

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/gender-and-justice-in-america/overlooked-in-the-era-of-metoo>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

When the Bureau of Justice Statistics released the [most recent trends on jails in the United States](#), they confirmed two things: First, the push for local justice reform is still strong. The number of people held in jail decreased from 785,500 people in 2008 down to 740,700 people at midyear 2016. Second, that the current era of reform continues to overlook women, with the numbers of women incarcerated in jails growing from 99,200 in 2000 to 101,900 in 2016. As we celebrate Womens History Month, let us not forget that although 5 percent of the worlds women live in America, American women account for 30 percent of all incarcerated women in the world.

Nearly two years ago, our publication, [Overlooked: Women and Jails in an Era of Reform](#), found the growth of the number of women in jail had skyrocketed since 1970, when roughly three-quarters of counties held not a single woman in their custody. Additionally, we found this growth did not occur equally across communities. In fact, while the national number of women in jail had grown 14-fold, small counties (those with fewer than 250,000 people) experienced a 31-fold increase from 1970-2014. And while our most recent report, [Divided Justice: Trends in Black and White Jail Incarceration, 1990-2013](#), found that alarming racial disparities persist in the overall national jail population, there is currently no way of knowing how those disparities are impacting women. The United States stopped separating out gender-specific data by race and ethnicity at the county level in 1993, when nearly two-thirds of the women in jails were women of color.

Today, [justice-involved women are also being overlooked](#) in the #MeToo movement. Although #MeToo was originally meant to spark conversations both in person and online, the current momentum has largely been felt on social media. But what about the incarcerated women who dont have access to social media? Or the devices (smartphones and computers) needed to access those conversations?

Our *Overlooked* report also showed that women in jail are overwhelmingly [survivors of violence](#). However, programs that are meant to address violence and trauma are often only available to women who have been arrested on certain charges. For example, some jurisdictions provide programming for women arrested on prostitution-related charges. Yet, those cases account for less than 1 percent of all arrests of women nationally. In contrast, almost 90 percent of *all* justice-involved women report being survivors of sexual violence in addition to 77 percent being survivors of intimate partner violence, and 60 percent being survivors of caregiver violence who could benefit from community support and services.

Additionally within the criminal justice system, [risks and rates of sexual victimization](#) disproportionately impact women. Though women represented just 13 percent of the people in jails between 2009 and 2011, they accounted for 27 percent of all inmate-on-inmate sexual victimization and 67 percent of all staff-on-inmate sexual victimization, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

In order to fully include women who are incarcerated in the #MeToo movement, we must alter our responses to address these realities. The movement is incomplete without incorporating their voices into the conversation.

PUBLICATION

NEWS

STORY/CHAPTER

Transformative change, sent to your inbox.

Vera Institute of Justice. All rights reserved.