



# Children of Incarcerated Parents

Brad Douglas, July 2008

An often overlooked impact of crime and incarceration is the effect these situations have on the children of those incarcerated. These children are often at risk for the same behaviors that led to their parents incarceration.

Many entities in West Virginia have expressed a desire to locate these children in order to provide services and have applied for grant funding to do so. Unfortunately, the number of Children of Incarcerated Parents in each county was unknown, therefore making it difficult to adequately define the scope of the problem for grant applications or program development.

In an attempt to address this information gap, the West Virginia Division of Corrections (WVDOC) conducted a survey of prisoners during fiscal year 2008. The survey was administered by case management staff on each inmate currently in WVDOC custody as of the start of the fiscal year and every new inmate being processed during the year. A total of 4,690 surveys were collected.

### Inmate Parent Characteristics

Of those surveyed 3,964 or 84.5% were male and 726 or 15.5% were female. As shown in Chart

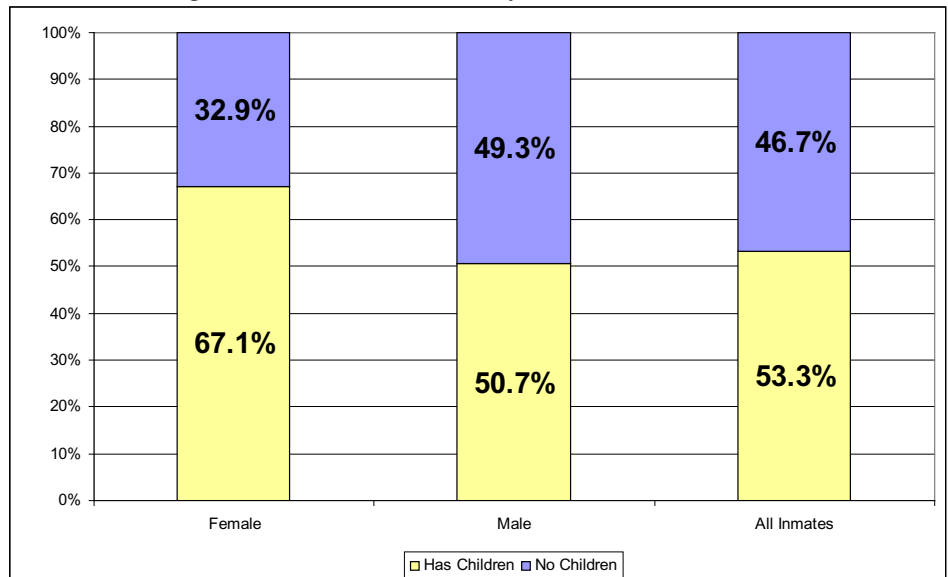
### Highlights

- 53.3% (2,498) of inmates reported they were parents. 67.1% of female inmates reported having children, while 50.7% of male inmates reported the same.
- The 2,498 inmate parents reported having 4,902 children. Female inmates had an average of 2.2 children, while male inmates had an average of 2.0 children.
- The average age of children reported by inmates was 8.5 years.
- The majority of inmate's children were reported as currently being under the care of the Biological Mother (62.0%).
- The largest group of children (39.7%) were reported to live in either Kanawha, Mercer, Cabell, Berkeley, Raleigh or Harrison Counties. With Kanawha having over twice as many as the next highest county (Kanawha 476, Mercer 225).

1, a greater percentage of female inmates reported that they had children ( 487 or 67.1%) than male inmates (2,011 or 50.7%). In all, 53.3% (2,498) of inmates surveyed reported that they had children. In the survey, "Child" was defined as a dependent under the age of 18.

The 2,498 inmates responding that they were parents listed a total of 4,902 children. The average number of children reported by female inmates was 2.2, while male inmates reported an average of 2.0 children.

Chart 1: Percentage of Inmates with Children by Inmate Gender.





## Children Characteristics

The gender reported for inmate children was almost evenly split between male (2,450 or 50.0%) and female (2,438 or 49.3%) with a small number that were unknown (14 or 0.3%).

Ages for these children were also very similar. The average age for female children was 8.6 years, while for males it was 8.3 years, for all children reported the average age was 8.5 years. Table 1 below summarizes the distribution of children by age category.

Table 1: Inmate Children by Age Category.

Age Category	# of Children	% of Children
Under 1 Year	126	3%
1-3 Years	824	17%
4-6 Years	940	19%
7-9 Years	956	20%
10-12 Years	802	16%
13-15 Years	795	16%
16-17 Years	459	9%
Grand Total	4902	100%

Another important consideration when discussing the Children of Incarcerated Parents is who is currently serving as the children’s guardian. As shown in Chart 2, the majority of children are being cared for by their Biological Mother (62%), with the next largest category being “Family Member” at 21%. Only seven percent of children are being cared for by their Biological Father.

Additionally, inmates were asked where their children were living by state and county. A significant portion of the children (1,098 or

22.3%) live out of state, with 246 or 5.0% being unknown and the remainder (3,558 or 72.6%) living in West Virginia.

Of the 3,558 living within West Virginia, the largest number reported Kanawha as their county of residence (476 children). Kanawha County had more than twice the number of children than the next highest, Mercer County, which had 225.

As illustrated in Chart 3, the top six counties (Kanawha, Mercer, Cabell, Berkeley, Raleigh, & Harrison) made up 39.7% (1,413) of the total number of children living within the state. The next group (Fayette, Marion, Nicholas, Ohio, Wood, & Logan) consisted of 15.5% or 551 with the rest distributed amongst the remaining counties.

## Conclusions

Children of incarcerated parents are often at high risk to display the same behaviors that may have led to their parents incarceration. It is important that the organizations attempting to assist these children know the scope of the problem in their locations. The fact that many of these children are concentrated in only six counties (39.7%) may assist these local providers in achieving grant funding and program sustainability.

As this report has shown, a significant number of prisoners currently incarcerated have children (53.3% or 2,498), and it is important to note that pretrial detainees and misdemeanor offenders in Regional Jails are not included in this analysis. Nearly 20% of the WVDOC’s sentenced population is also currently being held in regional jails and are not included.

Chart 2: Inmate Children by Caretaker Category.

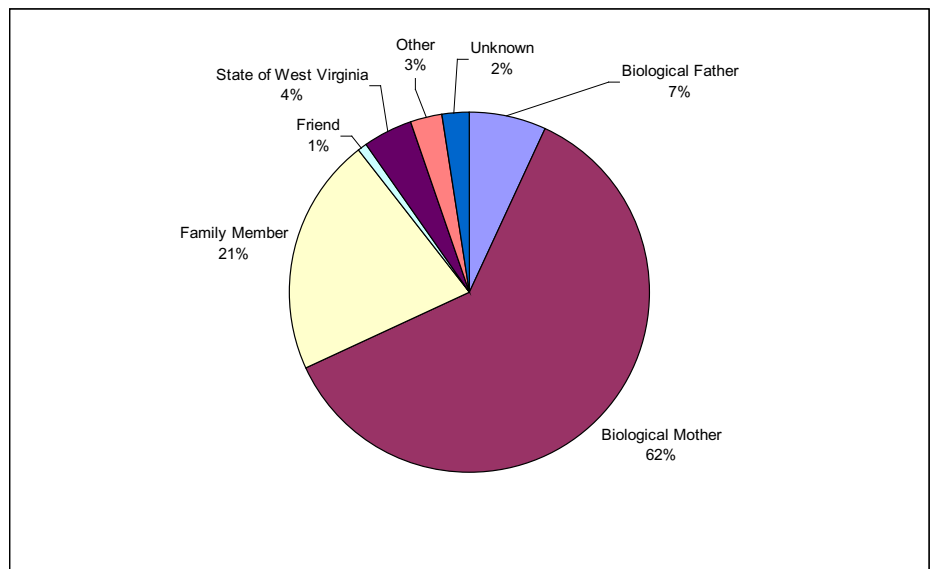
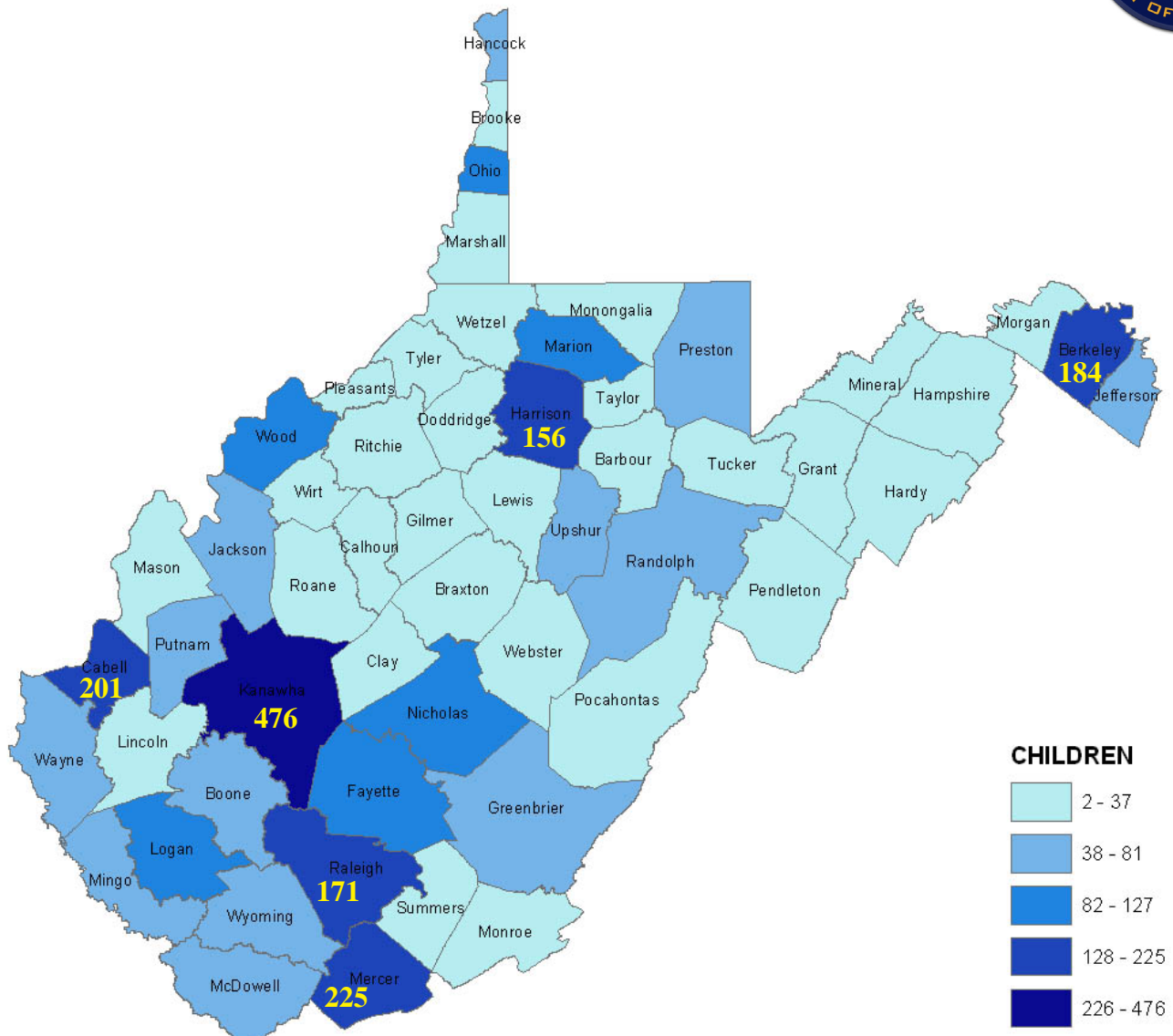




Chart 3: Inmate Children by County.



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