

# INTERGENERATIONAL INCARCERATION

## in NSW Prisons and Youth Justice Centres

### BACKGROUND

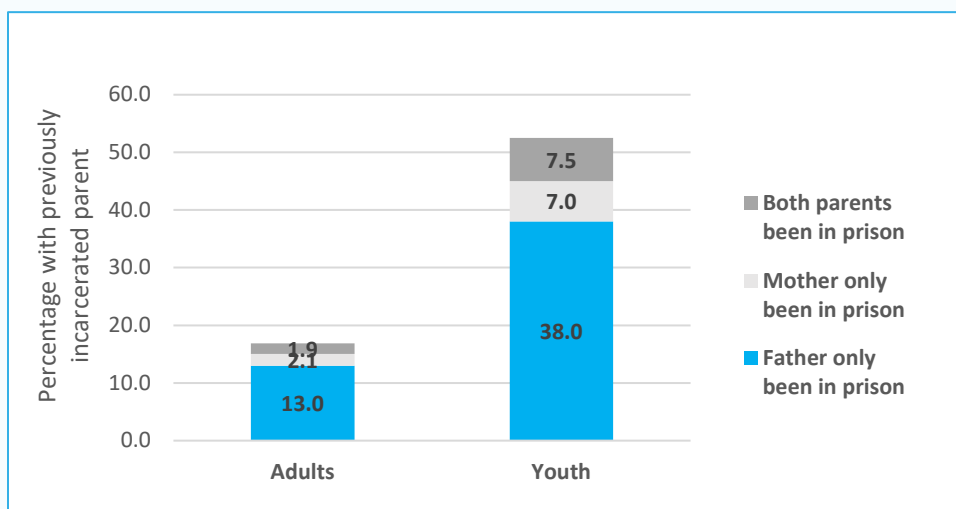
Intergenerational offending refers to the idea that criminal behaviour may be “transmitted” from one generation to another. There is strong criminological evidence that individuals whose parents were in prison during their childhood are at increased risk of incarceration themselves (“intergenerational incarceration”). Corrective Services NSW commissioned a study to better understand the scale of intergenerational incarceration in adult prisons and Youth Justice Centres.

### DATA SOURCES

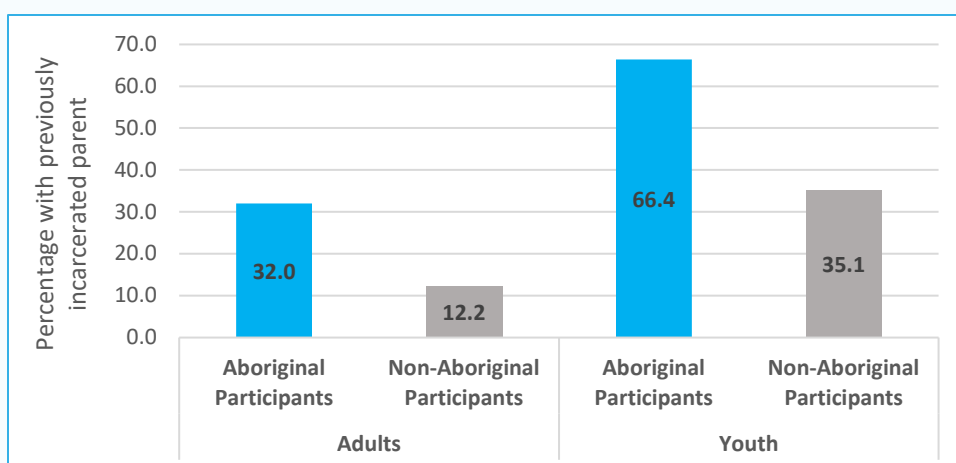
Data used for this analysis was obtained from two state-wide surveys conducted by the Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network and Juvenile Justice NSW in 2015: 1) NSW Network Patient Health Survey (NHPS); and 2) Young People in Custody Health Survey (YPICHS).

### FINDINGS

**Prevalence of intergenerational incarceration:** One-in-six (16.9%) adult prisoners and just over one-half (52.6%) of youth in youth justice centres reported that at least one of their parents had previously been imprisoned. Participants were more likely to report that their father had been imprisoned than their mother.



**Aboriginal participants:** Intergenerational incarceration was higher for Aboriginal participants with almost one-third (32.0%) of Aboriginal adult prisoners and two-thirds (66.4%) of Aboriginal youth in custody reporting a previously incarcerated parent.



# FINDINGS continued...

**Gender:** Female adult prisoners (21.0%) were more likely to report that at least one of their parents had been imprisoned than male prisoners (16.6%).

Findings suggest that there may be a stronger association between incarceration of mothers and subsequent incarceration of their daughters than between mothers and sons. Thus, 8.6% of female prisoners reported that their mother had been in prison compared to only 3.6% of male prisoners. This difference was clearly evident when limiting analyses to prisoners with a previously incarcerated parent...

	Female Adults in Prison with previously incarcerated parent	Male Adults in Prison with previously incarcerated parent
<b>Mother ONLY incarcerated</b>	23.2%	11.1%
<b>Both parents incarcerated</b>	17.8%	10.4%
<b>Father ONLY incarcerated</b>	58.9%	78.5%

## Other findings:

- **Age and schooling:** Younger participants and those who finished fewer years of schooling were more likely to report that a parent had been previously incarcerated.
- **Out-of-family care:** Adult prisoners who had been placed in care outside of their immediate family before the age of 16 years were more likely to report that one of their parents had been incarcerated than those who were not placed in care.
- **Juvenile detention:** Adult prisoners who had previously been held in juvenile detention were twice as likely to have a parent who had been in prison than prisoners who had never been in juvenile detention.
- **Violent offending:** Adult prisoners convicted of violent crimes against others were more likely to have had an imprisoned parent than those convicted of non-violent crimes not necessarily directed against individual persons.
- **Number of Times in juvenile detention:** Young people in youth justice centres who had been incarcerated more often were more likely to report that at least one of their parents had been imprisoned
- **Emotional and intellectual ability:** Findings from psychometric and intelligence testing of youth in custody suggested that, on average, those youth who had a previously incarcerated parent may exhibit greater psychopathic traits, antisocial behaviours, callousness and unemotional behaviour, and lower intellectual ability, than those whose parents had never been incarcerated. They also reported higher rates of suicidal thoughts and self-harm.
- **Experiences of trauma:** Young people in detention centres who had a least one parent who had been in prison were more likely to report that they had experienced trauma than those who did not have a parent who had been in prison.

## CONCLUSION

Findings from this study are strongly suggestive of an association between the imprisonment of parents and the subsequent contact of their children with the criminal justice system. This association is particularly apparent in the population of young people in detention centres and among Aboriginal people in custody. There is some indication that incarceration of mothers may have a greater impact on their daughters than their sons with respect to increased risk of future incarceration.

Having a previously incarcerated parent may be associated with indicators of socio-economic disadvantage including lower age of school leaving, unstable accommodation, being placed in out-of-home care, lived experience of trauma, and earlier contact with the justice system. The high percentage of young people in detention centres who reported a previously incarcerated parent, the association between younger age of those in detention centres and intergenerational incarceration, and the greater likelihood that adults in prison who had previously been in youth detention centres experienced a previously incarcerated parent, strongly suggest that increasing the age of criminal responsibility is a crucial step to breaking the cycle of intergenerational incarceration.

These findings demonstrate the importance of intervening with children whose parents are incarcerated or at risk of incarceration. Any such intervention must be holistic in nature and address the broad social needs of children at risk of experiencing the cycle of intergenerational transmission of offending. Programs developed by and for Aboriginal families should be a priority. More broadly, policies and programmes to address disadvantage more generally would be likely to disrupt the cycle of intergenerational incarceration.

**CAVEAT - Statistical testing for significance was not undertaken for this report. Findings of differences between sub-groups of participants must be treated with caution.**

*This is a summary of the report, "An Epidemiological Analysis of Intergenerational Incarceration in NSW Prisons and Youth Justice Centres"*