

Research on Incarcerated Women and Their Children

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Background

- Project began with grant from the Chicago Community Trust and co-operation and assistance from staff and officials at the IDOC and CCDOC, and ICJIA.
- We use administrative data bases maintained by IDOC, CCDOC and other state and local agencies to learn more about incarcerated mothers and their children.

Research Questions

- **The characteristics of the female prison population.**
- **Evidence of number of children affected.**
- **The relationship between prison and their employment prospects.**
- **Evidence on their contacts with the social welfare system.**
- **Evidence on their contacts with the child welfare system.**
- **Evidence on their children in the Chicago Public Schools**

The Female Prison Population and Their Children

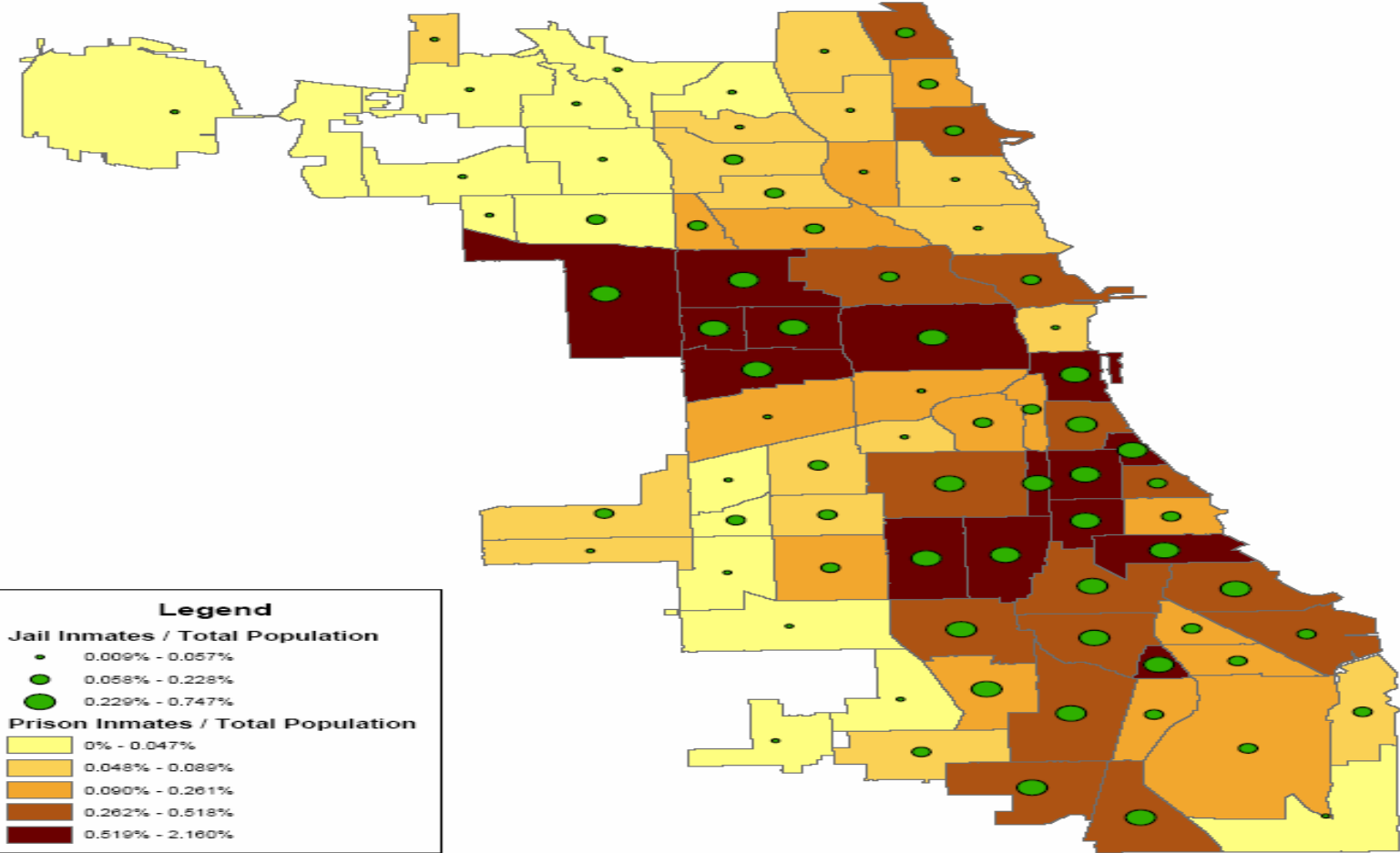
- **Increased rapidly during the 1990s.**
- **Since 2000 leveled off to between 2,500 to 3,000 admissions, annually**
- **Increase greatest among women with 4 or more children.**
- **For every women in prison there are about 3 kids affected:**
 - **In any given year, 7,500 children in Illinois have mothers who spent time in prison.**
 - **During 1990s approximately 35,000 children in Illinois had mother in prison**

Characteristics of Female Prisoners

- **Average age when admitted ~32 years.**
- **Time served is short: 9 months.**
- **Drug-related offenses common ~50%**
- **Minor crimes: e.g., retail theft < \$150~10%.**
- **85% report being mothers**
 - **25% have 4+ kids.**
- **At least 65% on FS or TANF since 1990.**
- **At least 70% worked in regular (UI-covered) job since 1995.**

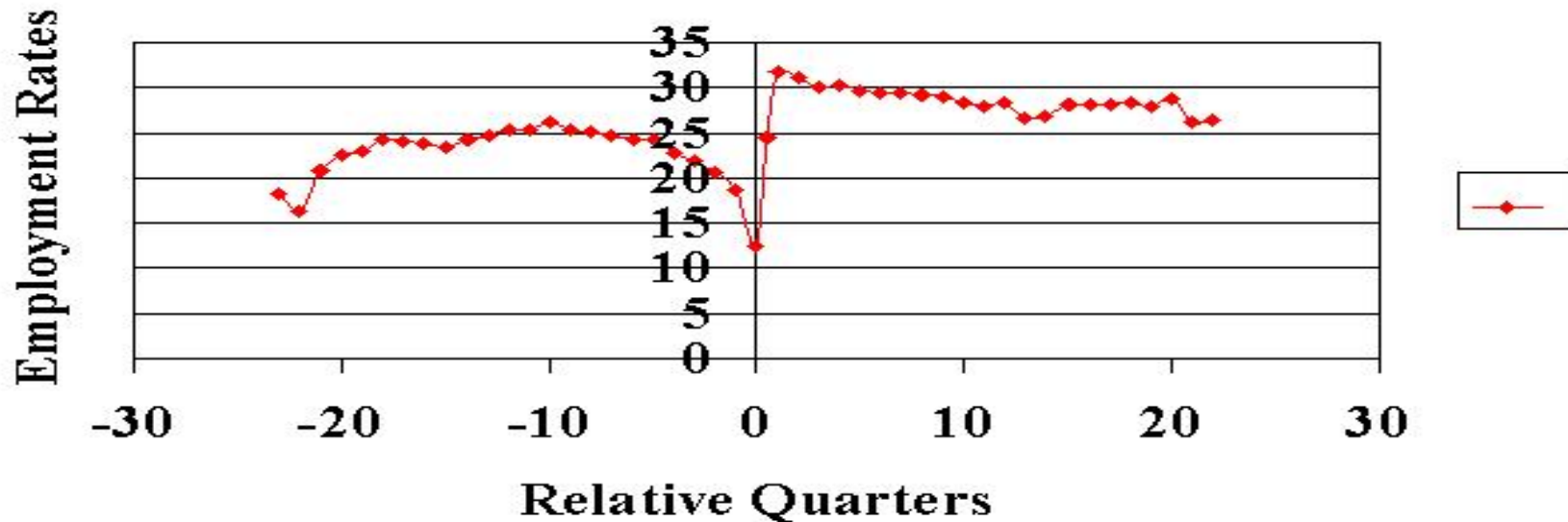
Female Incarceration Affects Low-Income Communities

Figure 10: Concentration of Female State Prisoners and Jail Inmates by Chicago Neighborhoods



Prison Does Not Cause Poor Employment Outcomes

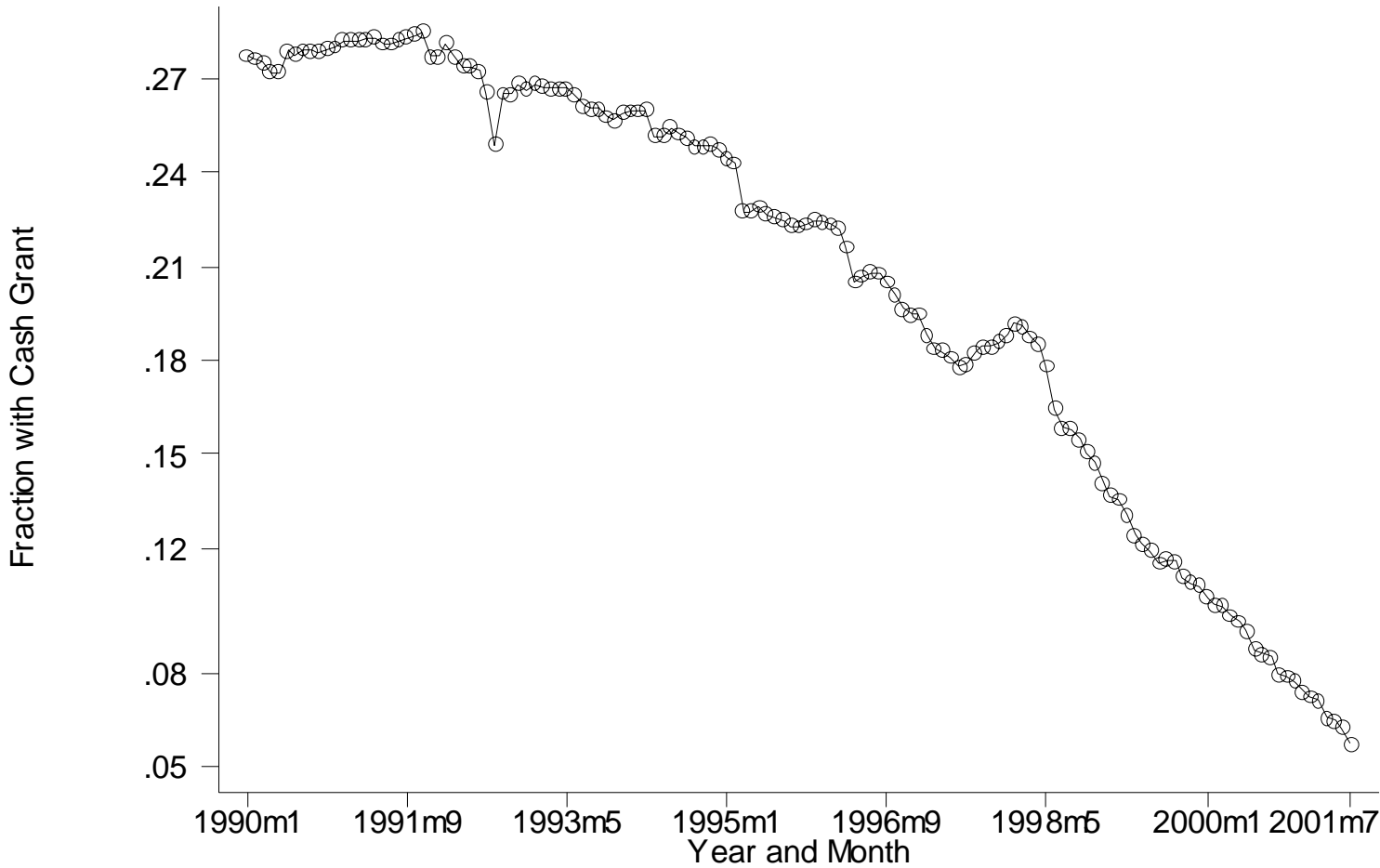
Figure 1
Employment Rates relative to prison entry and exit (Average rate: 25.60%)



Prospects for Self-Sufficiency?

- Earn \$1,800 per quarter when working.
- ***Only about 10% of women ever had a quarter with earnings > poverty threshold.***

Welfare Dependency?



Whose Minding the Children?

- **No mechanism to keep track of kids when custodial parent is in prison.**
- **About 1/3 have had a child in foster care ever. (Records go back to 1976.)**
- **Most FC spells do not start close to or at time of incarceration.**
- **Many FC spells have ended prior to prison.**

How Do the Kids Do in School?

- Test scores very low compared to CPS averages.
- Implications for test scores of individual schools?
- No effect on test scores associated with mother's incarceration in prison.

Lessons From the Qualitative Research

- Who are these women?
- What would it take to help them?
- Common story:
 - Physical and sexual abuse as a girl
 - Low levels of education
 - Impoverished and dangerous environment
 - Exposure to drugs at home or school
 - Drug addiction often by teen years
 - Poor/no work histories.

What Should Reentry Programs Do?

- **Reentry is not the right word.**
- **Comprehensive programs**
 - **Supportive housing**
 - **Drug treatment**
 - **Schooling**
 - **Life skills**
 - **Job Training**
- **Expensive intervention: E.g. Job Corps costs ~\$20,000.**
- **Leveraging community resources.**

Cook County Department of Corrections Department of Women's Justice Services Programs

- Women's Residential Program
- Female Furlough
- MOM's
- Women of Power Alumni Association
- Horticulture Program