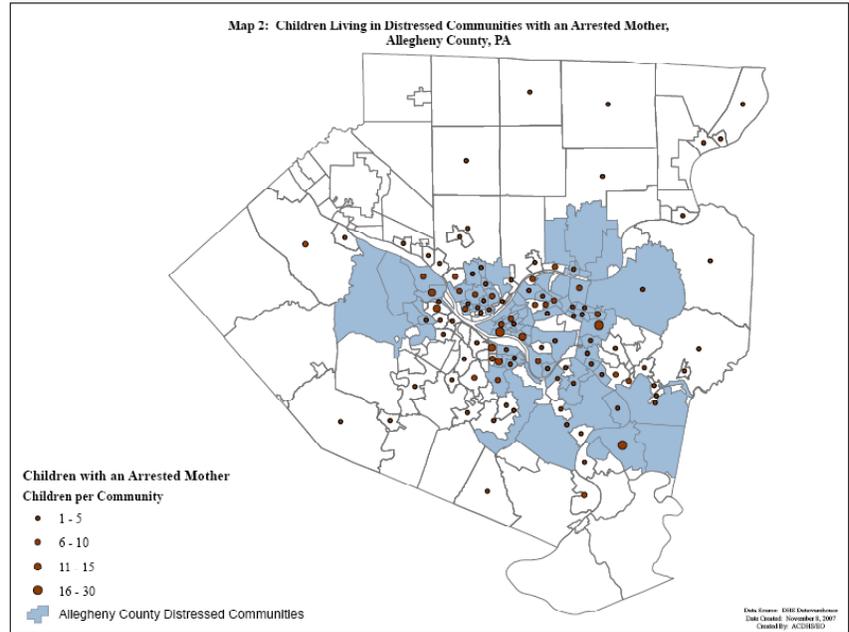


Figure 5: Residences of children of incarcerated parents in Allegheny County

Do children with an incarcerated mother access more behavioral health treatment than their peers in foster care?

Children with a maternal incarceration are statistically less likely to access mental health services or drug and alcohol treatment than their counterparts. However, the child’s age influences usage; young children (under age 12) with a maternal incarceration are more likely to access mental health services than their counterparts (35% vs. 24%), but adolescents are less likely to do so (19% vs. 38%). Adolescents with a maternal incarceration are also less likely to access drug and alcohol treatment (8% vs. 18%).

	Children First Placed in 2001-2004		Children First Placed in 2001-2004, with a Maternal Incarceration	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Mental Health	2,139	52%	378	53%
Under 1 year		13%		11%
1-4 years old		37%		40%
5-11 years old		68%		71%
12-17 years old		81%		84%
18+ years old		66%		50%
Drug & Alcohol	686	29%	84	22%
5-11 years old		10%		14%
12-17 years old		38%		34%

Table 3: Behavioral health access by service type and age

Data Analysis

Are children with an incarcerated mother more likely to be involved with the juvenile justice system than their foster care peers?

Children with an incarcerated mother are less likely than their peers to be involved with the juvenile justice system.

	Children First Placed in Years 2001-2004		Children First Placed in 2001-2004, with a Maternal Incarceration	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Children 12 and over	682	20%	76	11%
Age 12		8%		13%
Age 13		12%		16%
Age 14		20%		19%
Age 15		20%		22%
Age 16		24%		22%
Age 17		13%		6%

Table 4: Juvenile Justice Involvement

Are children with an incarcerated mother placed in different settings?

Compared to their counterparts, children of mothers with an incarceration history are more likely to be placed in a foster home setting and less likely to be placed in a group home.

	Under 1		1 to 4		5 to 11		12 to 17		18 and older	
Children First Placed, 2001-2004										
Foster Home	869	99	2,037	99%	2,321	90%	2,057	27%	166	42%
Residential Facility	3	<1%	1	<1%	78	3%	1,203	16%	35	9%
Group Home					181	7%	3,976	52%	93	24%
Supervised Independent Living	2	<1%					345	4%	97	25%
Children First Placed with Maternal Incarceration, 2001-2004										
Foster Home	324	100	685	99%	653	91%	345	42%	22	76%
Residential Facility					20	3%	124	15%		
Group Home					40	6%	322	39%	5	17%
Supervised Independent Living							34	4%	2	7%

Table 5: Placement setting by age

Data Analysis

Are children with an incarcerated mother more likely to have adoption as a goal than their counterparts?

While there is significant missing data, it seems that adoption is more likely to be a goal for children with an incarcerated mother than for their counterparts, even when compensating for the child’s age. The Vera Institute of Justice found incarceration to be associated with child adoption, even after accounting for maternal and child age. However, it is important to note that family reunification remains the preferred foster care goal regardless of maternal incarceration status. Further research will examine actual adoptions and other factors related to foster care exits.

	Children First Placed 2001-2004	Children First Placed 2001-2004, with a Maternal Incarceration
Reunification	16%	17%
Placed with Relative	3%	5%
Adoption	3%	10%
Long-term Placement	4%	4%
Independent Living	1%	1%

Table 6: Foster care goal

Do children with a maternal incarceration experience longer lengths of stay than their counterparts?

The duration-in-care pattern for children of incarcerated mothers is similar to that of their counterparts.

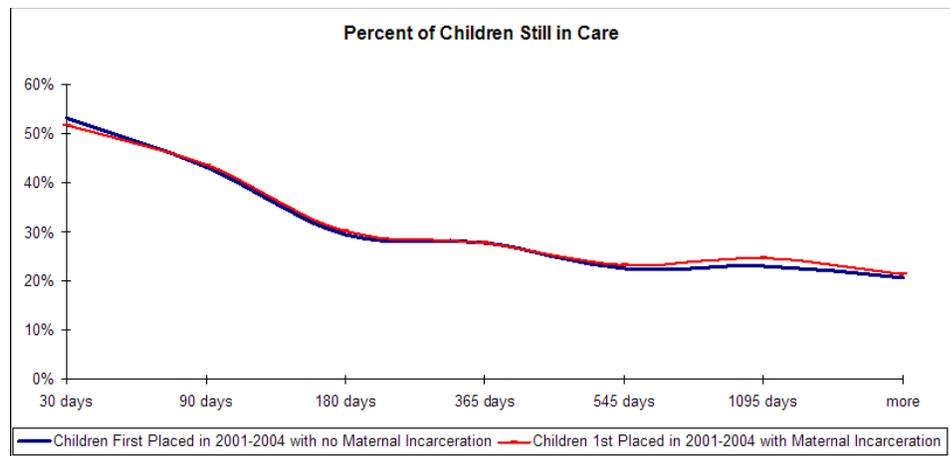


Figure 6: Percent of children still in care at various points in time

Data Analysis

Who are the mothers of children first placed in foster care in the years 2001-2004?

Between 2001 and 2004, there were a total of 2,823 mothers of children first placed in foster care. Of those mothers, 455 (16%) of them had an incarceration in the ACJ.

Mothers with a child first placed in 2001-2004 who had an incarceration history were slightly more likely to be white and young (under 35) than their counterparts without an incarceration history.

	No Incarceration History	History of Incarceration
Race		
Black	51%	49%
White	44%	47%
Other	5%	4%
Age at Child's Birth		
14 – 17 years	7%	5%
18 – 24 years	46%	48%
25 – 34 years	33%	39%
35 – 44 years	6%	8%
45 and older	4%	0%
Unknown	4%	1%

Table 7: Demographic comparison of foster care mothers

Are mothers with an incarceration history more likely to access behavioral health treatment than their counterparts?

Mothers with a child first placed in 2001-2004 and with an incarceration history accessed significantly more drug and alcohol (83% vs. 35%) and mental health (91% vs. 59%) services than their counterparts.

	No Incarceration History		History of Incarceration	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Mental Health	1,402	59%	416	91%
Drug and Alcohol	832	35%	379	83%

Table 8: Comparison of behavioral health treatment access for foster care mothers

How many times are incarcerated foster care mothers arrested?

The 455 mothers with a child first placed in foster care between 2001 and 2004, and with a history of incarceration, were arrested 3,458 times during that time period, for an average of more than seven arrests per woman.

Data Analysis

What are the incarceration patterns for mothers of children in foster care?

Mothers with an incarceration history and a child first placed in foster care in the years 2001-2004 were incarcerated both before the first foster care placement of their child/children, during the year of their child's first placement, and in the years following their child's first placement.

	Number of Women	Percentage of Total Women
Mother Jail Activity: 2001 (n=80)		
Arrests Prior to Child's First Placement Year	50	63%
Arrests in Year of First Placement	39	49%
Arrests in Years Subsequent to First Placement	80	100%
Mother Jail Activity: 2002 (n=106)		
Arrests Prior to Child's First Placement Year	75	71%
Arrests in Year of First Placement	51	48%
Arrests in Years Subsequent to First Placement	105	99%
Mother Jail Activity: 2003 (n=119)		
Arrests Prior to Child's First Placement Year	74	62%
Arrests in Year of First Placement	55	46%
Arrests in Years Subsequent to First Placement	116	97%
Mother Jail Activity: 2004 (n=150)		
Arrests Prior to Child's First Placement Year	93	62%
Arrests in Year of First Placement	76	51%
Arrests in Years Subsequent to First Placement	148	99%

Table 9: Maternal incarceration patterns

Similar to findings from the Vera Institute of Justice, we find the number of a mother's bookings increased steadily in the years prior to her child's first placement and spiked in the year of that first placement. However, the Vera analysis found the number of convictions in the years following the children's placement in foster care declined slightly; in Allegheny County, the number of ACJ bookings continued to rise in the years following placement (Ross, 2004).

Data Analysis

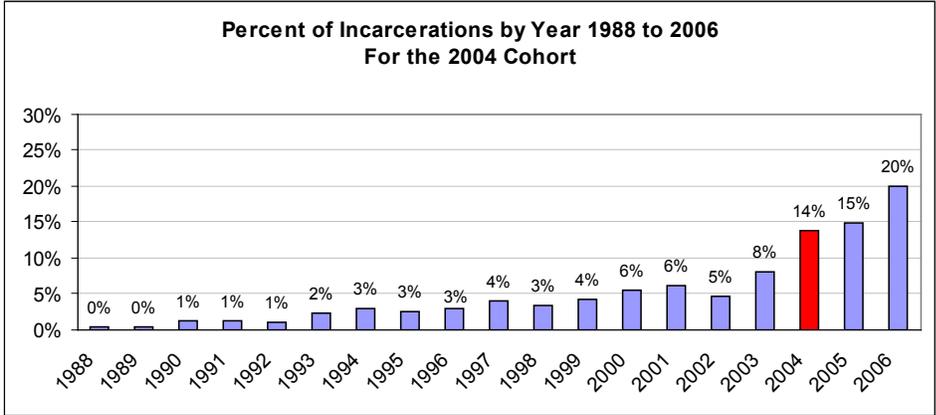


Figure 7: Percent of maternal incarcerations by year, 1998-2006

These 455 women together logged an average of two bookings per month between 1988 and the year of their child’s first placement, eight bookings per month in the year of their child’s placement, and ten bookings per month in the years after their child was first placed. Table 10 depicts the incarceration patterns for the 2004 cohort, illustrating the growth in incarcerations during and after their child’s placement.

Jail Bookings		Number	Number Per Month
2001	Prior to Child's First Placement Year	271	1.7
	In Child's First Placement Year	81	6.8
	After Child's First Placement Year	409	6.3
2002	Prior to Child's First Placement Year	320	1.9
	In Child's First Placement Year	89	7.4
	After Child's First Placement Year	457	9.3
2003	Prior to Child's First Placement Year	327	1.8
	In Child's First Placement Year	78	6.5
	After Child's First Placement Year	424	10.3
2004	Prior to Child's First Placement Year	462	2.4
	In Child's First Placement Year	124	10.3
	After Child's First Placement Year	420	14.5

Table 10: Maternal Incarceration Patterns

Data Analysis

Does a mother's incarceration tend to precede or follow a child's placement into foster care?

Following similar studies, we examined the first placement date for each child and compared this date with the closest arrest date for his or her mother. For more than half of the children with a maternal incarceration, their mother's incarceration came within two months (either before or after) of their first foster care placement. Further, contrary to what some might expect, but consistent with the literature, 60 percent of maternal incarcerations occurred after a child entered foster care.

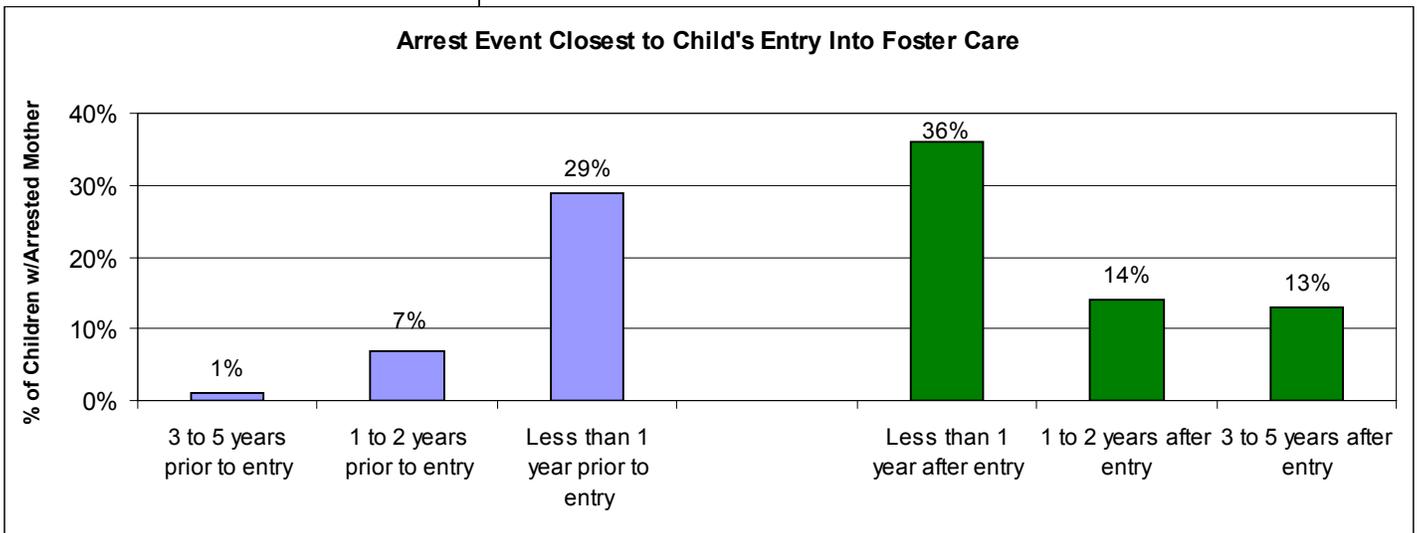


Figure 8: Arrest event closest to child's first entry into foster care

Of those, nearly 40 percent of the children experienced a maternal arrest less than two months after their first placement.

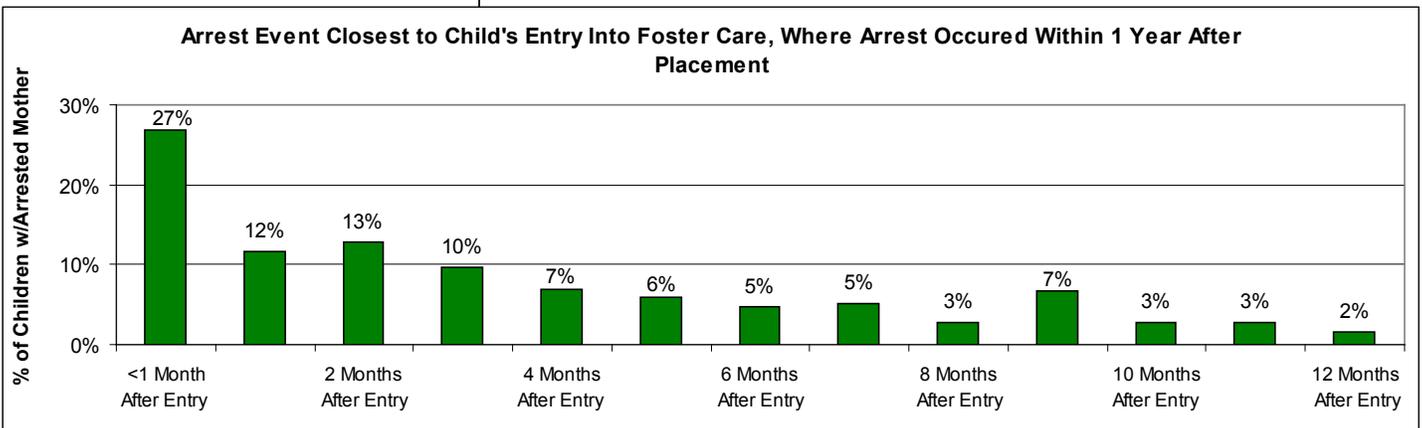


Figure 9: Arrest events following child's first placement

Data Analysis

Similarly, nearly half of the mothers who were incarcerated before their child's placement were booked less than two months prior to that placement.

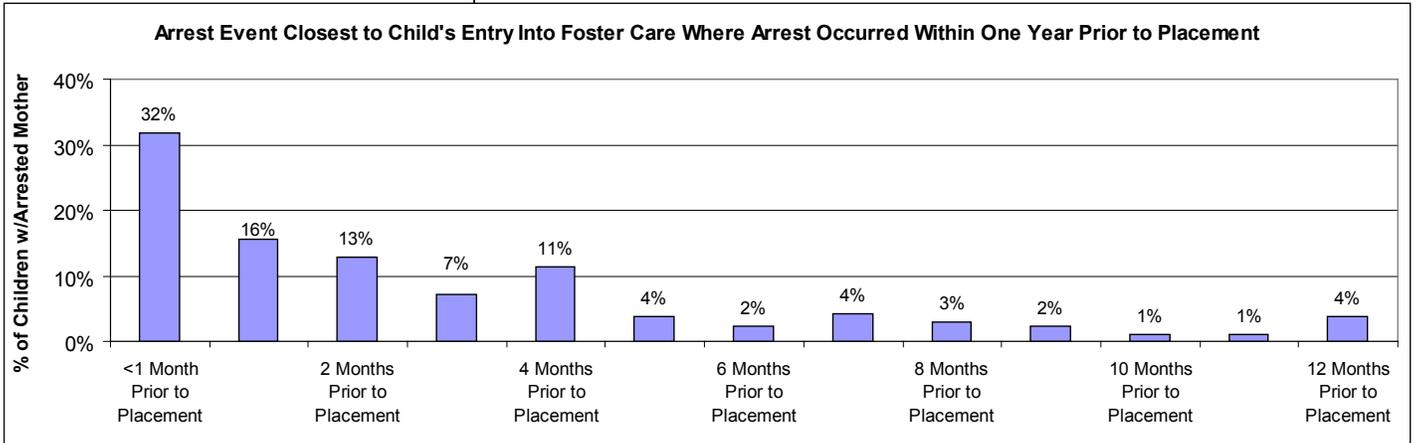


Figure 10: Arrest events prior to child's first placement

Data Analysis

Do incarcerated foster care mothers have extensive criminal careers?

Forty percent of these women had a criminal career that spanned less than five years:

Length of Criminal Career	Percentage of Total
Less than 1 year	11%
1 to 4 years	30%
5 to 8 years	17%
9 to 12 years	19%
13 to 15 years	12%
Longer than 15 years	12%

We also examined the total number of bookings for these women. Sixty-seven percent were booked five or more times during the study period.

Number of Bookings	Count	Percentage of Total
Less than 5	133	33%
5 to 10	172	42%
11 to 20	78	19%
21 to 30	19	5%
More than 30	6	1%

Finally, research suggests that individuals who commit a criminal act at a young age are likely to commit acts more frequently and over a long period of time (Blumstein et al.). Within our sample, women were more likely to be under the age of 30 years at the time of their first booking in the ACJ. Furthermore, a small percentage of women began their criminal career at the age of 18 years or younger.

With what offenses were these women charged?

The 455 women were booked in the ACJ a total of 3,458 times and charged with 8,404 offenses. Women were most often booked on a variety of misdemeanors charges (44%) such as fraudulent acts, forgery, resisting arrest, trespassing, etc. Drug-related charges accounted for 17 percent of offenses, theft for 20 percent, and prostitution for 7 percent.

Conclusions & RECOMMENDATIONS

	Number	Percentage of Total
Violent Felony	5	<1%
Weapons Offense	14	<1%
Offense Involving Child/Minor	118	1%
Drug Offense	1,439	17%
DWI	98	1%
Prostitution	629	7%
Larceny/Theft	1,713	20%
Assaults/Harassment	710	8%
Misdemeanors	3,678	44%

Cyclical nature of maternal criminality

Women included in this study exhibited similar criminal trends: most were incarcerated frequently, for short periods, over the course of many years, and with no desistance in sight. This finding, taken with the nature of their offenses (largely minor and drug- or alcohol-related) and their significant treatment access, suggests that the criminal justice system, human services systems, and the community are failing to support incarcerated women. Further discussion should focus on more effective treatment and incarceration strategies to help women break addictions and successfully reintegrate into their communities.

Links between foster care placement and maternal incarceration

Women are often incarcerated after losing their child to the foster care system. Maternal criminal activity spikes and continues to increase after a child's placement. This may suggest that family preservation efforts may not only be good for the children, they may benefit the mother and help to reduce crime. Of course, the safety and well-being of the child is the first priority of the child welfare system, but if safety can be maintained while behavioral health disorders are treated, keeping children with their mothers may have numerous community benefits.

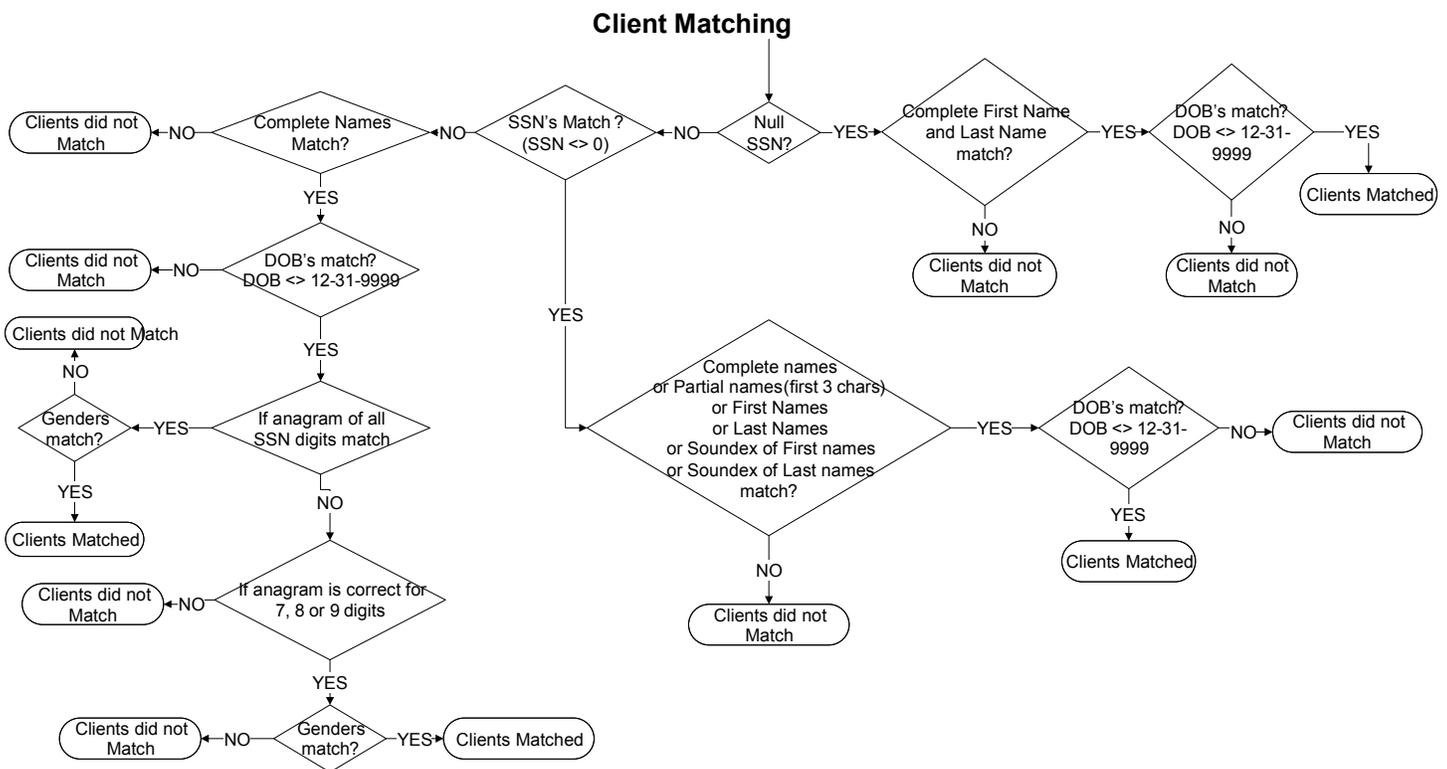
Increasing lengths of stay, particularly in the state prison system, also have significant implications in this discussion. If a woman's incarceration results in her child's placement in foster care for 15 to 22 months, her parental rights may be terminated. While only 1.5 percent of incarcerations lasted 15 months or longer, this issue should not be ignored.

Finally, a significant number of children are in foster care while their mother is incarcerated. Given this, if one of the goals of the child welfare system is to ensure parental visitation and other pro-reunification strategies, then the child welfare system must include adequate jail visitation in that plan.

Appendix A:

DHS DATA WAREHOUSE MATCHING ALGORITHM

In order to triangulate community and social problems it is helpful to integrate numerous data sources. To match data, we use an algorithm to compare external data sources with our DHS client data. This matching algorithm goes through a series of steps to confirm a client's presence in both data directories, looking at his or her social security number, first and last name, date of birth, and gender. In cases where the data may not match exactly, this process take further steps to confirm identity, using Soundex, a phonetic algorithm for indexing names by pronunciation, and anagrams of social security numbers.



Appendix B:

ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION: DISTRESSED NEIGHBORHOOD CRITERIA

Severely distressed neighborhoods are defined by the Annie E. Casey Foundation as census tracts with at least three of the four following characteristics:

1. High poverty rate (27.4 percent or more);
2. High percentage of female-headed families (37.1 percent or more);
3. High percentage of high school dropouts (23.0 percent or more); and
4. High percentage of working-age males unattached to the labor force (34.0 percent or more).

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