Impact of Mass Incarceration on Women and Families

Women in prison and detention struggle to keep families together and can face sexual harassment and sexual assault. A third of women in U.S. prisons are incarcerated for mostly nonviolent drug offenses. The number of women in U.S. prisons is increasing at nearly double the rate for men. Most women who are incarcerated, including mothers, are survivors of sexual and physical abuse and violence that often began during girlhood. African-American and Latina women make up the fastest-growing population in U.S. prisons and jails. Criminalizing mothers for trauma and addiction is a recent phenomenon, brought on by the introduction of mandatory sentencing to federal drug laws in the mid-1980s, which resulted in a 400 percent increase in the number of women in U.S. prisons. Women who have suffered physical and sexual abuse now face further abuse in prison and detention, where they fear speaking out and cannot flee violence and abuse.

at least 5100 children who are presently in foster care whose parents have been detained or deported

detainees are transferred an average of 370 miles from their homes.