

# The Association of Incarceration with Community Health and Racial Health Disparities

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## What Is the Purpose of This Study?

- To assess how the incarceration of a friend or family member is associated with the physical and mental health of those remaining in the community.

## What Is the Problem?

- The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world, and substantial disparities exist between incarceration rates for whites and minorities.
- Research on the impact of incarceration usually focuses on the sentenced individual and occasionally on the children of incarcerated parents.
- The health impact of incarceration may also extend to other family members and friends left behind in the community, exacerbating racial disparities in physical and mental health.

## What are the Findings?

In Genesee County, people who have had a relative or friend in prison in the last 5 years report more health problems than others. On average, they:

- Rated their physical health more poorly;
- Had more days where poor physical health interfered with usual activities;
- Felt more stress;
- Felt more overwhelmed by problems and unexpected events; and
- Were more likely to report feelings of depression, such as being lonely, sad, and losing interest in things.

## Who Should Care Most?

- Public Health departments and agencies.
- Community health care providers.
- Community members.
- Elected officials.
- Criminal justice officials.
- Friends and family of those incarcerated.

## Recommendations for Action

- If you or someone you know has a friend or relative in prison, there may be local community organizations and groups that can provide support and guidance.
- Move toward a harm-reduction model of criminal justice.
- Decriminalize substance use and abuse and shift oversight to the health care sector.

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Kruger, D.J., DeLoney, E.H. The community health impact of incarceration and racial health disparities. *Progress in Community Health Partnerships: Research, Education, and Action*. The Community Policy Brief is intended to inform community based organizations, public health policy makers, and other individuals whose primary interest is not research, but who would be interested in the application and translation of research findings for practical purposes.