

The Sentencing Project

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/incarcerated-women-and-girls/>

Policy Issue Resources

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Between 1980 and 2020, the number of incarcerated women increased by more than 475%, rising from a total of 26,326 in 1980 to 152,854 in 2020. The total count in 2020 represents a 30% reduction from the prior year a substantial but insufficient downsizing in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which some states began to reverse in 2021.

Research on female incarceration is critical to understanding the full consequences of mass incarceration and to unraveling the policies and practices that lead to their criminalization. The number of incarcerated women was nearly five times higher in 2020 than in 1980.

Incarcerated Women and Girls examines female incarceration trends and finds areas of both concern and hope. While the imprisonment rate for African American women was nearly twice that of white women in 2020, this disparity represents a sharp decline from 2000 when Black women were six times as likely to be imprisoned. Since then Black women's imprisonment rate has decreased by 68% while white women's rate has increased by 12%.

Similar to adults, girls of color are more likely to be incarcerated than white girls. Tribal girls are more than four times as likely, and African American girls are more than three times as likely as white girls to be incarcerated.

[Click here to read the fact sheet.](#)

People in prison is serving a life sentence

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