

Reason 4

Devastating Impact on Women

“Women are the fastest growing and least violent segment of prison and jail populations. 85.1% of female inmates are behind bars for non-violent offenses.”

Judge James P. Gray

Nothing destroys a family like putting the mother in jail. This is the very antithesis of family values.

We imprison the most women in the world, more than three times as many as any other country, even those with much greater populations than ours. For example, the National Council on Crime and Delinquency reports our female incarceration rate is approximately five times higher than repressive China's rate.

Our incarcerated women are treated viciously and violently for non-violent and often harmless acts. If prison is horrendous for men, incarceration is much worse for women. They're demeaned, sexually abused, assaulted, defeminized, and totally dehumanized. Thus, this war is just as devastating and deadly for women as it is for children and teens. And if we want to assure the annihilation of families in minority areas that have already seen their fathers and sons incarcerated, then imprisoning women is a guarantee.

“Who ever heard of a female drug lord? As the terms ‘kingpin’ and ‘drug lord’ denote, men are almost always those at the head of major drug operations, and yet the rate of imprisonment of women for drug crimes has far outpaced that of men.” Amnesty International, Rights for All agrees, “Women tend to be very small cogs in a very large system, not the organizers of backers of illegal drug empires.”

(1)

“When one is incarcerated with 1,200 other inmates, it is hard to be selfish. So many of the women here will never have the joy and wellbeing that you and I experience. Many of them have been here for years, devoid of care, devoid of love, devoid of family. “I beseech you all to think about these women, to encourage the American people to ask for reforms, both in sentencing guidelines, in length of incarceration for nonviolent first-time offenders, and for those involved in drug-taking. They would be much better served in a true rehabilitation center than in prison where there is no real help, no real programs to rehabilitate, no programs to educate, no way to be prepared for life ‘out there’ where each person will ultimately find herself, many with no skills and no preparation for living.” (2)

— Martha Stewart

Skyrocketing Incarceration for Women

The comprehensive ACLU booklet, *Caught in the Net: The Impact of Drug Policies on Women and Families* cites these horrendous statistics:

“129%: the rate of increase between 1986 and 1999 in the number of women in state prisons for non-drug offenses.

“888%: the rate of increase between 1986 and 1999 in the number of women in state prisons for drug offenses alone.” This increase exceeds the increase in the number of men incarcerated for comparable crimes.

“400%: the rate of increase since 1986 in the number of women behind bars (state and federal jails and prisons).

“800%: the rate of increase since 1986 of African-American women behind bars (state and federal jails and prisons).

“Drug offenses accounted for half (49%) of the rise in the number of women incarcerated in state prisons from 1986 to 1996, compared to one-third (32%) of the increase for men.

“Drug offenses are one of the leading causes of criminal convictions and incarceration among women, far outpacing convictions for violent crimes and public order offenses.