

# Reproductive Health Care Among Incarcerated Individuals

*Promising Strategies to Address Health Disparities Across the Reproductive Life Cycle*

NASEM

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Wellness of Incarcerated People

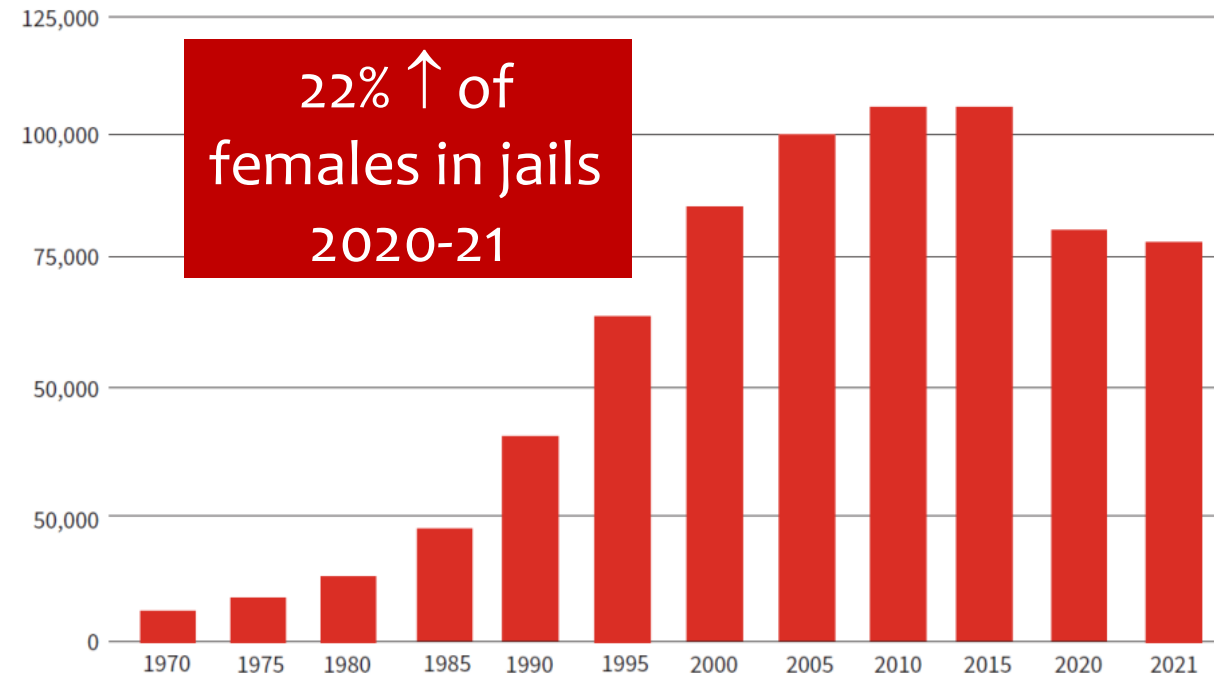
[arrwip.org](http://arrwip.org)



# What do we know about women\* behind bars in the U.S.?

- 168,449 adult females in jails and prisons
  - 75% are < 45 y.o.
  - 60% are mothers
- >1.2 million arrests of females

## Women in state and federal prisons



Sentencing Project. Source: Cahalan, M. W. (1986). *Historical corrections statistics in the United States, 1850-1984*. Bureau of Justice Statistics; *BJS Prisoners Series (1985-2020)*. Sentenced to one year or more for all years.

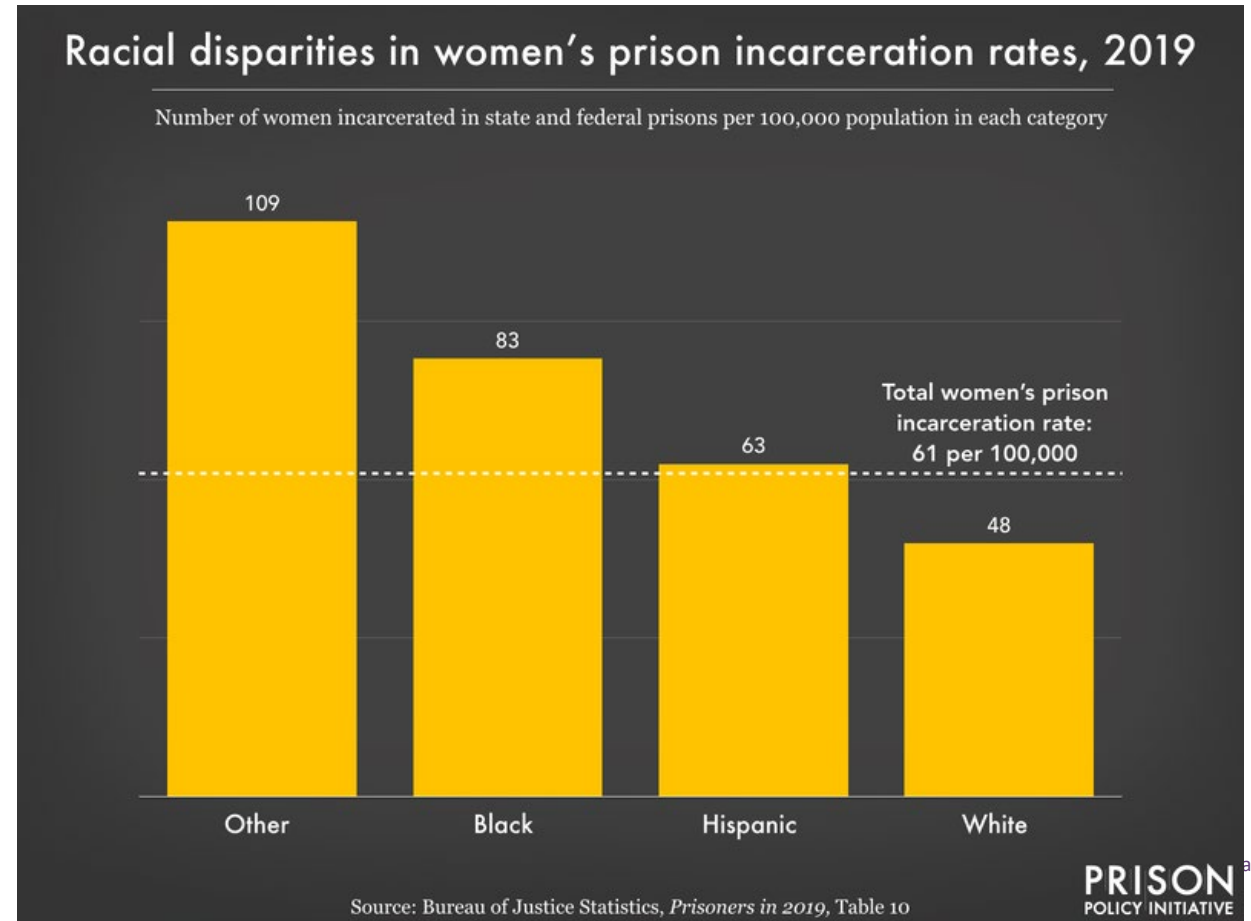
Carson; Zeng BJS 2022  
Marushak BJS 2020  
FBI crime stats 2022



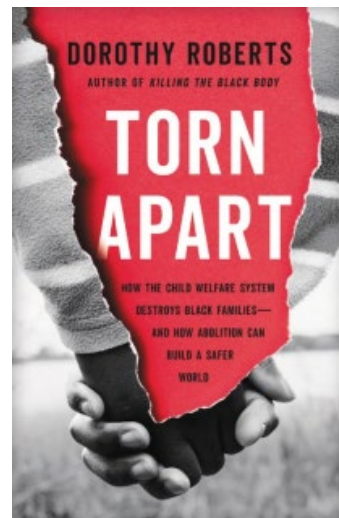
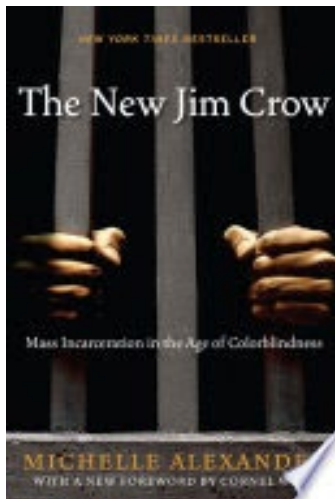
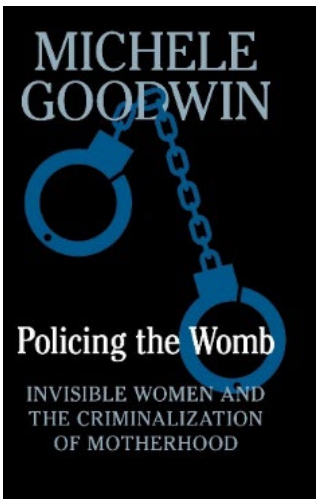
# Mental health, trauma, racism, and structural oppression in mass incarceration

## High prevalence of:

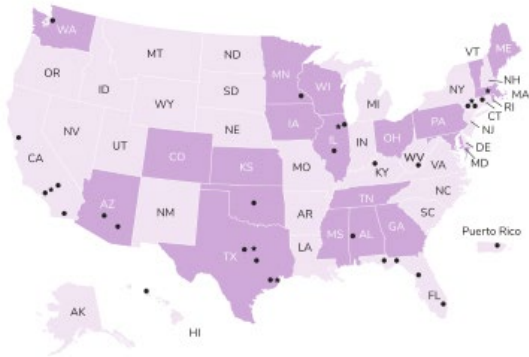
- Mental health diagnoses (70%)
- Substance use disorders (70%)
- Trauma
  - Physical, sexual (>80%)
  - Structural
  - Reproductive



Bronson BJS 2017  
Marushak BJS 2021  
Prison Policy Initiative 2021



# How common is pregnancy behind bars?



- 1 year of monthly pregnancy data from:
- 22 State Prison Systems
  - All Federal Prisons
  - 6 county jails (5 largest)

### US PRISONS



**1396** Admissions of pregnant people

**4%** of females entering state prison were pregnant

~3,000 admissions of pregnant people to U.S. prisons each year

### US JAILS



**1622** Admissions of pregnant people

**3%** of females entering jail were pregnant

~55,000 Admissions of pregnant people to U.S. jails each year


### Pregnancy Outcomes in US Prisons<sup>1</sup>



Live Births	<b>753</b>
Miscarriage	<b>46</b>
Abortion	<b>11</b>
Stillbirth	<b>4</b>
Ectopic Pregnancy	<b>2</b>

2 newborn deaths; 0 maternal deaths

### Pregnancy Outcomes in US Jails<sup>1</sup>



Live Births	<b>144</b>
Miscarriage	<b>41</b>
Abortion	<b>33</b>
Stillbirth	<b>2</b>
Ectopic Pregnancy	<b>4</b>

2 newborn deaths; 0 maternal deaths

# Pregnancy and care in custody



- Variable access to prenatal care
- Isolation, fear, uncertainty of gestating and birth in custody
- Inherent limitation of autonomy
- Shackling in pregnancy, labor, postpartum
- Separation from newborn
- Lack of postpartum care and lactation support

429 U.S. 97 (1976)

**ESTELLE, CORRECTIONS DIRECTOR, ET AL.  
v.  
GAMBLE.**

No. 75-929.

**Supreme Court of United States.**

Argued October 5, 1976.  
Decided November 30, 1976.



# Limited abortion access pre- and post-Dobbs

**Table 1.** Characteristics and Abortion Policies of Sampled State Prisons (n=22) and Jails (n=6)

	Prisons	Jails
Abortion allowed	19 (86)	4 (67)
1st trimester only	8 (42)	0 (0)
1st and 2nd trimester	11 (58)	4 (100)
Incarcerated person funds abortion	13 (68)	1 (25)
State where Medicaid covers abortion for nonincarcerated people	7 (37)	4 (100)
No written abortion policy	7 (32)	1 (17)
Abortion allowed, 1st trimester only	2 (29)	0 (0)
Abortion allowed, 1st and 2nd trimester	2 (29)	0 (0)
Abortion not allowed	3 (43)	1 (100)

Data are n (%).



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*“We're not looked at as people; we're looked at as inmates, so all of our decisions are taken from us, even with our pregnancies. They decide when we eat; they dictate when we drink. They dictate everything. They dictate when we see the doctor.”*

*“From my understanding, I was told that if you wanted an abortion when you're here at DOC, you can't because you were the state's property.”*



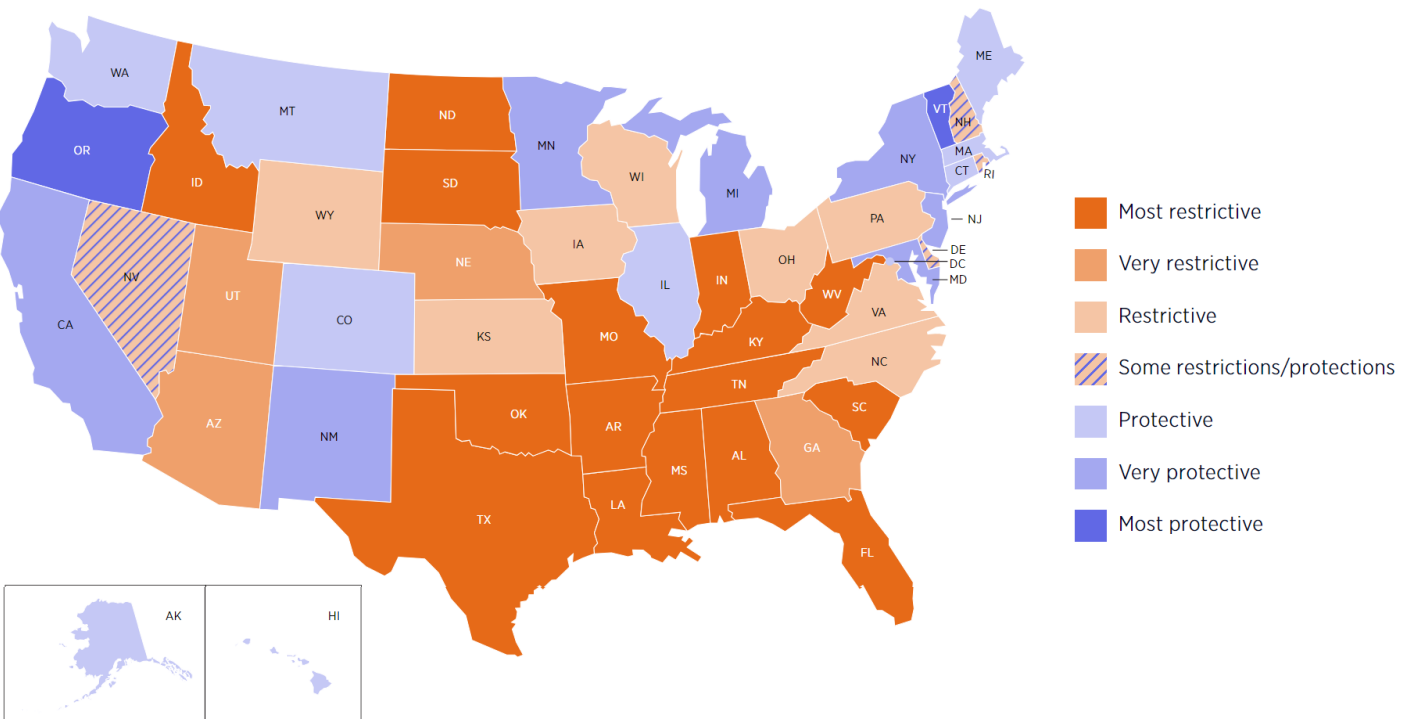
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# Lack of medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD) in pregnancy & postpartum in custody

## Jails



**60%** of jails continue MOUD in pregnancy, with or without initiation

**32%** initiate and continue MOUD in pregnancy

## Prisons



**82%** of prisons continue MOUD in pregnancy, with or without initiation

**18%** initiate and continue MOUD in pregnancy



## Postpartum



**24%** of MOUD-providing jails continue MOUD postpartum

## Synergistic risk of opioid overdose

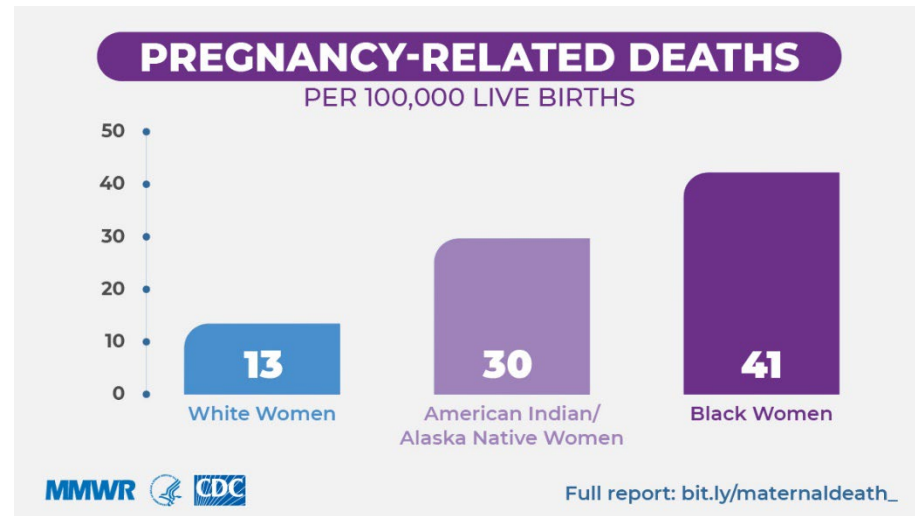
Postpartum

Post-release (100x)

Sufrin et. al. 2021 Addiction  
Sufrin et. a. 2022 JAMA Network Open  
Merrall et. al. 2010 Addiction  
Nielsen et. al. 2020 Addiction



# Links between perinatal incarceration & maternal mortality?

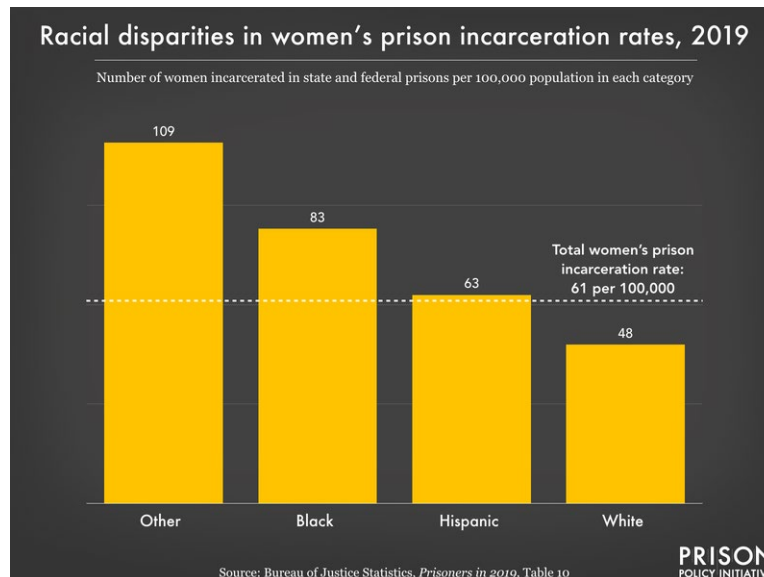


**Pregnancy-Related Deaths: Data from Maternal Mortality Review Committees in 36 US States, 2017–2019**

Susanna Trost, MPH; Jennifer Beauregard, MPH, PhD; Gyan Chandra, MS, MBA; Fanny Njie, MPH; Jasmine Berry, MPH; Alvssa Harvev, BS; David A. Goodman, MS, PhD

➔

	Total	
	N	%
Mental health conditions <sup>2</sup>	224	22.7
Hemorrhage <sup>3</sup>	135	13.7
Cardiac and coronary conditions <sup>4</sup>	126	12.8
Infection	91	9.2
Embolism-thrombotic	86	8.7
Cardiomyopathy	84	8.5
Hypertensive disorders of pregnancy	64	6.5



# Promising strategies



## E4P: Enhanced Perinatal Programs for People in Prison

### Project Aims

1. Identify **facilitators and barriers** to implementation of pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum support programs for people who are pregnant in prison.
2. Evaluate the **pregnancy and birth outcomes** of program participants.
3. Evaluate the **postpartum outcomes** of program participants.

alabama  
prison  
birth  
project



GROWING  
TOGETHER



Advocacy and Research on Reproductive  
Wellness of Incarcerated People

UAMS  
University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA



EMORY | NELL HODGSON WOODRUFF SCHOOL OF NURSING

University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences



# Promising Strategies



- End carceral births



**Healthy Start Act**  
[SF 1315/HF 1403](#)

- End mass incarceration

- Improve quantity & quality of care
  - Mandatory standards of care and oversight
  - Comprehensive abortion & prenatal care
  - MOUD access
- Access to doulas
- Data collection
- Training custody and carceral medical staff
- Reduce harm from hospitals
- Breastfeeding support
- Postpartum and pregnancy mental health care
- Passing and implementation of anti-shackling laws





**ARRWIP**

Advocacy and Research on Reproductive  
Wellness of Incarcerated People



[csufrin@jhmi.edu](mailto:csufrin@jhmi.edu)



[www.arrwip.org](http://www.arrwip.org)

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