

The Sentencing Project

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/the-lives-of-juvenile-lifers-findings-from-a-national-survey/>

Policy Issue Resources

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Sentences of life without parole are often erroneously believed to translate to a handful of years in prison followed by inevitable release. The reality is that a life without parole sentence means that the individual will die in prison.

This report provides a new perspective on the population of individuals serving life sentences without parole for crimes committed in their youth. It represents the findings of a comprehensive investigation into this population that includes a first-ever national survey of juvenile lifers. Through this effort we obtained in-depth information from these individuals about their life experiences prior to their conviction, as well as descriptions of their lives while incarcerated. The findings are sobering, and should become an element of policy discussion regarding this extreme punishment.

Although it does not excuse their crimes, most people sent to prison for life as youth were failed by systems that are intended to protect children. Survey findings from 1,579 individuals around the country who are serving these sentences demonstrate high rates of socioeconomic disadvantage, extreme racial disparities in the imposition of these punishments, sentences frequently imposed without judicial discretion, and counterproductive corrections policies that thwart efforts at rehabilitation.

To read the report, download the PDF below.

Increase in U.S. jail & prison population in the last 40 years

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