

Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction



Incarcerated Fathers: A Statistical Profile

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Highlights

- Information in this report is based on a first-ever self-report survey of ODRC males with regard to the topic of parenthood of minor children.
- In a sample of males incarcerated in an ODRC prison on January 1, 2004, 51.6% had at least one child less than 18 years of age.
- 26.3% of all minor children were under 5 years of age.
- Prior to admission to prison, 46.7% of the children lived in the same household as their father.
- 86.5% of the fathers maintain contact with at least one of their minor children.
- For those fathers who stayed in contact with their children, 85.6% maintained contact with at least one of their children by phone; 89.6% maintained contact by mail and 53.4% maintained contact by visits.

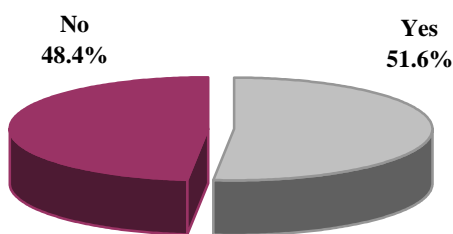
Incarcerated Fathers: A Statistical Profile¹

Using a sample of 965 males incarcerated on January 1, 2004, this report summarizes information regarding their minor children. Information contained in this report identifies the proportion of male inmates with minor children, as well as the gender and age of the minor children. This report also includes information on the living arrangement of the minor children, type and frequency of contact the father has with his children and the current caregiver of the children, and whether or not the offender is required by the courts to pay child support.

A concern that must be addressed before reviewing the data is whether the information gathered through the survey is accurate. It is useful first to remember the kind of questions being asked. These are census, or “snapshot” questions. For the males in prison on a particular date, how many had minor children on that date? This contrasts with intake information (people entering during a period, some for only a short stay) or with information on ever being a parent.

The Appendix provides information regarding the representativeness of the sample. Further, one issue associated with census—type of questions is discussed. It should be obvious to the reader that inmates who have been in prison for several years are less likely to have minor children than are those who entered prison recently. Even if all male inmates were equally likely to have fathered children, a higher percentage of the children of long-term inmates would no longer be minor children. We discuss the implications of this pattern in the Appendix.

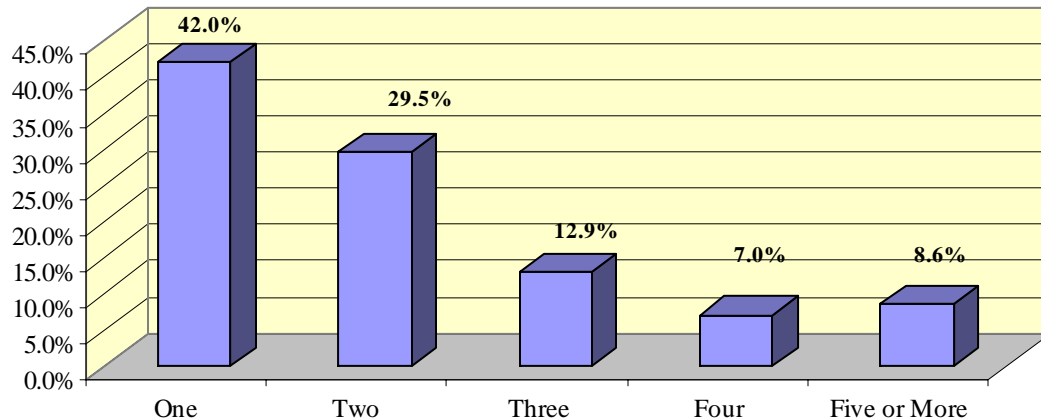
Chart 1. Percent of ODRC Incarcerated Males with a Minor Child



Of the 965 inmates sampled, 51.6% had at least one minor child (less than 18 years of age) at the start of 2004, while 48.4% did not have any minor children. It is useful to remind the reader at this early point in the paper that the inmates may also have children older than 17 years of age. Older children are not considered in this report.

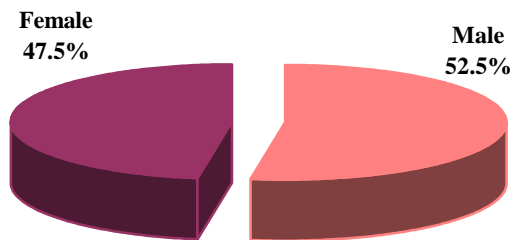
¹ Special thanks to Steve Van Dine, Chief, Bureau of Research, for his editorial comments, Unit Management staff for their timeliness in locating randomly selected inmates to complete the survey, Richard Ebin, Service Learning Administrator, for coordinating with Craig Bowman, AOT teacher at LOCI, and his students for creating the database screens and entering the data.

Chart 2. Number of Minor Children



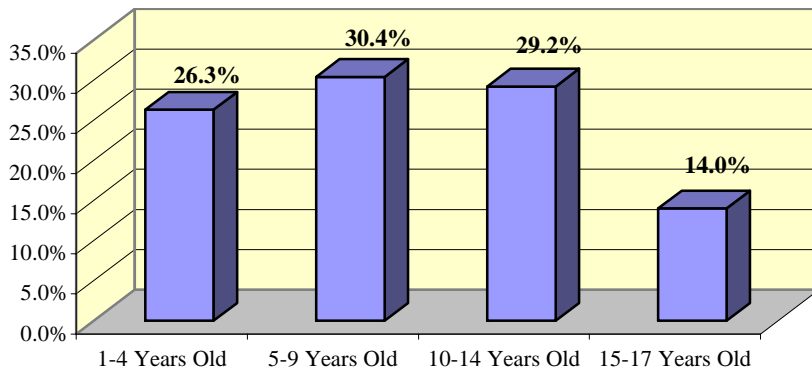
Of the 498 inmates with minor children, over half reported having multiple minor children. Forty-two percent of the fathers reported having only 1 child; 29.5% reported 2 children; 12.9% reported 3 children; 7% reported 4 children and 8.6% reported 5 or more children. The greatest number of minor children claimed was 9. Overall, the 498 incarcerated fathers had a total of 1,084 minor children.

Chart 3. Gender of Minor Children
(Missing-Gender of 9 Children)



For all offenders with minor children, 52.5% of the children were male and 47.5% were female.

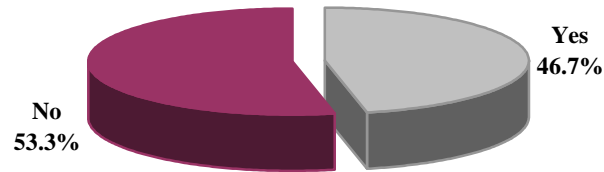
Chart 4. Age of Minor Children
(Missing-Age of 16 Children)



Mean Age of Children=8.5

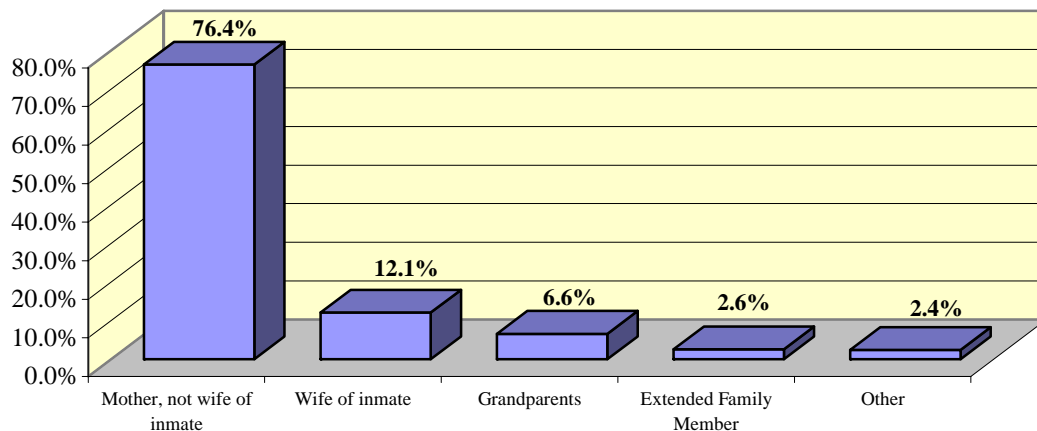
Of the incarcerated fathers who listed the ages of their minor children, 26.3% of the children were under 5 years old; 30.4% were between the ages of 5 and 9; 29.2% were between the ages of 10 and 14; and 14% were between the ages of 15 and 17.

Chart 5. Minor Children Lived with Offender Prior to Arrest for Current Offense
(Missing - Living Arrangement at Time of Offender's Arrest for 15 Children)



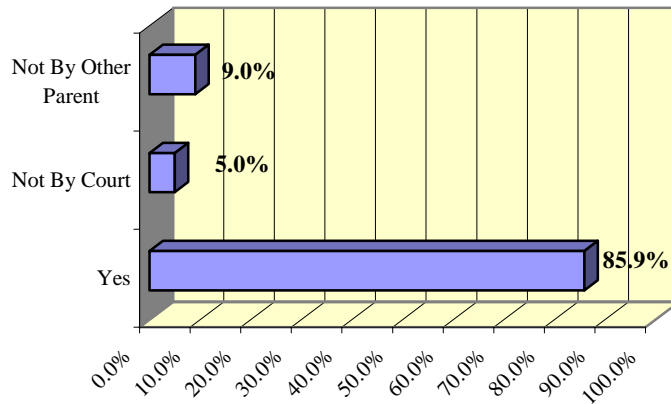
Of all the children, 46.7% lived in the same household as their father at the time of his arrest for the current offense. When considering the effect of a father's incarceration on changing the dynamics of the household of his children, it seems likely that the 46.7% would experience the greatest change.

Chart 6. Current Living Arrangement of Minor Children
(Missing-Current Living Arrangement of 75 Children)



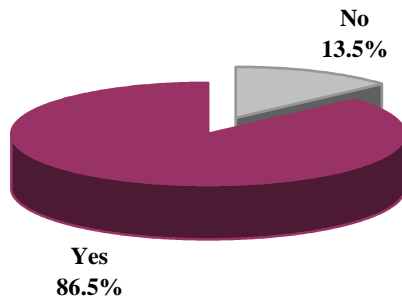
Currently, 76.4% of the children live with their mother, who is not the spouse of the inmate; 12.1% live with the wife of the inmate, who may or may not be the biological mother of the children; 6.6% live with grandparents; 2.6% live with an extended family member and 2.4% either live with friends, are in foster care or were adopted.

Chart 7. Is Offender Allowed to Have Contact with Minor Children?



Of the incarcerated fathers, 9% were denied contact with at least one of their children by the child's mother and 5% were denied contact by the courts.

Chart 8. Contact with Minor Children

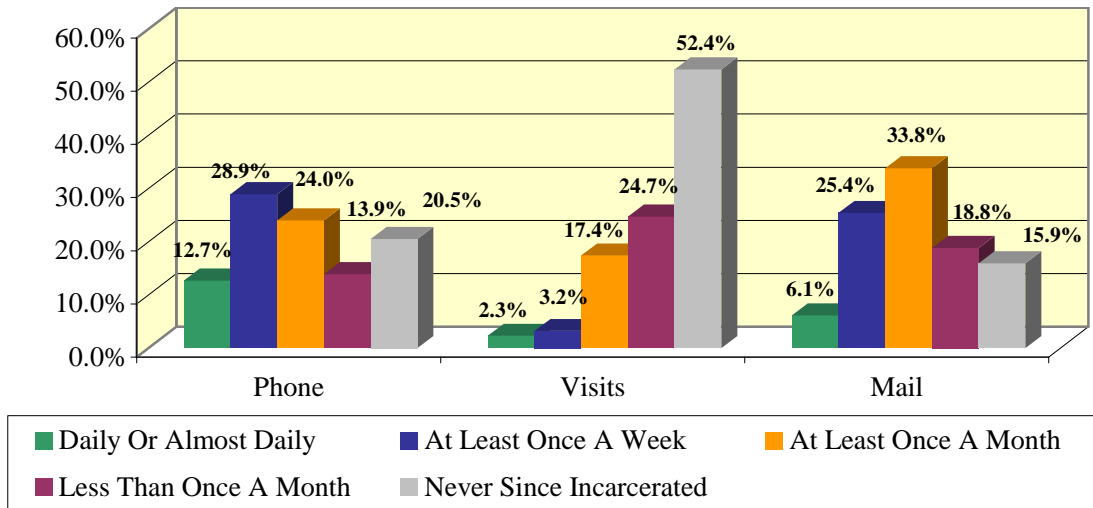


<i>Any Contact</i>	<i>% of Fathers</i>
Yes	86.5
No	13.5

<i>Type of Contact</i>	
Phone	85.6
Mail	89.6
Visits	53.4

Of the 498 incarcerated fathers, 86.5% reported having contact with at least one of their minor children. Mail contact between father and child is the most frequent type of contact. Of the 431 fathers who reported staying in contact with their minor children, 85.6% contacted at least one of their children by phone, 89.6% by mail and 53.4% through visits.

Chart 9. Type and Frequency of Contact from Minor Children

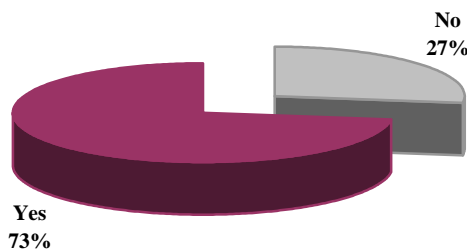


For those fathers who have contact with their children, 79.5% of the children were contacted by phone; 47.6% visited their father; and 84.1% received and/or sent mail to their father. Regarding phone contacts, the highest proportion of children had contact with their father at least once a week (28.9%).

Regarding personal visits from their children, 24.7% of the children visited their father less than once a month and 17.4% visited at least once a month. As a note, fathers reported 2.3% of their children visiting at least daily or almost daily. Given ODRC policies on visitation, visits of such high frequency are highly unlikely. Approximately 46.6% of the inmates said they have never received a visit from even one of their children since they have been incarcerated (see table next to Chart 8). This could be a function of the distance between the children's residence and the inmate's parent institution. It seems plausible that the further the child resides from the institution, the less frequent the visits.

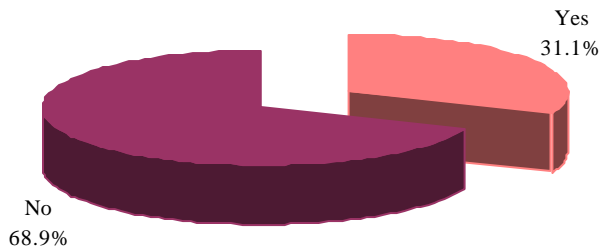
Overall, fathers reported receiving and/or sending mail from 33.8% of their children at least once a month and from 25.4% of their children at least once a week.

Chart 10. Contact with Caregiver of Children
(Missing - Contact with Caregiver for 13 Children)



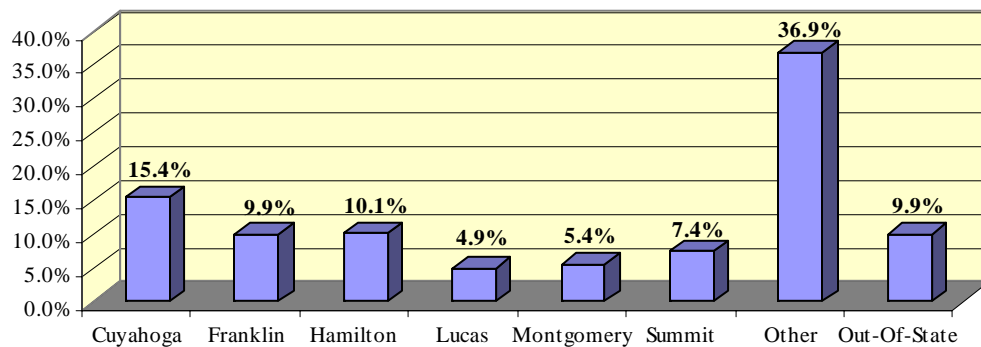
Overall, 27% of the incarcerated fathers' did not have contact—mail, phone and / or visits—with the current caregiver of at least one their children. Because over half the fathers had multiple children—who could have different mothers—we also looked at this variable using the number of children as the base (N=1,071). In this instance, no contact was reported for 28% of the children.

Chart 11. Offender Required by Courts to Pay Child Support for Minor Children
(Missing-Responses for 116 Children)



Overall, 31.1% of the fathers reported that they were required by the courts to pay child support for at least one of their minor children. Again, because the fathers had multiple children and could be required to pay child support for some of the children (e.g., two of his three children), we looked at this variable using the number of children as the base (N=968). Overall, child support was required for 26% of the children.

Chart 12. County of Residence for All Minor Children
(Missing-County of Residence for 66 Children)



Of the 1,018 minor kids for which a county of residence was given, the largest proportion (15.4%) resides in Cuyahoga County. Approximately a tenth of the children reside in Franklin County (9.9%), Hamilton County (10.1%) or out-of-state (9.9%).

Overall, the summary presented in this report is a good start to a more in-depth study of parenthood among ODRC inmates. Again, this is a first-ever self-report survey of ODRC males in regard to the topic of parenthood. Within this sample, 51.6% of the males surveyed reported having at least one minor child and approximately 25% of those children were less than 5 years old. What happens to these children when parents are incarcerated is an area where more research is needed. Still, even with just the information from this study researchers and practitioners can examine further the implications of parental incarceration on the criminal justice system and other social service agencies. They can also design and implement programs to help fathers stay connected with their children and reenter the community more successfully.

Appendix: Data Issues

Data in this report are based upon self-report information. The accuracy of the information in this report depends upon the degree of two types of error: sampling error and non-sampling error. Sampling error is the variation that may occur by chance because a sample rather than the complete population of incarcerated males is used. To determine the representativeness of the sample to the population of incarcerated males, the two were compared on selected characteristics. Table A shows how the sample looked when compared to the total male inmate population on January 1, 2004. Overall, the sample looked very similar to the inmate population in terms of race, age and county of commitment.

Table A. Comparison of Sample with January 1, 2004, Snapshot of ODRC Incarcerated Males on Selected Characteristics

	Sample (n=965)	1/1/2004 Snapshot (n=41,340)
Race		
Black	47.6	50.1
White	52.4	49.9
Age		
15-19	2.1	2.3
20-24	18.0	18.1
25-29	20.8	17.5
30-34	16.1	15.4
35-39	12.2	13.5
40-44	11.4	12.6
45-49	8.4	9.5
50-54	4.6	5.3
55-59	3.6	3.0
60 and over	2.8	2.7
Mean	34.6	35.1
Median	33	33
County of Commitment		
Cuyahoga	16.6	19.9
Franklin	10.6	10.0
Hamilton	8.6	10.3
Lucas	6.6	5.0
Montgomery	6.0	5.9
Summit	6.4	5.6
All Others	45.2	43.3

Non-sampling error can be attributed to many sources. Examples might be non-response, untruthfulness, differences in interpretation of questions among inmates, recall difficulties, and processing errors. Examples might be a father who denies being a parent for fear of a child support order or a youth who falsely claims five children. Table A suggests that non-response has not greatly distorted the profile. There is no strong evidence of other sources of non-sampling error in the study, although a small percentage of inmates do claim more personal contact / visits than is possible.

Table B compares fathers and non-fathers on selected characteristics. A higher proportion of fathers were between the ages of 25-29 (26.3%) and 30-34 (20.9%) than non-fathers (15% and 10.9% respectively); and approximately 13% of the non-fathers have been incarcerated for 16 years or longer, while less than 2% of the fathers have been incarcerated for 16 years or longer. One can see that the non-fathers are much older (about five years), which is probably related to longer terms in prison and perhaps being older on admission.

A higher proportion of fathers were Black (53.4%) than White (46.6%). When this pattern is examined more closely by controlling for age and years incarcerated, some of the differences are diminished. (These tables are available on request.) The higher rate of Blacks who have minor children may be correlated with the greater proportion of young Black males who enter prison for short sentences for drug-oriented offenses.

Table B. Comparison of Fathers of Minor Children and Non-Fathers on Selected Characteristics

	Fathers (n=498)	Non-Fathers (n=467)
Race		
Black	53.4	41.3
White	46.6	58.7
Age		
15-19	1.2	3.0
20-24	18.1	18.0
25-29	26.3	15.0
30-34	20.9	10.9
35-39	14.3	10.1
40-44	10.0	12.8
45-49	5.4	11.6
50-54	2.2	7.1
55-59	1.0	6.4
60 and over	0.6	5.1
Mean	32.1	37.3
Median	31	36
County of Commitment		
Cuyahoga	16.1	17.1
Franklin	10.0	11.1
Hamilton	9.2	7.9
Lucas	5.8	7.5
Montgomery	6.6	5.4
Summit	7.2	5.6
All Others	45.1	45.4
Years Incarcerated		
<1 - 5 Years	79.7	63.0
6 - 10 Years	10.8	14.8
11 - 15 Years	7.6	9.4
16 - 20 Years	1.6	6.6
21 Years or More	0.2	6.2