

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/gender-and-justice-in-america/the-gendered-multigenerational-impact-of-incarceration-on-education-and-the-social-capital-of-communities>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

It's no coincidence that the number of Americans with college diplomas is [the same](#) as those with criminal records; the relationship between a lack of education and criminal justice involvement, especially for girls and women, is bi-directional, complex, and problematic.

For example, youth in the juvenile justice system have very high educational needs; at least one in three is [identified](#) as needing or receiving special education services, which is four times the rate of youth attending school in the community. A majority of incarcerated youth have been suspended or expelled, or have dropped out of school. A recent study also [showed](#) that, because community resources are so sparse, girls are often locked up just so that they can receive basic needs like education. Eighty-eight percent of girls in the study reported suspension or expulsion from school, and the majority of girls reported feeling victimized by peers, teachers, and school policies.

After being released from juvenile facilities, girls were concerned about the stigma of returning to school, or even having any options for school enrollment. Once they returned, girls rated the same school services received in the community as less helpful as those received in residential placement. The [Locked Out](#) report details many ways that state, local, nonprofit, and private entities managing educational and vocational services for about 60,000 incarcerated youth per day in the United States are inadequate. For instance, most incarcerated youth do not attend school with the same curriculum and standards as in the community. Most states don't collect or track incarcerated students' outcomes, such as credits earned, diplomas and certificates received, or metrics on reading and math assessments; and most state policies make it difficult for youth released from facilities to effectively transition back to community-based education.

In addition, children with incarcerated or formerly incarcerated parents are more likely to have problems in school, lower school engagement, experience social stigma, and struggle with chronic absenteeism. Furthermore, economic impacts on families during and after incarceration undermine housing stability and, subsequently, school stability. With these issues at home, these same youth are also more likely to be involved in the criminal justice system, further disrupting the quality of their education and continuing the financial and social deprivation of community resources.

It remains vital to focus on education policy and practice-oriented changes like reforming suspension and expulsion policy, transition practices, appropriate educational placements, and improving the quality of education in facilities. However, it is also increasingly essential to take a multigenerational approach to education initiatives. According to [a new report](#), addressing the educational needs of both children and their parents is more likely to break the cycle of poverty, transform opportunity networks, and address some of the root causes of justice involvement and a community's lack of educational opportunities.

For example, focusing on women's educational opportunities actually [improves the social capital](#) of communities and leads to further educational advancement for whole families. This is because women are, as researchers Susan Strum and Vivan Nixon [note](#), deeply embedded in and committed to their families and communities, as shown in a study of the [College and Community Fellowship \(CCF\)](#), where educational support moved between generations.

Since [42 of the top 44 jurisdictions](#) throughout the world with the highest rates of incarcerated women are, in fact, individual American states (the other two being Thailand and the United States itself), we have no shortage of families who can benefit from community-based education initiatives like CCF if only given the chance.

Through the [Gender & Justice in America](#) blog series, Vera will explore issues facing justice-involved women and girls in the fields of adult corrections, youth justice, immigration, victimization, substance use, and mental health.

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