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The Increase in Incarcerations Among Women and its Impact on the Grandmother Caregiver: Some Racial Considerations

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This article analyzes census data on the increase in incarcerations among women, with specific emphasis on some racial differences. The steady rise in female incarcerations and its impact on grandmothers who are caregivers of their children is the focus of this analysis. The article includes sociodemographic and health characteristics of imprisoned mothers, a review of relevant research, the impact of incarcerations on family caregivers, and implications for research. The rate of female incarceration has increased by 11% per year since 1985. A disproportionately higher number are women of color. Approximately fifty-three percent of the children whose mothers are imprisoned are cared for by grandmothers. The rapid increase in the female incarceration rate suggests the need for additional research on the social, economic, and health impact of this phenomenon on family caregivers, especially grandmothers.

There has been a dramatic increase in the number of incarcerations among women over the past three decades. In 1970, only 5,635 women were incarcerated in federal and state prisons. By 1985, however, this number increased to 21,296, and was as high as 74,730 by the latter part of 1996. Presently, there are over 90,000 women in U.S. prisons (National Women's Law Center, 1999). This constitutes a 256% increase in female incarcerations and a growth rate of 11.2% per year since 1985. Similar numbers of women were in local jails (McQuaide and Ehrenreich, 1998). These figures include a disproportionately higher number among women of color. Women have become the hidden victims of the state's zeal for incarceration (National Women's Law Center,

1999). Since incidence and prevalence rates among the female inmate population are increasing rapidly, it is important to recognize this vulnerable group as a significant one for policy, research, and program intervention.

In spite of these drastic increases, however, little is known about the characteristics and needs of incarcerated mothers in general, and not much more is known about the care and welfare of their young children. A number of problems are associated with the rapidly increasing rate of incarcerations among African American women. The health problems of the mother as well as the care of the children are among the problems that place a serious burden on the grandmother, who is the primary caregiver of 53% of the children under 18 years. In spite of the rapid increase in incarcerations of African American mothers and the associated problems, as well as the increased popular and scholarly interest in the area, there is little systematic research on how imprisonment of daughters with minor children affect the family, and the grandmother caregiver, in particular, who must care for the vast majority of their young children. In an effort to highlight some of the issues and problems, this article will provide information on (1) sociodemographic and health characteristics of imprisoned mothers, (2) a review of recent research on custodial grandparenting, (3) incarcerations and family caregiving, and (4) implications for research. There is an urgent need for social scientists to study aggressively the scope, nature, and magnitude of the issues involved in incarceration of young African American mothers, and its impact on grandmother caregivers. In an effort to ensure strong and healthy families, we need to understand how these and other social and public health problems influence the daily lives and well being of our most vulnerable population.

Sociodemographic and Health Profile of Female Inmates

The majority of the 84,500 women incarcerated in state and federal prison as of the end of 1998, are there for economic crimes. The rapid increase within the last 10 years is due, in part, to the worsening of economic conditions for women, as well as the increase in arrest rates because of the war on crime and the war on drugs. The most common convictions are for property

crimes, such as check forgery and illegal credit card use. Eighty percent of imprisoned women report incomes of less than \$2,000 in the year before the arrest, and 92 percent report incomes under \$10,000. Ninety percent of women in prison are single mothers (National Women's Law Center, 1999). And, over the past 30 years, poverty has been increasingly associated with single female heads of households. Racism and economic discrimination are intricately linked to sexism in our culture, creating severe inequalities in the court system and the prison system. This race-sex based discrimination in convictions and sentencing is consistent with the racial norms and expectations in society. African American women are twice as likely to be convicted of killing their abusive husbands than are White women. And, in general, African American women receive longer jail time and higher fines than White women for the same offenses (National Women's Law Center, 1999). The majority of women convicted of violent crimes were for either defending themselves or their children from abuse (National Women's Law Center, 1999). Perhaps not so surprising is the fact that the average prison terms for killing a husband are twice as long as for killing a wife.

The general characteristics of incarcerated women seem to be consistent throughout the literature. Nearly half of the women in both state prisons and local jails have never been married. In state prisons, there is a tendency to be a high school dropout (58 percent). Seventy-five percent are between the ages of 25–34, and the average age is 29. Most are mothers of dependent children (80%), and were not employed at the time of the arrest. An alcohol and drug abuse history is associated with 90 percent, and the vast majority are women of color. African American and Hispanic women together represent approximately 64 percent of the female inmate population (50% and 14% respectively). White women constitute the remaining 36 percent (Kurshan, 1999; Smith, 1999; National Women's Law Center, 1999).

Family background characteristics seem to play a major role in the incidence of jail inmates (Table 1). Approximately 55% of incarcerated African American females were raised by their mother only in comparison to 34% White and 37% Hispanic. Approximately 10% of African American women were raised by their grandparents, in comparison to 4% for White women and 8%

Table 1
Family background of jail inmates, by sex and race/Hispanic origin, 1996

	Percent of jail inmates						
	Total	Male	Female	White non-Hispanic	Black non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other
Person(s) lived with most of time while growing up:							
Both parents	39.7%	40.0%	36.5%	51.0%	27.2%	45.3%	32.7%
Mother only	43.3	43.4	42.3	34.2	54.8	36.5	43.7
Father only	4.9	5.0	3.6	6.5	3.2	5.1	5.1
Grandparents	7.0	6.7	9.8	3.6	9.7	8.0	6.0
Other	5.2	4.9	7.7	4.7	5.0	5.1	12.5
Ever lived in a foster home, agency, or institution while growing up	13.6%	13.1%	17.9%	18.1%	10.5%	9.4%	24.7%
Family ever received public assistance while growing up							
Welfare only	22.0%	22.0%	22.7%	19.2%	24.6%	21.8%	23.9%
Public housing only	4.8	4.7	5.8	1.7	8.4	2.6	8.0
Both	11.8	11.5	14.1	4.9	19.3	9.3	10.4

Table 1
Continued

	Percent of jail inmates								
	Total	Male		Female		White		Black	
						non-Hispanic	Hispanic	non-Hispanic	Hispanic
Family member ever incarcerated	46.1%	44.7%	58.2%	46.7%	49.0%	37.1%	54.8%		
Any*	17.1	17.2	16.5	21.1	14.4	13.1	27.0		
Father	4.4	3.9	9.1	4.1	4.9	3.7	7.2		
Mother	30.3	29.9	33.8	27.7	31.9	25.4	32.5		
Brother	6.2	5.5	12.7	6.0	7.0	4.3	10.2		
Sister	3.3	2.1	13.6	4.9	1.7	2.3	9.5		
Spouse	1.3	1.1	3.2	1.5	1.2	0.9	3.0		
Child									
Parent or guardian ever abused alcohol or drugs while inmate was growing up	23.1%	22.8%	25.8%	30.3%	17.9%	18.8%	29.7%		
Alcohol only	1.3	1.2	2.2	1.3	1.5	1.0	0.7		
Drugs only	6.9	6.5	10.4	8.3	6.0	5.9	7.3		
Both alcohol and drugs									

*Details may not add to total because more than one response was possible.
Correctional Populations in the U.S. 1996. Bureau of Justice Statistics, April 1999, NCJ 170013.

for Hispanic women. Nineteen percent of the African American female jail population grew up in public housing in comparison to 5% for White and 9% for Hispanic women. All three groups report relatively high incidence of the incarceration of a brother and father. The incarceration of the father is more prevalent among White female inmates (21%), whereas the incarceration of the brother is more common among African American inmates (35%). In the African American and Hispanic female inmate population, a smaller percentage of their parents or guardians abused alcohol; 18% and 19% respectively, in comparison to 30% of White female inmates (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1999a; 1999b).

Women in both state and federal prison facilities are older than those in local jails or on probation (Table 2). One in 5 women in jail or under probation supervision are under 25. State prisoners constitute 1 in 8 and federal prisoners 1 in 11 of the age group under 25. Women who are in correctional facilities are more likely to have been never married than their female counterpart in the general population. Approximately 50% of women incarcerated in state and federal facilities as well as local jails have never been married. A majority of women in the justice system are high school graduates, and some 40% of high school graduates have attended some college and beyond. Female prisoners are generally more economically deprived than their male counterpart. Approximately 4 in 10 women were employed full-time prior to their arrest in comparison to 6 in 10 men. Although significant for both groups, approximately 37% of incarcerated women had incomes less than \$600 per month before incarceration in comparison for 28% of men. Some 30% of female inmates reported receiving welfare assistance immediately before their arrest, whereas only 8% of men inmates received this type of assistance (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1999a; 1999b).

The lifetime prevalence rate of incarceration among African American women is significantly higher than for White or Hispanic women. According to the office of Bureaus of Justice Statistics 11 women out of 1,000 will be incarcerated in a state or federal prison at some time in their lives. It is estimated that 36 out of 1,000 African American women, 5 out of 1,000 White women, and 15 out of 1,000 Hispanic women will end up in prison during their lifetime (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1999a; 1999b).

Table 2

Characteristics of adult women on probation, in jail, and in prison

Characteristics of women	Probation	Local jails	State prisons	Federal prisons
Race/Hispanic origin				
White	62%	36%	33%	29%
Black	27	44	48	35
Hispanic	10	15	15	32
Other	1	5	4	4
Age				
24 or younger	20%	21%	12%	9%
25-34	39	46	43	35
35-44	30	27	34	32
45-54	10	5	9	18
55 or older	1	1	2	6
Median age	32 years	31 years	33 years	36 years
Marital status				
Married	26%	15%	17%	29%
Widowed	2	4	6	6
Separated	10	13	10	21
Divorced	20	20	20	10
Never married	42	48	47	34
Education				
8 th grade or less	5%	12%	7%	8%
Some high school	35	33	37	19
High school graduate/GED	39	39	39	44
Some college or more	21	16	17	29

Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, Women Offenders, December, 1999. NCJ 175688

Near the end of 1998, 84,427 women were under the jurisdiction of state and federal correctional institutions, 75,241 were in state maintained institutions, and 9,186 were in the federal institutions. It is reported (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1999a; 1999b) that from 1990 to 1998, the rate of female imprisonment increased by an annual average of 8.5% in state and federal prisons. Prison

populations increased nationally an average of 6.7% annually over the same 8-year period (Table 3).

In viewing state incarceration rates, there are sharp variations (Table 4). For example, a little under 50% or 33,345 of women prisoners were housed in southern states. Female incarcerations in southern states were higher than for any region, constituting 65 inmates per 100,000 population. The western states constituted some 25% or 18,845 of the total state prison population. The per capita rate of imprisonment was 58 per 100,000. Midwestern states had approximately 18% of women state prisoners, constituting 13,684 with a rate of 42 inmates per 100,000 population. The northeastern states accounted for 12% of women prisoners or 9,367 with an incarceration rate of 31 (Table 4).

Female prison inmates have a series of health related problems. One in four women is either pregnant or postpartum at the time of imprisonment. Any number of health problems may accompany a woman to prison, including drug addiction, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. It is reported that rates of HIV among the female inmate population is much higher than that which is found in the general population.

Table 3

Trends in the number of sentenced female prisoners per 100,000 female residents, by race:

Year	All women	White	Black
1990	31	19	117
1991	33	19	129
1992	35	20	136
1993	40	23	155
1994	45	26	169
1995	47	27	176
1996	51	30	185
1997	53	32	192
1998	57	34*	212*

*Based on projected estimate.

Bureau of Justice Statistics, Special Report, Women offenders, December 1999, NCJ 175688

Table 4

Female prison populations, 1998

Jurisdictions	Number of female inmates	
	Year end 1998	Per 100,000 women residents
Total, all jurisdictions	84,427	57
States, total	75,241	51
Federal	9,186	5
States with at least 1,000 women prisoners		
Alabama	1,525	64
Arizona	1,780	66
California	11,694	67
Colorado	1,070	53
Connecticut	1,357	43
Florida	3,526	45
Georgia	2,474	61
Illinois	2,646	43
Indiana	1,198	39
Kentucky	1,046	51
Louisiana	2,126	94
Maryland	1,140	39
Michigan	2,052	41
Mississippi	1,213	77
Missouri	1,880	67
New Jersey	1,653	39
New York	3,631	38
North Carolina	1,932	35
Ohio	2,912	50
Oklahoma	2,091	122
Pennsylvania	1,517	24
South Carolina	1,412	63
Texas	10,343	102
Virginia	1,806	47
Washington	1,018	35
Wisconsin	1,169	42

Bureau of Justice Statistics, Special Report, Women Offenders, December, 1999.
 NCJ 175688

This is due primarily to the concentration of women who engage in risky behavior — injection drug use, multiple sex partners, and unprotected sex (Smith, 1999). According to the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics (1999a; 1999b), in 1997, an estimated 2,200 women serving time in state prisons were HIV-positive, approximately 3.5% of the female inmate population. An estimated 20,200 male inmates, or approximately 2.2 percent of the male population, was HIV-positive. The female inmate HIV-positive population peaked in 1993 at 4.2%.

The myriad health and social problems of the incarcerated young mother also become the problems of the grandmother caretaker. Because many of the problems are chronic, such as AIDS and drug addiction, the role of the grandmother caregiver is often permanent. In cases where the mother has transmitted the AIDS virus to the unborn child, grandmother caregivers assume responsibility for the care of approximately 70 percent of these babies. Acoca (2000) reports that one northeastern women's correctional facility, testing for AIDS has revealed between 25% and 30% of the women have tested positive for the AIDS virus. In addition to HIV, many other infectious diseases requiring treatment are prevalent among incarcerated women.

Approximately 50% of female offenders incarcerated in state prisons had used alcohol, drugs, or both at the time of the offense for which they were incarcerated. Drug use was reported to be more prevalent at the time of the offense than the use of alcohol. Women inmates in state prisons reported a higher usage of drugs than men. Forty percent of female inmates in comparison to 32% of men had been under the influence of drugs when the offense occurred. Men, on every measure of alcohol use, had a higher percentage of alcohol usage at the time the crime occurred than did women (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1999a; 1999b; Acoca, 2000).

Research Perspectives

Increase in custodial grandparenting

Since 1970, there has been a 77 percent increase in the number of households maintained by grandparents (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1997). In 1970, 2.2 million or 3.2 percent of American children lived in a home maintained by a grandparent. However, this figure increased to 3.9 million or 5.5 percent by 1977 (Casper and

Bryson, 1998; US. Bureau of the Census, 1998; Velkoff and Lawson, 1998). In 1998, this figure has increased to 4 million or 6 percent of all children under 18. The greatest increase; however, was among children with only one parent present in the household. This pattern, grandchildren living in households maintained by grandparents with only the mother present, increased from 1970 to 1997 by 118%. Since 1990, the greatest growth has been in the number of grandchildren living with their grandparents only, with neither parent present (Casper and Bryson, 1998; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998).

The increase in households maintained by African American grandparents is primarily headed by the grandmother. This trend is particularly noticeable, in general, but particularly in inner city, poor, crime infested neighborhoods. African American children are more likely to live in the home of their grandparents than are Whites or Hispanics. In 1992, 12 percent of African American children lived in the home of their grandparents, in comparison to 4 percent of White and 6 percent of Hispanic children (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1992). It is not uncommon for African American children to live in a multigenerational home with an unmarried grandmother. Grandmothers easily assume the responsibility for the care of grandchildren and great-grandchildren when the parent is no longer able or willing to care for their children. The high proportion of African American grandchildren living with grandparents, grandmothers in particular, reflects a continuing pattern of co-residence and shared caregiving within African American families (Roe, Minkler, & Barnwell, 1994; Wilson, 1986). Over the past two decades, the crack-cocaine epidemic, HIV/AIDS epidemic, and incarcerations of young African American mothers have all contributed to the dramatic increase in the incidence and prevalence of custodial grandparenting in African American communities. All three problems have had an impact on the well being of grandmother caregivers and, unfortunately, this trend is likely to continue well into the twenty-first century

Incarcerated Women's Children and Family Caregiving

The vast majority of female prisoners are young mothers with children under 18 years. Approximately 7 in 10 women in correctional supervision have minor children. An estimated 72% of

women on probation, 55% of those in local jails, 65% of women in state prisons, and 59% of women in federal prisons have children under the age of 18 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1999a; 1999b). Eighty percent of female inmates have children, and 85 percent had custody of them prior to their incarceration. Approximately 167,000 of children in the United States have mothers who are incarcerated. Parents or other relatives assume childcare responsibilities for 67 percent of the children under 18. The child's father takes responsibility for 22 percent (Smith, 1999; National women's Law Center, 1999). Grandmothers assume responsibility for taking care of 53 percent of the 67 percent taken care by relatives (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1999a; 1999b). In some instances, mothers may lose contact with their children permanently (Table 5).

The Impact of Female Incarcerations on Grandmother Caregivers

A number of issues surrounding female incarcerations are important and worthy of consideration. The Incarceration of the mother affects the child as well as the caregiver, who is the grandmother in most cases. Female incarcerations place three generations at risk and destroy families, leaving lasting scars on children as well as putting an enormous financial and health burden on grandmother caregivers. Incarcerations among women have increased by 202% over the last ten years (Dressel and Barnhill, 1994). Approximately, two-thirds of the women in state and federal prisons and jails have children under the age of 18 years. And, approximately 53 percent of these children live with their grandparents while their mother is in prison (See Table 6). In most cases concerning female incarcerations, the grandmother is the primary caregiver. Some 32,000 older women are primary caregivers for their grandchildren whose mothers are incarcerated (Dressel and Barnhill, 1994). It is estimated that 75,000 grandmothers will be faced with the increasing incidence of incarcerations of their grandchildren's parents by the end of the century (Barnhill, 1996). African American grandmothers are increasingly called upon to act as surrogate parents for grandchildren whose mothers are incarcerated, or otherwise incapacitated because of drug abuse (Barnhill, 1996; Dressel and Barnhill, 1994).

The increasing prevalence of incarcerations among young African American mothers create problems for poor and elderly

Table 5
Children of jail inmates, by sex and race/Hispanic origin, 1996

Characteristics of inmates	Male				Female				
	Total ^a	Total ^a	White non-Hispanic	Black non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Total ^a	White non-Hispanic	Black non-Hispanic	Hispanic
Have children									
No	36.3%	38.1%	44.1%	32.3%	37.7%	20.3%	22.2%	18.2%	21.1%
Yes	63.7	61.9	55.9	67.7	62.3	79.7	77.8	81.8	78.9
Any under 18	57.9	56.5	48.4	62.8	59.2	70.5	67.5	72.4	73.1
Adult children only	5.8	5.4	7.4	5.0	3.1	9.2	10.3	9.4	5.8
Number of children under 18	620,530	536,299	166,923	247,020	103,720	84,240	26,086	39,309	13,491
Number of jail inmates with children under age 18	290,093	254,328	114,087	82,014	50,079	35,765	12,290	15,854	5,789
Number of children under 18 ^b									
1	38.6%	39.7%	38.7%	41.8%	38.5%	30.4%	34.6%	29.0%	31.2%
2	31.4	31.5	35.5	27.8	33.2	30.3	33.3	29.3	28.2
3	16.7	16.0	15.3	15.4	17.0	21.4	21.1	19.2	25.2
4	7.1	6.5	6.2	6.4	7.5	11.2	8.3	13.2	9.6
5	3.2	3.1	2.6	3.9	2.2	4.4	1.6	6.0	3.4
6	3.0	3.1	1.7	4.6	1.8	2.2	1.0	3.3	2.5

Table 5
Continued

Characteristics of inmates	Male			Female		
	Total ^a	White non-Hispanic	Black non-Hispanic	Total ^a	White non-Hispanic	Black non-Hispanic
Lived with child(ren) under 18 before entering jail ^b						
No	58.5%	57.6%	65.6%	41.1%	49.2%	35.3%
Yes	41.5	42.4	34.4	58.9	50.8	64.7
Caretaker of child(ren) under 18 ^{b,c}						
Other parent	81.1%	86.3%	89.5%	29.9%	41.5%	23.1%
Grandparent	18.1	13.8	13.9	47.7	39.1	52.8
Other relative/friend	8.7	6.1	6.0	27.9	25.2	28.8
Agency/foster home	3.0	3.0	1.6	10.9	13.7	7.7
Number of jail inmates	501,509	169,317	181,729	50,722	18,201	21,903
			84,556			7,915

^aTotals include inmates of other races.

^bPercentages are based on inmates with children under age 18.

^cPercentages add to more than 100% because inmates with more than one child may have provided multiple responses. Correctional Populations in the United States, 1996, April 1999. NCJ 170013

African American grandmothers who are living on fixed incomes, and who may have other child care or kin care responsibilities. In their 1994 case study, Dressel and Barnhill found that this particular population had material needs in almost all basic aspects of life. They also found that the grandmother's psychological needs focused on respite care from and validation for their family work, desire for a better relationship with the incarcerated daughter, and ways to deal with the emotional needs of grandchildren and their behavioral disruptions at home and school (Dressel and Barnhill, 1994). The authors also reported problems centered around transition periods, such as when the grandmother takes in the children after the daughter's arrest, the conviction, and the release after many years. These transitions may present critical problems in family relationships between the daughter and the grandmother caregiver.

Consequences of Custodial Caregiving on African American Grandmothers

A number of reasons for grandparents acting as parents to their grandchildren are discussed in the literature. Among them are drug abuse, incarcerations, divorce, desertion, death of a parent, child abuse, unemployment, teenage pregnancy, and HIV/AIDS (Barnhill, 1996; Burnette, 1997; Burton, 1992; Burton and Bengtson, 1985; Burton and DeVries, 1993; Honey, 1988; Joslin and Brouard, 1995; Kee, 1997; Minkler, 1994; Minkler and Roe, 1993; Minkler and Roe, 1996; Minkler, Roe, and Price, 1992; Roe, Minkler, and Barnwell, 1994; Minkler, Roe, and Robertson-Beckley, 1994; Poe, 1992; Pruchno and Johnson, 1996). Incarcerations of young mothers, as well as the drug and AIDS epidemics, are the most critical reasons for grandparents assuming the role of parent to their grandchildren. These problems are leaving a devastating impact on African American families, and are likely to accelerate in the next century.

A growing body of literature shows that African American grandmothers assume responsibility for the care of their grandchildren and great-grandchildren in the case of drug abuse (Burton, 1992; Minkler, Roe, and Robertson-Beckley, 1994; Roe, Minkler, and Barnwell, 1994); incarcerations (Dressel and Barnhill, 1994; and HIV/AIDS (Burnette, 1997; Honey, 1998; Joslin and

Brouard, 1995). African American grandparents are more likely to be surrogate parents than are Whites or Hispanics (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1992), and the number one reason is drug Abuse (AARP, 1994). Drug use, HIV/AIDS, and incarcerations are interrelated and will continue to be critical issues for many families and communities as long as the drug problem remains out of control.

These problems are exacerbated because of the lack of formal and informal support. Traditionally African American families were characterized as a unit with extensive cooperation and family support. And, although the extended family is still functioning in African American communities, the roles of family members have changed drastically, particularly the contemporary roles of the grandmother as caregiver. Some contemporary studies show that African American grandmothers are not receiving consistent and reliable support from family members (Burton, 1992). Other studies show a rich support network (Minkler and Roe, 1993), although social isolation is seen among some of the young grandmothers who are experiencing role conflict caused by employment and childcare (Minkler and Roe, 1993). Raising grandchildren with special needs (U.S. Senate Special Committee on Grandparents, 1992; Burton, 1992; Minkler and Roe, 1993) as well as caring for adolescent children (Kee, 1997) who have their own unique set of needs, all present social and psychological discomfort for African American grandmother caregivers.

In their study of African American grandmothers, Minkler and Roe (1996) have identified consequences of surrogate parenting in the areas of health problems, economic difficulties, and the lack of government support. A number of health problems, such as depression, insomnia, hypertension, back pain, stomach pain, and other problems associated with the physical and emotional demands of childcare have been reported by clinicians (Minkler and Roe, 1996). In a study of grandmothers raising grandchildren as a result of the crack-cocaine epidemic, Minkler and Roe (1996) found that grandmothers tended to minimize the severity of their health problems in an effort to show that they were capable of taking care of their grandchildren. Some studies have reported declining health after becoming surrogate parents, while other studies have found changes in social behaviors, such as increase

in cigarette smoking and alcohol consumption (Burton, 1992; Minkler and Roe, 1996; Minkler, Roe, and Price, 1992).

The health problems of African American grandmother caregivers are often exacerbated by financial problems. African American women have traditionally occupied low paying jobs, and often without good retirement benefits. Although they suffer financially, African American grandmothers make a sacrifice to become surrogate parents. As reported by Minkler and Roe (1996), grandparents must sometimes spend savings or make other sacrifices in an effort to adjust to the role of parenting their grandchildren. In addition, considering the vast number of grandparents caring for grandchildren in this country, there is little government support for their efforts. Grandparent caregivers do not receive the type of financial support as do foster care providers (Minkler and Roe, 1996). They are also denied benefits such as psychological counseling and clothing allowance which are available to foster care providers. Although their traditional helping roles are still intact, African American grandmothers have some specific problems and needs with regards to health, economic, social, and legal issues that require programmatic, policy and research consideration.

Implications for Research

Over the last three decades, there has been a drastic increase in the incidence and prevalence of young mothers incarcerated in the United States. This article has addressed the rise in female incarcerations, and some problems associated with grandparents who must raise their grandchildren whose parents are imprisoned in state or federal prisons and local jails. While functioning in the role of custodial grandparent in the case of imprisonment of their children, African American grandmothers experience much stress and many problems. However, in spite of the numerous problems outlined in this article, there is very little systematic research on this topic of grandparents caring for their grandchildren whose children are incarcerated. Research on the topic of custodial grandparenting in the case of incarcerations is relatively unexplored. The following research questions are recommended for future study: (1) What are some racial differences

in sociodemographic characteristics of female inmates? (2) What are some social and demographic characteristics of grandparents who care for their grandchildren whose children are incarcerated? (3) What is the impact of incarcerations on the grandparent caregiver? (4) What types of formal and informal supports are available to grandparents who are caring for grandchildren whose parents are incarcerated? (5) How do the separations affect the grandchildren? (6) What types of interventions are needed? It is anticipated that this article will motivate social scientists to seriously explore some of the issues involved with grandparents who care for grandchildren whose parents are incarcerated.

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