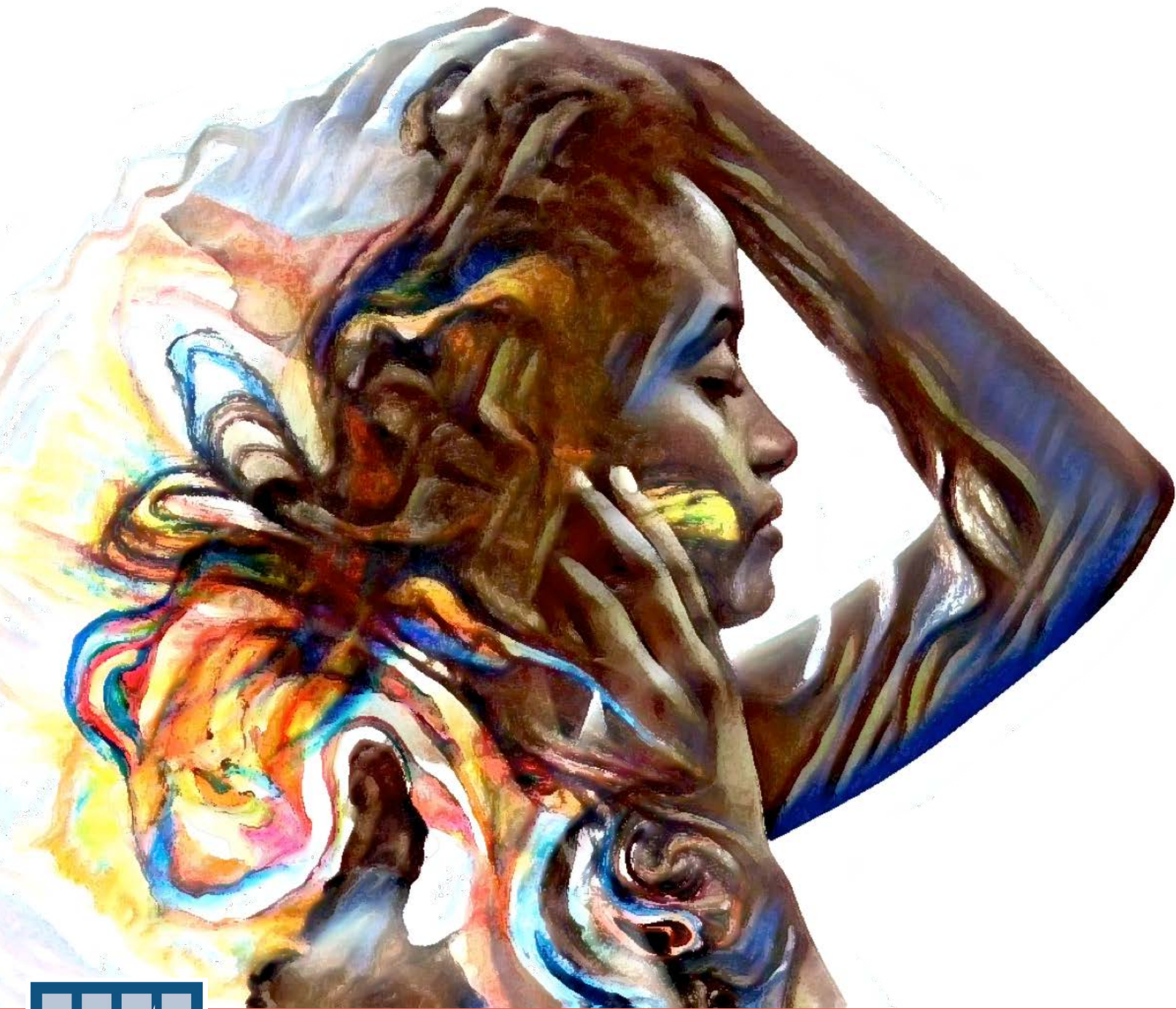


An Unsupported Population:



TEXAS CRIMINAL
JUSTICE COALITION

The Treatment of Women in Texas' Criminal Justice System

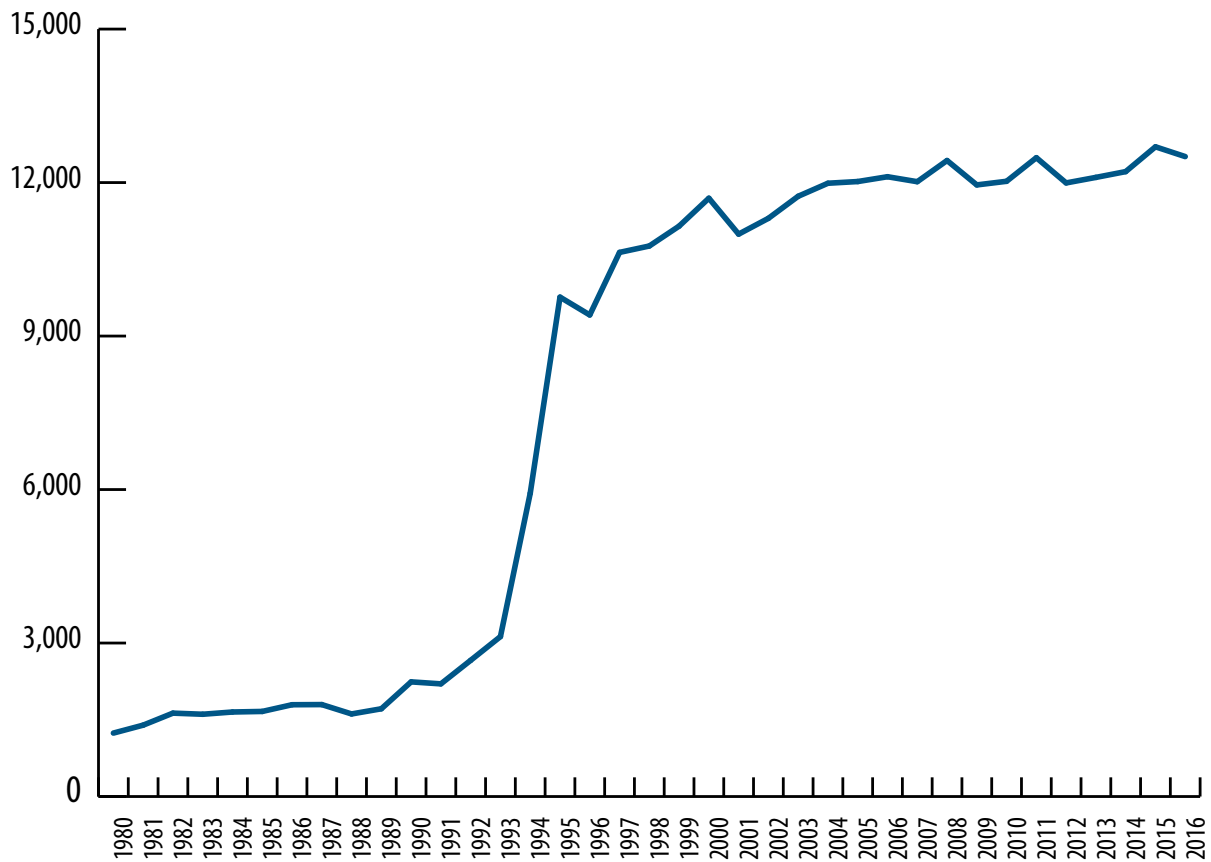
APRIL 2018

A Snapshot of Women Incarcerated in Texas' Justice System

Data Shows Significant Growth in Female Incarceration

Texas has one of the top 10 highest female incarceration rates in the country,² and the number of incarcerated women has grown significantly over time. In fact, female incarceration in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ, the state's corrections system) has increased 908% from 1980–2016, compared to an increase in the male population of 396%.³

Texas Female Prison Population Growth, 1980-2016



Texas now incarcerates more women by sheer number than any other state.⁴ From 2009–2016 Texas reduced its men's prison population by 8,577 while backfilling its prisons with 554 women.⁵ As of 2016, women incarcerated in TDCJ numbered 12,508, representing 8.5% of the incarcerated population, up from 7.7% in 2009.⁶

The number of women incarcerated in TDCJ is only slightly less than the total number of women in both

state and federal prisons across the country in 1980.⁷ And 81% of these incarcerated women are mothers.⁸

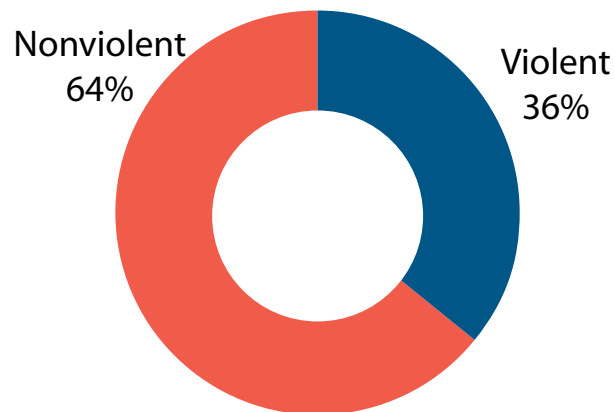
The rise in female incarceration is not exclusive to prisons. The number of women in Texas jails awaiting trial — totaling around 6,300 — has grown 48% since 2011, even as the number of female arrests in Texas has decreased 20% over that time period.⁹ Sadly, there is a significant number of pregnant women in Texas jails, with an average 367 pregnant females booked into Texas county jails each month in 2017.¹⁰

Female Criminality and Experiences Within Confinement

The differences between incarcerated women and men point to the need for gender-based programs and services to address women's underlying causes of criminality and prepare them for a successful reentry to the community.

Women in TDCJ for nonviolent offenses far outpace men, with 64% of women compared to 42% of men incarcerated for a nonviolent offense. The majority of those offenses are for drug possession or delivery. The percentage of women incarcerated for a property offense (22%) also exceeds the percentage of men (14%).¹¹

The Majority of Women in TDCJ are Incarcerated for Nonviolent Offenses



Women in TDCJ additionally outpace their male counterparts when it comes to substance use disorders, with 70% of women identified as suffering from a substance use disorder vs. 58% of men.¹²

Women in TDCJ are far more likely than men to be parents, with a staggering 81% of women in TDCJ having children vs. 68% of men.¹³

Unfortunately, TDCJ does not track information relating to how many women have histories of trauma, such as sexual abuse and domestic violence. However, the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition surveyed hundreds of women incarcerated in TDCJ in 2014; **nearly 60% of respondents had been sexually assaulted and 82% had been victims of domestic violence.**

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Along with, and perhaps as a result of, these significant trauma histories, justice system-involved women also reported high rates of mental health problems.¹⁴ And prior to entering TDCJ, they had high rates of poverty, low education levels, and low employment rates — all drivers into the criminal justice system, and all pointing to the lack of help for women in the community.

While inside TDCJ, women reported a lack of access to health care, basic hygiene items, and enough food. A quarter reported feeling “not very” or “not at all” safe. Nearly half reported that they never see their children, and one-third reported not feeling close to family or friends. Only small percentages of women reported that TDCJ did “very well” helping them address mental health, substance abuse, housing, or family reunification needs.

A Better Path for Women

It is critical to address the drivers of women into incarceration — especially substance abuse, mental health issues, past victimization, and poverty. Doing so will stop cycle of reoffending and re-incarceration that comes at great expense to taxpayers, families, and communities.

Similarly, it is vitally important to treat incarcerated women with dignity and to prepare them for a safe, successful reentry.

The Texas Criminal Justice Coalition urges local and state officials to adopt the recommendations below, which will give women the tools to address their underlying causes of criminality and increase the likelihood that they can successfully transition back to their families and communities.

- 1. Invest in programs and tools that address women’s unique needs, including gender-specific, recidivism-reducing programming that improves the reentry transition, and gender-specific risk and needs assessments to ensure particular issues are addressed.**
- 2. Improve conditions of confinement for women to ensure they are treated with dignity, including by providing better treatment for pregnant women and new mothers, improving access to quality health care and hygiene products, and reducing violence against incarcerated women.**
- 3. Remove barriers to family unity, including by eliminating costly charges for phone calls from prison, and by creating more welcoming, family-friendly visitation areas.**
- 4. Better prepare women for release from incarceration, including by providing pre-release programming, linkage to child welfare agencies, and improved aftercare and parole assistance.**

For more information about system-involved women in Texas, please see TCJC’s webpage dedicated to women’s justice at www.TexasCJC.org/womens-justice.