

# Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report

*Survey of State Prison Inmates, 1991*

# Women in Prison

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The number of women in State prisons grew 75% from yearend 1986 to yearend 1991, reaching almost 39,000 by June 1991. At that time women were 5.2% of all prisoners, up from 4.7% in 1986.

Relying on responses to questions in interviews with a nationally representative sample of State inmates, this report describes those women. It provides details on offenses and criminal histories, and it also depicts the women's personal characteristics and backgrounds.

Most of the female State prison inmates were over age 30, at least high school graduates or holders of a GED, and members of a racial or ethnic minority. Large majorities were unmarried, mothers of children under age 18, and daughters who had grown up in homes without both parents present. Before entering prison a large percentage of the women had experienced physical or sexual abuse.

The following findings summarize some major points of the report:

**Current offenses** The expanding population of women who served a sentence for a drug offense accounted for more than half of the total growth; violent offenders, a fifth.

- In 1991, 10% of female inmates were in prison for fraud (which includes forgery and embezzlement), down from 17% in 1986.

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This report provides results of the most comprehensive survey of women confined in State prisons ever undertaken. About 1 in every 11 women in State correctional facilities was interviewed.

Female inmates largely resemble male inmates in terms of race, ethnic background, and age. However, women are substantially more likely than men to be serving time for a drug offense and less likely to have been sentenced for a violent crime. Nearly 6 in 10 female inmates grew up in a household with at least one parent absent, and about half reported that an immediate family member had also served time. More than 4 in 10 reported prior physical or sexual abuse.

We want to thank all of the State departments of corrections that facilitated these interviews. This study would not have been possible without their assistance.

Lawrence A. Greenfeld  
Acting Director

**Criminal histories**

Nearly half of all women in prison were currently serving a sentence for a nonviolent offense and had been convicted in the past for only nonviolent offenses. Nearly two-thirds of all female inmates had two or fewer prior convictions.

- About 71% of all State female prisoners had served a prior sentence to probation or incarceration, including 20% who had served a sentence as a juvenile.

**Victims of violent inmates**

Nearly two-thirds of the women serving a sentence for a violent crime had victimized a relative, intimate, or someone else they knew.

**Family characteristics**

Two-thirds of the women had at least one child younger than 18; altogether, they were mothers to more than 56,000 minor children.

- An estimated 46% of women with minor children said they talked with those children on the phone at least once a week; 45% had contact by mail at least once a week; and 9% were visited by their children.

- More than half reported their minor children were living with grandparents; a quarter, with the father.

- About 47% of the women reported having an immediate family member who had been in jail or prison. About 35% had brothers and 10% had sisters who had been incarcerated.

**Drug and alcohol use**

Almost half of the women in prison reported committing their offense under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

- More than half of women in prison in 1991 had used drugs in the month before the current offense. About two-fifths had used drugs daily.

- The percentage of women who used cocaine or crack in the month before their offense increased from 23% in 1986 to 36% in 1991.

## Survey of Inmates of State Correctional Facilities, 1991

The Bureau of Justice Statistics conducted the 1991 Survey of Inmates of State Correctional Facilities in 277 prisons nationwide. At each facility, inmates were chosen systematically from the day's roster. Through personal interviews with 13,986 inmates, about 94% of those selected, data were collected on individual characteristics of State prison inmates, current offenses and sentences, characteristics of victims of violent inmates, criminal histories, prior drug and alcohol use and treatment, and health care services provided in prison. Similar surveys occurred in 1974, 1979, and 1986.

### Increase in number of women in prison

The State prison population grew 58% between 1986 and 1991. During the same period, the number of women in prison increased 75%, and the number of men, 53%.

	State prison inmates		Percent change
	1986	1991	
Female	22,777	39,917	75.2%
Male	464,603	728,246	52.9%

Note: Data are based on custody counts from the National Prisoner Statistics program.

Adult arrest statistics reflected similar changes. While the number of female arrests increased 24% between 1986 and 1991, the number of male arrests increased 13%. Women accounted for 19% of all adult arrests in 1991, up from 17% in 1986.

	Adult arrests		Percent change
	1986	1991	
Female	1,805,422	2,230,417	23.5%
Male	8,582,422	9,667,402	16.7%

Note: The number of adult arrests was estimated by applying the sex and age distributions from reported arrests to the total estimated number of arrests. Adults are defined as persons age 18 or older. Source: FBI, *Crime in the United States*.

**Table 1. Characteristics of State prison inmates, by sex, 1991 and 1986**

Characteristic	Percent of female inmates		Percent of male inmates	
	1991	1986	1991	1986
<b>Race/Hispanic origin</b>				
White non-Hispanic	36.2%	39.7%	35.4%	39.5%
Black non-Hispanic	46.0	46.0	45.5	45.2
Hispanic	14.2	11.7	16.8	12.7
Other <sup>a</sup>	3.6	2.5	2.3	2.5
<b>Age</b>				
17 or younger	.1%	.2%	.7%	.5%
18-24	16.3	22.3	21.6	26.9
25-34	50.4	50.5	45.5	45.5
35-44	25.5	19.6	22.6	19.4
45-54	6.1	5.5	6.6	5.2
55 or older	1.7	1.8	3.2	2.5
Median age	31 years	29 years	30 years	29 years
<b>Marital status</b>				
Married	17.3%	20.1%	18.1%	20.4%
Widowed	5.9	6.7	1.6	1.6
Divorced	19.1	20.5	18.4	18.0
Separated	12.5	11.0	5.9	5.8
Never married	45.1	41.7	55.9	54.3
<b>Education<sup>b</sup></b>				
8th grade or less	16.0%	16.5%	19.6%	20.9%
Some high school	45.8	49.7	46.2	50.6
High school graduate	22.7	19.1	21.9	17.7
Some college or more	15.5	14.8	12.3	10.8
<b>Pre-arrest employment</b>				
Employed	46.7%	47.1%	68.5%	70.1%
Full time	35.7	37.1	56.5	58.4
Part time	11.0	10.0	12.0	11.7
Unemployed	53.3%	52.9%	31.5%	30.0%
Looking	19.2	22.0	16.2	17.8
Not looking	34.1	30.9	15.3	12.2
Number of inmates	38,796	19,812	672,847	430,604

Note: In 1991, data were missing on marital status for 1.1% of cases, on education for 0.8%, and on pre-arrest employment for 0.7%. In 1986, data were missing for race and Hispanic origin for 0.4% of cases, on education for 0.4%, on marital status for 0.1%,

and on pre-arrest employment for 0.5% of cases. <sup>a</sup>Includes Asians, Pacific Islanders, American Indians, Alaska Natives, and other racial groups. <sup>b</sup>Based on highest grade completed.

### Characteristics of women in prison

Women in State prisons in 1991 were most likely to be black (46%), age 25 to 34 (50%), unemployed at the time of arrest (53%), high school graduates, holders of a GED, or with some college (58%), and never married (45%) (table 1). Compared to 1986, the female prison population in 1991 had higher percentages of Hispanics, women older than 25, and women who had completed high school. There were lower percentages of non-Hispanic whites and of women under age 25.

Although the men in prison overall were older in 1991 than in 1986, they were younger on average than the women. From 1986 to 1991 the median age of men went from 29 to 30, and in 1991, 22% of the men were younger than age 25.

The percentage of women in prison who had never married increased from 42%

in 1986 to 45% in 1991. About a third of female inmates in both years were either separated or divorced. More than half the male inmates in 1986 (54%) and in 1991 (56%) reported that they had never married.

Imprisoned women in 1991 had completed more years of education than women in 1986. An estimated 23% of female inmates had completed high school in 1991, up from 19% in 1986. Male inmates had a similar increase in high school graduates, from 18% to 22%. In the 1991 survey, a third of the women who had dropped out of school — about a fifth of all women in prison — had gotten a GED. Altogether, 43% of female inmates had a high school diploma or its equivalent as the highest level of education. As in 1986 women in prison in 1991 were more likely than men to have had some college education (16% compared to 12%).

Female inmates were significantly less likely than male inmates to be employed at the time of their arrest. An estimated 47% of women in prison were working, compared to 68% of the men. More than a third of the women were unemployed and not looking for a job.

### Current offense

From 1986 to 1991 a large increase occurred in the percentage of women in prison for drug offenses, and this was matched by a decline in the percentage in prison for property offenses (table 2). Nearly 1 in 3 female inmates were serving a sentence for drug offenses in 1991, compared to 1 in 8 in 1986. This increase in sentenced drug offenders accounted for 55% of the increase in the female prison population between 1986 and 1991.

The percentage of women in prison for property offenses declined from 41% in 1986 to 29% in 1991. Sentences for fraud decreased more than for any other single offense type, dropping from 17% of the women in prison to 10%.

Women incarcerated for violent offenses included about 3 in 10 female inmates in 1991, down from 4 in 10 in 1986. Despite this decrease in the proportion of violent female inmates, the number of women sentenced for a violent offense rose from 8,045 to 12,400 during the 5-year period. Murder, the most prevalent violent offense among female inmates in 1991, accounted for just over a third of the women sentenced for a violent offense.

### Violent female inmates and their victims

In 1991 nearly two-thirds of the women in prison for a violent offense had victimized a relative, intimate, or someone else they knew (table 3). Women serving a sentence for a violent offense were about twice as likely as their male counterparts to have committed their offense against someone close to them (36% versus 16%). Another third of the women, but more than half of the men, had victimized a stranger.

Women in prison for homicide were almost twice as likely to have killed an intimate (husband, exhusband, or boyfriend) as a relative like a parent or sibling (32% versus 17%). Female inmates were more likely to have killed relatives or intimates (49%) than nonrelatives (30%) or strangers (21%).

**Table 2. Most serious offense of State prison inmates, by sex, 1991 and 1986**

Most serious offense	Percent of prison inmates			
	1991		1986	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
All offenses	100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %
Violent offenses	32.2 %	47.4 %	40.7 %	55.2 %
Murder <sup>a</sup>	11.7	10.5	13.0	11.2
Negligent manslaughter	3.4	1.7	6.8	3.0
Kidnaping	.4	1.2	.9	1.7
Rape	.4	3.7	.2	4.5
Other sexual assault	1.3	6.2	.9	4.7
Robbery	7.8	15.2	10.6	21.3
Assault	6.2	8.3	7.1	8.1
Other violent <sup>b</sup>	1.1	.5	1.2	0.8
Property offenses	28.7 %	24.6 %	41.2 %	30.5 %
Burglary	4.5	12.9	5.9	17.0
Larceny/theft	11.1	4.5	14.7	5.6
Motor vehicle theft	.7	2.3	.5	1.4
Arson	1.0	.7	1.2	.7
Fraud	10.2	2.4	17.0	3.2
Stolen property	1.0	1.4	1.6	2.0
Other property <sup>c</sup>	.1	.5	.4	.5
Drug offenses	32.8 %	20.7 %	12.0 %	8.4 %
Possession	11.8	7.3	4.0	2.9
Trafficking	19.8	13.0	7.3	5.3
Other/unspecified	1.3	0.4	0.7	0.2
Public-order offenses	5.7 %	7.0 %	5.1 %	5.2 %
Weapons	.5	1.9	.9	1.5
Other public-order <sup>d</sup>	5.1	5.1	4.3	3.7
Other offenses	.6 %	.4 %	.9 %	.7 %
Number of inmates	38,462	665,719	19,761	430,151

Note: Excludes an estimated 7,462 inmates in 1991 and 505 inmates in 1986 for whom offense was unknown. Detail may not add to total because of rounding.

<sup>a</sup>Includes nonnegligent manslaughter.

<sup>b</sup>Includes blackmail, extortion, hit-and-run driving with bodily injury, child abuse, and criminal endangerment.

<sup>c</sup>Includes destruction of property, vandalism, hit-and-run driving without bodily injury, trespassing, and possession of burglary tools.

<sup>d</sup>Includes escape from custody, driving while intoxicated, morals and decency, and commercialized vice.

Relationship of victim to offender	Percent of females serving a sentence for homicide*
Intimate	31.9%
Relative	17.0
Well-known	14.3
Acquaintance	12.8
Known by sight only	2.7
Stranger	21.3

\*Homicide includes murder, negligent manslaughter, and nonnegligent manslaughter.

**Table 3. Relationship of violent offenders to their victims, by sex, 1991**

Relationship	Percent of violent State prison inmates	
	Female	Male
Total	100.0 %	100.0 %
Close	35.7 %	16.3 %
Intimate	19.9	6.8
Relative	15.9	9.6
Known	29.2 %	33.2 %
Well known	14.1	14.6
Acquaintance	10.8	12.0
By sight only	4.3	6.5
Strangers	35.1 %	50.5 %
Number of inmates	11,800	299,380

Note: Excludes an estimated 16,778 inmates who did not report relationship to the victim. Detail may not add to total because of rounding.

## Criminal history

Female inmates generally had not been sentenced to incarceration or probation as often as male inmates, and their record of past convictions was generally less violent than that of male inmates (table 4). About 28% of the women reported no previous sentences to incarceration or probation, compared to 19% of the men. Four in ten women had a history of violence, compared to more than 6 in 10 men.

Nearly half of all women in prison were currently serving a sentence for a nonviolent offense and had only nonviolent offenses for prior convictions. Among women with no prior sentences, more than half were serving a sentence for a violent offense. Among those women with a previous sentence, about a third were serving a sentence or had served a sentence for a violent offense.

Female inmates also had shorter criminal records than male inmates (table 5). An estimated 51% of all women in prison had one or no prior offenses, and 66% had two or fewer offenses, compared to 39% and 55% of the men, respectively. About 2 in 10 women had a criminal record as a juvenile, compared to 4 in 10 men. Half of all women in prison had criminal records as adults only.

## Sentence length

Overall, female prisoners had shorter maximum sentences than men (table 6). Half of the women had a maximum sentence of 60 months or less, while half of the men had a sentence of 120 months or less. Excluding sentences to life or death, women in prison had received sentences that, on average, were 48 months shorter than those of men (mean sentences of 105 and 153, respectively). An estimated 7% of the women and 9% of the men received sentences to life or death.

Maximum sentence length	Percent of inmates	
	Female	Male
Less than 36 months	24.2%	12.4%
36-59	18.7	15.0
60-119	20.5	22.3
120-179	11.9	13.2
180 or more	17.7	27.9
Life/death	7.0	9.2

The differences in sentence length are, in part, the result of variation in the distribution of offenses among female and male inmates. Women were more likely than men to be in prison for drug and property

offenses, which had shorter average sentences than violent offenses,

For each category of offense, women received shorter average maximum sentences than men. For property offenses, female prisoners had a mean sentence 42 months shorter than men; for drug offenses, 18 months shorter; and for violent offenses, 39 months shorter.

**Table 4. Criminal history of State prison inmates, by sex, 1991**

Criminal history	Female	Male
No previous sentence	28.2%	18.7%
Current violent offense	15.8	12.5
Current nonviolent offense	12.4	6.2
Violent recidivists	25.7%	50.2%
Current and prior violent	6.9	17.9
Current violent only	10.8	19.3
Prior violent only	8.0	13.0
Nonviolent recidivists	46.1%	31.1%
Prior minor public-order offenses only	2.1	1.2
Other prior offenses	44.0	29.9
Number of inmates	38,158	660,007

Note: Excludes an estimated 13,477 inmates for whom current offense and prior probation/incarceration offenses were unknown.

## Family background

More than half of the women in prison had grown up in a household without the presence of both parents (table 7). An estimated 42% had lived in a single-parent household — 39% with their mothers and 3% with their fathers. An additional 16% had lived in a household with neither parent present.

**Table 5. Prior sentences of State prison inmates, by sex, 1991**

Prior sentence	Female	Male
None	28.9%	19.6%
Juvenile	3.5	8.4
Adult only	50.7	40.6
Both	17.0	31.4
Number of times		
0	28.9%	19.6%
1	22.0	19.2
2	14.9	16.3
3-5	20.1	26.2
6-10	9.1	12.7
11 or more	5.1	6.1
Number of inmates	38,038	661,021

Note: Excludes an estimated 12,584 inmates for whom data on prior sentences to probation or incarceration were unknown.

**Table 6. Total maximum sentence length of State prison inmates, by most serious offense and sex, 1991**

Most serious offense	Maximum sentence length in months					
	Female inmates			Male inmates		
	Number	Median	Mean	Number	Median	Mean
All offenses	37,429	60 mo	105 mo	653,292	120 mo	153 mo
Violent offenses	12,118	180 mo	178 mo	310,946	180 mo	217 mo
Murder	4,432	840	310	69,405	Life	386
Negligent manslaughter	1,309	120	158	11,333	156	188
Sexual assault*	--	--	--	65,223	180	211
Robbery	2,913	120	145	99,730	144	201
Assault	2,309	72	109	54,004	120	160
Property offenses	10,743	44 mo	74 mo	160,702	72 mo	116 mo
Burglary	1,747	60	81	84,490	96	142
Larceny	4,140	36	53	29,125	48	74
Fraud	3,836	60	92	15,660	60	100
Drug offenses	12,264	54 mo	79 mo	134,539	60 mo	97 mo
Possession	4,410	36	64	47,515	56	82
Trafficking	7,379	60	89	84,310	72	106
Public-order offenses	2,075	36 mo	60 mo	44,515	48 mo	84 mo

Note: Excludes an estimated 1,367 female inmates and 19,555 male inmates for whom current offense or sentence length was unknown. Sentence length refers to the total maximum sentence for all inmates including consecutive sentences for inmates with

multiple offenses. Suspended sentences were excluded from the total.

--Too few cases to estimate.

\*Includes rape and other sexual assault.

Relative to the general population, female inmates were nearly twice as likely to have grown up in a single-parent household. In 1975, when most of the inmates in 1991 were between ages 10 and 18 — 80% of the 66.1 million children in the Nation's households were living with both parents.\*

About 17% of the female inmates had lived in a foster home, agency, or other institution at some time while they were growing up.

The composition of the childhood household differed among white, black, and Hispanic women in prison. More than half of white women and less than a third of black women grew up with both parents present. Black female inmates were the most likely to have grown up in a home with only their mothers (46%). Hispanic women were equally likely to have lived with both parents (40%) or their mothers only (41%). White women were more

\*Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1978, U.S. Bureau of the Census, table 68.

likely than other women to have ever lived in a foster home, agency, or other institution.

Women in prison were more likely than the men to have had at least one member of their immediate family who had been incarcerated: 47% of female inmates and 37% of male inmates. About 35% of the women had a brother and 10% had a sister who had served a jail or prison sentence.

Higher percentages of black women than of white women had family members who had been in jail or prison. Among women 42% of black inmates, 36% of Hispanic inmates, and 26% of white inmates said a brother had been incarcerated. White women (11%) were more likely than black women (5%) to have had a father with jail or prison time.

A third of the female inmates and a quarter of the males said that a parent or guardian had abused drugs or alcohol while the inmate was growing up. Alcohol was more

often cited than drugs. Thirty-two percent of the women had a parent who abused alcohol, and 7% had a parent who used drugs. Of white women in prison, 42% reported parental abuse of drugs or alcohol, compared to 33% of Hispanic women and 26% of black women.

### Physical and sexual abuse of prisoners

In 1991 survey participants responded to a series of questions about any abuse experienced and their age at the time of abuse. For the first time in a BJS inmate survey, inmates reported their relationship to their abusers, and female inmates indicated if sexual abuse involved rape.

More than 4 in every 10 women reported that they had been abused at least once before their current admission to prison. An estimated 34% of female inmates reported being physically abused, and 34% reported being sexually abused. About 32% said the abuse had occurred before age 18, and 24% said they had been abused since age 18.

**Table 7. Family structure, incarceration of family members, and parental abuse of alcohol or drugs reported by State prison inmates, 1991**

	Percent of female inmates				Percent of male inmates
	All <sup>a</sup>	White	Black	Hispanic	All <sup>a</sup>
Person(s) lived with most of time while growing up:					
Both parents	42.0 %	55.1 %	31.9 %	40.3 %	43.1 %
Mother only	38.9	29.3	46.1	41.0	39.2
Father only	3.4	3.7	3.0	3.8	4.0
Grandparents	9.3	6.1	11.3	10.3	7.6
Other relatives	3.0	1.1	4.7	2.8	3.0
Friends	.4	.4	.4	.5	.4
Foster home	1.8	2.7	1.5	.8	1.5
Agency or institution	.8	1.1	.6	.2	.8
Other	.5	.5	.5	.2	.5
Ever lived in a foster home, agency, or institution while growing up					
No	82.8 %	78.9 %	85.9 %	85.6 %	82.7 %
Yes	17.2	21.1	14.1	14.4	17.3
Family member ever incarcerated					
No	53.4 %	61.1 %	47.3 %	53.0 %	63.1 %
Yes <sup>b</sup>	46.6	38.9	52.7	47.0	36.9
Spouse	1.8 %	3.1 %	1.1 %	1.4 %	.2 %
Mother	4.0	3.5	4.5	3.6	1.5
Father	7.8	10.9	5.4	6.7	6.3
Brother	35.1	26.1	42.0	35.9	30.9
Sister	10.0	5.6	12.4	14.6	4.2
Child	1.6	1.3	1.6	2.3	.2
Parent/guardian abused alcohol or drugs					
No	66.4 %	57.7 %	74.0 %	67.1 %	73.5 %
Yes	33.6	42.3	26.0	32.9	26.5
Alcohol only	26.3 %	32.7 %	20.7 %	25.4 %	21.9 %
Drugs only	1.6	1.0	2.0	2.2	.8
Both alcohol and drugs	5.7	8.6	3.2	5.2	3.6
Number of inmates	38,630	13,969	17,739	5,521	669,578

Note: Excludes 3,435 inmates for whom information on family history was missing.  
<sup>a</sup>Includes Asians, Pacific Islanders, American Indians,

Alaska Natives, and other racial groups.  
<sup>b</sup>Detail add to more than total because more than one family member may have been incarcerated.

**Table 8. Prior physical or sexual abuse of State prison inmates, by sex, 1991**

	Percent of State prison inmates		
	Total	Female	Male
Ever physically or sexually abused before current incarceration			
No	86.1%	56.8%	87.8%
Yes	13.9	43.2	12.2
Before age 18	11.9	31.7	10.7
After age 18	4.2	24.5	3.0
Physically abused	11.3	33.5	10.0
Sexually abused	6.8	33.9	5.3
Number of inmates	700,475	38,109	662,367
Relationship of abuser to inmate*			
Intimate	11.2%	49.8%	3.0%
Spouse/ex-spouse	6.1	30.5	1.0
Boyfriend/girlfriend	6.6	27.6	2.2
Relative	68.1	56.1	70.6
Parent/guardian	53.7	37.7	57.1
Other relative	22.6	26.5	21.7
Friend/acquaintance	22.8	20.1	23.4
Someone else	21.2	19.6	21.6
Refusal	1.1	1.3	1.1

Note: Sexual abuse includes fondling, incest, molestation, sodomy, rape, and other types of sexual assault. Detail adds to more than total because some inmates were abused both before and after age 18, or were both sexually and physically abused; inmates may also have reported more than one abuser.

\*Based on those inmates who were abused and knew their abuser.

Compared to men in prison, women were at least three times more likely to report any prior abuse, and six times more likely to report sexual abuse or abuse since age 18.

Among inmates who reported prior abuse, women differed somewhat from men in their relationships to their abusers. An estimated 50% of women in prison who reported abuse said they had experienced abuse at the hands of an intimate, compared to 3% of men. While both female and male inmates were most likely to name a relative as an abuser, women were less likely than men to say that a parent had abused them (38% compared to 57%).

More than three-quarters of the female inmates who had a history of abuse reported being sexually abused. An estimated 56% of the abused women said that their abuse had involved a rape, and another 13% reported an attempted rape.

Among the women in prison, those who reported abuse had different types of offenses than those who did not. The victims of abuse were more likely to be in prison for a violent offense (42% versus 25%) and less likely to be serving a sentence for a drug offense (25% versus 31%).

Most serious offense	Percent of female inmates who experienced	
	Prior abuse*	No prior abuse
Violent	41.7%	25.0%
Property	25.3	31.4
Drug	25.3	38.5
Public-order	6.9	4.6
Other	.7	.5
Number of inmates	16,385	21,439

\*Includes those inmates who experienced physical or sexual abuse prior to their current incarceration.

Half of the violent female inmates who had been abused were sentenced for homicide, compared to two-fifths of other violent female inmates.

Violent offense	Percent of violent female inmates who experienced	
	Prior abuse	No prior abuse
Homicide	50.8%	41.9%
Sexual assault	6.1	3.9
Robbery	20.1	29.4
Assault	18.0	20.7
Other violent	5.0	4.2
Number of inmates	6,827	5,369

### Mothers in prison

More than three-quarters of all women in prison had children, and two-thirds of the women had children under age 18 at the time of the survey (table 9). The 25,714 mothers in prison had more than 56,000 children under age 18. Male inmates were slightly less likely to have children: 64% reported having any children and 56% had children under age 18.

Black (69%) and Hispanic (72%) female inmates were more likely than white (62%) women to have children under age 18. Black women were slightly more likely than other women to have lived with their young children before entering prison.

Among inmates with children under age 18, 25% of the women, but nearly 90% of the men, said that their children were living with the other parent. More than a third of white female inmates reported children to be living with their fathers at the time of the interview, compared to a quarter of Hispanic women and less than a fifth of black women. Regardless of race, the children's grandparents were the most common single category of caregivers: 57% of black mothers, 55% of Hispanic mothers, and 41% of white mothers. Nearly 10% of the women reported that their children were in a foster home, agency, or institution.

**Table 9. Children of State prison inmates, by race and sex of inmates, 1991**

Characteristics	Percent of female inmates				Percent of male inmates All*
	All*	White	Black	Hispanic	
Have children					
No	21.9%	26.1%	20.4%	17.8%	36.1%
Yes	78.1	73.9	79.6	82.2	63.9
Under age 18	66.6	61.6	69.0	71.6	56.1
Adult only	11.4	12.3	10.6	10.6	7.6
Number of inmates	38,658	13,983	17,754	5,521	669,732
Number of children under age 18 <sup>a</sup>					
1	37.3%	40.7%	37.0%	31.2%	43.2%
2	29.9	30.8	28.4	33.3	28.9
3	18.1	17.5	18.2	19.8	15.2
4	8.5	6.5	9.0	10.0	6.8
5 or more	6.1	4.5	7.4	5.7	5.9
Lived with child(ren) under 18 before entering prison <sup>a</sup>					
No	28.3%	31.3%	24.5%	34.3%	47.1%
Yes	71.7	68.7	75.5	65.7	52.9
Where child(ren) under 18 live(s) now <sup>a,b</sup>					
Father/mother	25.4%	35.2%	18.7%	24.4%	89.7%
Grandparent	50.6	40.6	56.7	54.9	9.9
Other relative	20.3	14.7	23.7	22.8	2.9
Friends	4.1	5.7	2.7	4.2	.4
Foster home	8.6	12.6	5.8	6.5	1.7
Agency/institution	2.1	2.1	1.8	2.1	.5
Alone	2.0	1.9	2.3	1.5	1.1
Other	4.2	6.4	3.0	3.0	1.0

Note: Female prison inmates had an estimated total of 56,123 children under age 18 and male inmates had 770,841 minor children.

\*Includes Asians, Pacific Islanders, American Indians, Alaska Natives, and other racial groups.

<sup>a</sup> Percents are based on those inmates with children under age 18.

<sup>b</sup> Percents add to more than 100% because inmates with more than one child may have provided multiple responses.

Among inmates with children, women were more likely than men to have had contact with their children since admission to prison, regardless of the children's ages (table 10). Nearly 90% of women with children under age 18 had contact with their children, compared to about 80% of men. An estimated 87% of women with only adult children, compared to 72% of men, had contact with those children during their incarceration.

Since entering prisons, half of the women had been visited by their children, four-fifths had corresponded by mail, and three-quarters had talked with them on the phone.

An estimated 46% of women with minor children said they talked with those children on the phone at least once a week; 45% had contact by mail at least once a week; and 9% were visited by their children. Female inmates with children younger than 18 were more likely than those with only adult children to make daily telephone calls to their children (16% versus 11%).

### Drug use history

Women in prison in 1991 used more drugs and used those drugs more frequently than men (table 11). About 54% of the women had used drugs in the month before the

current offense, compared to 50% of the men. Female inmates were also more likely than male inmates to have used drugs regularly (65% versus 62%), to have used drugs daily in the month preceding their offense (41% versus 36%), and to have been under the influence at the time of the offense (36% versus 31%). Nearly 1 in 4 female inmates reported committing their offense to get money to buy drugs, compared to 1 in 6 males.

Compared to the women in prison in 1986, higher percentages of female inmates in 1991 reported that they had used drugs in the month before their offense (54% compared to 50%) (table 12). Among women using a drug in the month before the offense, the percentage using cocaine or crack rose from 23% in 1986 to 36% in 1991. However, marijuana use during the same period declined from 30% of the women to 20%. The use of other types of drugs either declined or remained about the same during this period.

About the same percentage of women in both years said they were under the influence of drugs at the time of their offense. At the time of their offense, 23% of female inmates were using cocaine or crack in 1991, up from 12% in 1986. Marijuana use dropped from 8% to 5%. Use of heroin and other opiates remained about the same.

**Table 11. Drug use history of State prison inmates, by sex, 1991**

Drug use	Percent of inmates	
	Female	Male
Ever used	79.5 %	79.4 %
Ever used regularly*	65.3	62.0
Used in the month before current offense	53.9	49.6
Used daily in the month before current offense	41.4	35.7
Under the influence at the time of the current offense	36.3	30.6
Committed offense to get money to buy drugs	23.9	16.5
Number of inmates	38,743	672,055

Note: Excludes an estimated 844 inmates who did not report on their use of drugs.  
\*Regular use is defined as once a week or more for at least 1 month.

Among inmates, women were more likely than men to report having used a needle to inject illegal drugs: a third of female inmates, compared to a quarter of male inmates. An estimated 18% of the women and 12% of the men also said that they had shared a needle at least once in the past.

Prisoners	Ever used a needle	Ever shared a needle
Female*	34.0%	18.0%
White	41.6	25.0
Black	24.0	10.3
Hispanic	45.9	24.5
Male	24.3%	11.5%

\*Includes Asians, Pacific Islanders, American Indians, Alaska Natives, and other racial groups.

Injecting drugs was more widespread among Hispanic and white women than among black women. About 46% of the Hispanic women, 42% of the white women, and 24% of the black women used a needle to inject illegal drugs before admission to prison. About a fourth of the Hispanic and white women and about a tenth of the black women had shared a needle for drugs.

Type of contact	Percent of female inmates		Percent of male inmates	
	Children under age 18	Adult children only	Children under age 18	Adult children only
	Any contact	89.6%	87.2%	79.5%
Calls to/from children	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Daily	16.4	11.0	8.2	3.1
Once per week	29.7	29.2	22.4	19.1
Once a month	17.0	19.6	16.9	16.5
Less than once a month	8.8	13.7	12.5	15.2
Never	28.1	26.6	39.9	46.0
Mail to/from children	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Daily	8.9	8.4	6.9	3.6
Once per week	36.4	32.6	24.2	20.0
Once a month	22.5	24.8	22.0	21.8
Less than once a month	11.0	14.4	15.3	20.2
Never	21.3	19.8	31.6	34.4
Visits by children	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Daily	.4	.2	1.0	.1
Once per week	8.7	9.5	7.4	4.0
Once a month	18.0	16.8	14.9	12.6
Less than once a month	20.8	25.2	21.8	25.9
Never	52.2	48.4	54.9	57.4
Number of inmates	25,610	4,393	373,770	50,698

Note: Detail does not add to total because inmate may have reported more than one type of contact.

Female inmates who used drugs differed from those who did not in the types of crimes they committed (table 13). Regardless of the measure of drug use, users were less likely than the nonusers to be serving a sentence for a violent offense.

One in four of the women who had used drugs in the month before their offense and 2 in 5 of the nonusers were serving a sentence for a violent offense. Among women who had committed the offense under the influence of drugs, 24% were sentenced for a violent offense, and among those not under the influence, 37% were sentenced for a violent offense. Women who had not used drugs were about twice as likely as users to have committed homicide, but were less likely to have committed robbery.

Among women who said they committed their crimes to get money to buy drugs, 17% were serving a sentence for a violent offense and 43%, a sentence for a property offense. Female inmates who said that drug money was a motive for their crimes were about twice as likely as other inmates to be incarcerated for robbery, burglary, larceny, or fraud (54% versus 27%).

About half the women in prison in 1991 reported that they had never participated in a drug treatment or drug education program (table 14). Those prisoners reporting a more serious use of drugs were more likely to have been participants. Among female inmates who had ever used drugs, 64% had been in a clinic, therapy, self-help group, class, or other treatment program. Of the women who had used drugs in the month before their offense, 71% had participated in a drug treatment program; 42% had been in treatment before admission. Twelve percent of the women using drugs in the month before their arrest were also in treatment at that time.

**Table 12. Drug use by female State prison inmates, by type of drug, 1991 and 1986**

Type of drug	Used in the month before the offense		Under the influence at the time of the offense	
	1991	1986	1991	1986
Any drug	53.9 %	50.0 %	36.3 %	33.9 %
Marijuana	20.5	30.5	4.6	8.5
Cocaine/crack*	36.5	23.3	22.6	12.1
Cocaine	26.2	23.3	14.2	12.1
Crack	19.1	...	10.1	...
Heroin/opiate	15.9	17.9	11.3	12.9
Heroin	14.8	17.2	10.8	12.3
Other opiates	3.4	2.1	1.0	1.0
Stimulants*	7.6	7.8	2.8	4.0
Amphetamines	4.6	7.8	.9	4.0
Methamphetamines	5.1	...	2.2	...
Depressants	5.0	9.1	1.4	4.5
Barbiturates	4.8	9.0	1.3	3.9
Methaqualone	.8	3.0	.1	.7
Hallucinogens	2.2	3.5	1.1	1.5
LSD	1.0	1.6	.4	.4
PCP	1.5	2.2	.7	1.1

Note: Detail may add to more than total because an inmate may have been using more than one drug. ...Not available.

\*Percents in 1986 reflect either cocaine or amphetamines in general because the survey in that year did not ask about crack or methamphetamines separately.

**Table 13. Most serious offense of female State prison inmates, by drug use history, 1991**

Most serious offense	Used drugs in the month before current offense		Under the influence of drugs at the time of the offense		Committed offense to get money to buy drugs	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Violent offenses	25.0 %	40.8 %	24.3 %	37.0 %	17.1 %	37.0 %
Homicide <sup>a</sup>	8.8	22.5	8.5	19.0	2.2	19.3
Sexual assault <sup>b</sup>	.4	3.0	.3	2.4	0	2.2
Robbery	9.6	5.7	10.7	6.1	13.2	6.0
Assault	5.2	7.3	3.7	7.6	1.5	7.7
Other violent	.9	2.2	1.0	1.8	.3	1.9
Property offenses	30.0 %	27.1 %	30.6 %	27.6 %	42.6 %	24.4 %
Burglary	5.7	3.2	5.4	4.1	7.2	3.7
Larceny/theft	12.9	8.9	13.9	9.5	21.9	7.8
Fraud	8.8	12.0	9.0	11.0	11.9	9.6
Other property	2.6	3.1	2.4	3.1	1.5	3.3
Drug offenses	39.0 %	25.7 %	39.6 %	28.8 %	36.0 %	31.8 %
Possession	15.4	7.5	15.8	9.3	11.2	11.9
Trafficking	21.9	17.4	21.7	18.7	23.3	18.7
Other drug	1.7	.7	2.1	.8	1.4	1.2
Public-order offenses	5.5 %	5.8 %	5.2 %	5.9 %	3.9 %	6.1 %
Weapons	.6	.4	.5	.4	.3	.5
Other public-order	4.9	5.4	4.7	5.5	3.7	5.6
Other offenses	.5	.7	.3	.8	.4	.7
Number of inmates	20,758	17,639	13,827	24,220	9,098	28,812

<sup>a</sup>Includes murder, negligent manslaughter, and nonnegligent manslaughter.  
<sup>b</sup>Includes rape and other sexual assault.

After admission to prison 38% of the women had participated in a drug treatment program. The most frequently used programs were group counseling (30%) and self-help treatment groups (21%). More than half of those who had used drugs in the month before their offense had participated since admission; nearly a third were enrolled in a program at the time of the survey.

Type of treatment	Percent of female inmates in drug treatment program after admission to prison
All types*	37.7%
Inpatient	8.6%
Counseling	
Group	30.2%
Individual	10.5%
Peer/self-help	21.4%
Drug education	10.7%

\*Detail adds to more than total because inmates may have participated in more than one type of treatment program.

## Alcohol use

Although women in prison were more likely than men to have committed their offense under the influence of drugs (36% versus 30%), women were less likely to have been drinking alcohol (22% versus 31%) (table 15). Nearly half of both women and men were under the influence of either drugs or alcohol at the time of the offense.

**Table 14. Drug use among female State prison inmates, by drug treatment, 1991**

Drug treatment program	Percent of female inmates		
	All	Using drugs	
		Ever in the past	In the month before offense
Participation*			
Ever	50.5%	63.6%	70.8%
Since admission	37.7	47.4	53.0
Before admission	28.6	36.1	41.8
Times			
1	16.2	20.5	23.3
2	6.0	7.6	8.8
3-5	4.8	6.1	7.3
6 or more	1.3	1.7	2.1
Participated in the month before the current admission	9.1%	11.5%	12.3%
Most recent participation was while incarcerated	40.2%	50.6%	55.9%
Participating at the time of the survey	20.7%	26.0%	30.2%
Number of inmates	38,221	30,292	20,691

\*Categories of participation before and after admission include inmates who participated during both periods.

**Table 15. Alcohol use of State prison inmates, by sex, 1991**

	Percent of State prison inmates	
	Female	Male
Used alcohol in the year before the current offense	57.7%	72.8%
Frequency of use		
Daily	19.0%	29.5%
At least once a week	16.8	25.9
Less than once a week	6.3	6.5
At least once a month	7.1	5.6
Less than once a month	8.2	5.3
Under influence of drugs or alcohol at time of offense		
No	52.6%	52.0%
Yes	47.4	48.0
Alcohol only	11.6	17.9
Drugs only	25.5	16.2
Both	10.3	13.9

**Table 16. Participation in alcohol-abuse programs by State prison inmates, by alcohol use and sex, 1991**

	Percent of State prison inmates	
	Ever in alcohol-abuse or treatment program	After admission, in alcohol-related program
All inmates		
Female	30.3%	15.0%
Male	36.2	13.5
Consumed alcohol in the year before the offense		
At least once a week		
Female	40.9%	23.0%
Male	42.0	17.8
At least once a month		
Female	20.9%	12.8%
Male	25.4	11.0
Less than once a month		
Female	16.0%	12.4%
Male	24.3	9.5
Committed the offense under influence of alcohol		
Female	50.7%	28.1%
Male	51.7	22.2

## HIV and AIDS

Among State prison inmates who were tested for the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and reported the results of that test, women were more likely than men to test positive. An estimated 3.3% of the women reported being HIV-positive, compared to 2.1% of men.

Among female inmates who were tested for HIV, 6.8% of Hispanics and 3.5% of blacks tested positive, compared to 1.9% of white female inmates.

An estimated 6.7% of women who had used a needle to inject illegal drugs reported testing positive for HIV, compared to 4.7% of their male counterparts. Among women who reported needle use, Hispanics were most likely to be HIV-

positive (11.6%), followed by blacks (8.3%) and whites (3.9%).

	Percent of inmates who tested HIV-positive	
	All	Ever used a needle
Female*	3.3%	6.7%
White	1.9	3.9
Black	3.5	8.3
Hispanic	6.8	11.6
Male	2.1%	4.7%

\*Includes Asians, Pacific Islanders, American Indians, Alaska Natives, and other racial groups.

Among inmates who had shared a needle to inject drugs, women were more likely than men to be HIV-positive (10.0% versus 6.7%).

For a more detailed discussion of HIV-testing and AIDS, see *HIV in U.S. Prisons and Jails*, BJS Special Report, NCJ-143299.

Female inmates generally drank less often than male inmates during the year before their current offense: 58% of women in prison reported any alcohol use, compared to 73% of men. About 2 in 10 women, compared to 3 in 10 men, drank every day during that year.

Among inmates, women had participated less than men in any alcohol treatment but were about as likely as men to have joined an alcohol-related group like Alcoholics Anonymous or Al-Anon after admission (table 16). Heavier drinkers, regardless of their sex, were more likely to participate in alcohol-related prison to groups than those who drank less often before entering prison. However, for inmates who drank at least once a week before admission, the women (23%) were more likely than the men (18%) to participate. The same difference in participation levels between women and men existed for inmates who had committed their offense under the influence of alcohol.

### Prison health care for women

About 6% of women in prison in 1991 had entered prison pregnant (table 17). An estimated 6.7% of black women, 5.9% of Hispanic women, and 5.2% of white women were pregnant at admission. Most women who had been pregnant had received both routine gynecological exams and prenatal care.

White female inmates were more likely than other women to have received mental health care after admission. Twenty-nine percent of white women had participated in individual or group counseling for problems other than drug or alcohol abuse, compared to 21% of black women and 15% of Hispanics. Before their current admission white female inmates (18%) were more likely than black (8%) or Hispanic (6%) females to have stayed overnight in a mental hospital or other mental health treatment program. Nearly 1 in every 6 women had received medication prescribed by a psychiatrist or other doctor for an emotional or mental problem since admission to prison.

### Methodology

The 1991 Survey of Inmates of State Correctional Facilities was administered for the Bureau of Justice Statistics by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. Personal interviews were conducted with 13,986 inmates to collect data on individual characteristics of State prison inmates, current offenses and sentences, characteristics of victims, criminal histories, prior drug and alcohol use and treatment, and health care services provided while in prison. Similar surveys were conducted in 1974, 1979, and 1986.

#### Sample design

The sample for the 1991 survey was selected from a universe of 1,239 State prisons enumerated in the 1990 Census of State and Federal Adult Correctional Facilities or had been opened between completion of the census and February 29, 1991. The sample design was a stratified, two-stage selection.

In the first stage correctional facilities were separated into two sampling frames: one for prisons with male inmates and one for prisons with female inmates. Prisons holding both sexes were included on both lists. Within each frame, prisons were stratified into eight strata defined by census region (Northeast, Midwest, South, and West) and facility type (confinement and community-based). All prisons with 1,950 or more men were selected from the male frame; and all prisons with 380 or more women were selected from the female frame. The remaining prisons in the male frame were grouped into equal size strata of approximately 2,600 males and then stratified by security level (maximum, medium, minimum, and unclassified). The remaining prisons in the female frame were also grouped into strata of approximately 574 females. A systematic sample of prisons was then selected within strata on each frame with probabilities proportional to the size of each prison. Overall, a total of 277 prisons were selected.

In the second stage interviewers visited each selected facility and systematically selected a sample of male and female inmates using predetermined procedures. As a result, approximately 1 of every 52 male inmates and 1 of every 11 females were selected. A total of 13,986 interviews were completed, yielding an overall response rate of 93.7%.

**Table 17. Health issues concerning female State prison inmates, by race, 1991**

	Percent of female inmates			
	All <sup>a</sup>	White	Black	Hispanic
Had a gynecological examination after admission to prison	90.9%	91.7%	92.2%	86.1%
Pregnant when admitted to prison	6.1%	5.2%	6.7%	5.9%
Had a gynecological exam related to pregnancy				
Yes	5.2%	4.8%	5.7%	4.2%
No	.8	.3	1.0	1.8
Received any prenatal care related to pregnancy				
Yes	4.2%	4.1%	4.6%	2.9%
No	1.8	1.0	2.1	3.0
Participated in individual/group counseling after admission <sup>b</sup>	23.2%	28.8%	21.0%	15.1%
Currently in individual/group counseling				
Yes	13.5%	17.5%	11.8%	7.5%
No	9.7	11.3	9.2	7.7
Received prescription medication from psychiatrist/other doctor for emotional or mental problem since admission	15.6%	17.8%	14.2%	12.1%
Admitted to a mental hospital/health treatment program overnight before admission	11.5%	17.5%	7.7%	6.5%
Number of female inmates	38,518	13,922	17,711	5,486

<sup>a</sup>Includes Asians, Pacific Islanders, American Indians, Alaska Natives, and other racial groups.

<sup>b</sup>Excludes alcohol and drug treatment.

Based on the completed interviews, estimates for the entire population were developed using weighting factors derived from the original probability of selection in the sample. These factors were adjusted for variable rates of nonresponse across strata and inmate characteristics. Further adjustments were made to control the survey estimates to midyear 1991 custody counts projected from data obtained in the National Prisoner Statistics series (NPS-1).

### Accuracy of the estimates

The accuracy of the estimates presented in this report depends on two types of error: sampling and nonsampling. Sampling error is variation that may occur by chance because a sample rather than a complete enumeration of the population was conducted. In any survey the full extent of the nonsampling error is never unknown. The sampling error, as measured by an estimated standard error, varies by the size of the estimate and the size of the base population. Estimates of the standard errors have been calculated for the 1991 survey. (See Appendix table.) These estimates may be used to construct confidence intervals around percentages in this report. For example, the 95-percent confidence interval around the percentage of women who were in prison for a drug offense is approximately 32.8% plus or minus 1.96 times 1.04% (or 30.8% to 34.8%).

These standard errors may also be used to test the significance of the difference between two sample statistics by pooling the standard errors of the two sample estimates. For example, the standard error of the difference between female and male inmates in the percent in prison for drug offenses would be 1.4% (or the square root of the sum of the squared standard errors for each group). The 95-percent confidence interval around the difference would be 1.96 times 1.4% (or 2.7%). Since the difference of 12.1% (32.8% minus 20.7%) is greater than 2.7%, the difference would be statistically significant.

All comparisons discussed in this report were statistically significant at the 95-percent confidence level. To test the significance of comparisons not mentioned in the report, use percentages in text or tables and, when available, base numbers.

**Appendix table. Standard errors of the estimated percentages, female and male prison inmates, 1991**

Base of the estimate and sex	Estimated percentages					
	98 or 2	90 or 10	80 or 20	70 or 30	60 or 40	50
1,000						
Female	1.97	4.23	5.64	6.46	6.91	7.05
Male	5.09	10.90	14.53	16.65	17.80	18.16
2,000						
Female	1.39	2.99	3.99	4.57	4.89	4.99
Male	3.60	7.71	10.28	11.77	12.58	12.84
5,000						
Female	0.88	1.89	2.52	2.89	3.09	3.14
Male	2.27	4.87	6.50	7.44	7.96	8.12
10,000						
Female	0.62	1.34	1.78	2.04	2.18	2.23
Male	1.61	3.45	4.60	5.26	5.63	5.74
15,000						
Female	0.51	1.09	1.46	1.67	1.78	1.82
Male	1.31	2.81	3.75	4.30	4.60	4.69
20,000						
Female	0.44	0.95	1.26	1.44	1.54	1.58
Male	1.14	2.44	3.25	3.72	3.98	4.06
25,000						
Female	0.39	0.85	1.13	1.29	1.38	1.41
Male	1.02	2.18	2.91	3.33	3.56	3.63
30,000						
Female	0.36	0.77	1.03	1.18	1.26	1.29
Male	0.93	1.99	2.65	3.04	3.25	3.32
38,796*						
Female	0.32	0.68	0.90	1.04	1.11	1.13
50,000						
Male	0.72	1.54	2.06	2.35	2.52	2.57
100,000						
Male	0.51	1.09	1.45	1.66	1.78	1.82
200,000						
Male	0.36	0.77	1.03	1.18	1.26	1.28
400,000						
Male	0.25	0.54	0.73	0.83	0.89	0.91
600,000						
Male	0.21	0.44	0.59	0.68	0.73	0.74
672,847*						
Male	0.20	0.42	0.56	0.64	0.69	0.70

Note: The reliability of an estimated percentage depends on the size and its base. Each standard error when multiplied by 1.96 provides a 95-percent confidence interval around an estimated percentage. To calculate the difference between two estimated percentages, take the square root of the sum of each squared standard error for the percentages being compared.  
\*The total number of female and male prisoners in 1991.

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Data used in this report are available from the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data at the University of Michigan, 1-800-999-0960. The data set is archived as the Survey of Inmates of State Correctional Facilities, 1991 (ICPSR 6068).