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## **A Profile of Women Released Into Cook County Communities from Jail and Prison**

Testimony to the Cook County Commission on Women's Issues

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## **Background & Introduction**

The decision to incarcerate defendants pre-trial in jail, and to sentence them to prison as a result of a felony conviction, are not only some of the most expensive decisions made by criminal justice practitioners, but also carry with them significant implications regarding public safety, access to services and rehabilitation, and reintegration back into society. Although females have historically, and currently, account for a relatively small proportion of defendants and offenders processed through the justice system and its secure custodial facilities, over the past 30 years increasing numbers of females processed through the system has increased the attention of researchers, practitioners and policy makers to the unique characteristics and needs of females in the justice system.

To provide criminal justice practitioners and policy makers in Cook County with a general understanding of the numbers and characteristics of females processed through the Cook County Jail, and women from Cook County sentenced to prisons operated by the Illinois Department of Corrections, this testimony summarizes some characteristics of these women and provides the groundwork for additional research that will be carried out in the future. The information and analyses presented in this testimony have been developed over the past few years through two separate efforts carried out by a research team at Loyola University Chicago. First, over the past four years, the Cook County Sheriff's Office and Loyola University Chicago's Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology have partnered to develop and enhance the capacity to conduct applied research and policy analysis within the Cook County Department of Corrections. This effort has resulted in numerous presentations to practitioners and policy makers in Cook County, has provided support to the Cook County Justice Advisory Council in their efforts, and has aided in successful grant applications by the Sheriff's Office to federal funding agencies.<sup>1</sup> The second effort the current testimony is informed by is a study carried out by a research team at Loyola University Chicago, with support from the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, that examined in detail trends and characteristics of females sentenced to the Illinois Department of Corrections and their risk of recidivism. Although the published report from that study<sup>2</sup> did not focus on Cook County, from data collected as part of that study, we were able to extract some information about women sentenced to prison from Cook County for this testimony. All of the analyses presented in this testimony relate to *adults* (individuals over the age of 16) and therefore *excludes* those that go through the Cook County Temporary Juvenile Detention Center and the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice.

## **Trends in the Number of Women Admitted to the Cook County Jail & Sentenced to Prison from Cook County**

The number of adult females admitted to, and detained in, the Cook County Jail increased dramatically during the 1990s, peaked in 2004 and 2005, and since then has decreased to levels not seen since the early 1990s. For example, the number of females admitted to the Cook County Jail

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<sup>1</sup> For access to publications generated as a result of this effort, please visit [http://works.bepress.com/david\\_e\\_olson/subject\\_areas.html](http://works.bepress.com/david_e_olson/subject_areas.html).

<sup>2</sup> Olson, D.E., Escobar, G., & Stalans, L. (2011). *An Examination of Admissions, Exits and End-of-the-Year Populations of Adult Female Inmates in the Illinois Department of Corrections, State Fiscal Years 1989 – 2011*. Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, Chicago, Illinois. Available at [http://www.icjia.state.il.us/public/pdf/ResearchReports/Female\\_Inmate\\_Report\\_through\\_SFY2011\\_122011.pdf](http://www.icjia.state.il.us/public/pdf/ResearchReports/Female_Inmate_Report_through_SFY2011_122011.pdf)

increased from roughly 6,000 in 1990 to around 15,000 in 2000 and 2005, but by 2011 had fallen to fewer than 10,000. Admissions to the jail through September of 2012 suggest that the number of females admitted to the jail this year will be higher than what was recorded in 2011.<sup>3</sup> For context, during 2011 there were a total of 62,500 males admitted to the Cook County Jail. Similar trends were seen when admissions to the Illinois Department of Corrections of females from Cook County were examined. For example, before state fiscal year (SFY) 1994, annual prison admissions of adult females from Cook County never exceeded 1,000 inmates, however, by SFY 2005, just over 2,400 women from Cook County were admitted to prison in Illinois. By SFY 2011, the number of females admitted to prison from Cook County had fallen to fewer than 1,100—more than a 50 percent drop compared to SFY 2005. While these trends during the 1990s, and through 2005, resulted in females accounting for a growing proportion of admissions to both the Cook County Jail and the Illinois Department of Corrections, the proportion of admissions to jail accounted for by females never exceeded 16 percent, and the proportion of overall prison admissions from Cook County accounted for by females never exceeded 11 percent.

Trends in both of these indicators of incarceration for Cook County women during the 1990s and early 2000s were primarily fueled by a dramatic increase in felony-level arrests for drug-law violations by the Chicago Police Department. In addition to this increase in arrests for drug-law violations, increasing numbers of women in Cook County were also arrested for other crimes during that period, including property crimes and violent offenses. Further, changes made to Illinois law in 2000 that resulted in the establishment of a felony-level prostitution offense for individuals convicted of prostitution a second time also resulted in a significant increase in admissions to prison of women from Cook County from 2000 to 2005. However, since the early 2000s, the amount of crime in Cook County (and nationally) has decreased, and as a result, so too have the number of arrests by police. As a result of fewer arrests, the number of admissions to the Cook County Jail has decreased substantially since 2005. Similarly, as a result of fewer arrests, fewer felony convictions have occurred, resulting in fewer prison sentences from Cook County.

### **Characteristics of Female Jail Admissions**

During calendar year 2011, there were more than 9,100 adult females admitted to the Cook County Jail, accounting for almost 13 percent of the total admissions to the jail that year (Table 1). On the other hand, that same year there were 62,500 males admitted to the Cook County Jail. Other than differences in the sheer volume of admissions into the jail, male and female admissions to the jail were only slightly different in terms of their age, race and education level. For example, the average age of females admitted in 2011 was 34 years old, compared to an average of 33 years old for males admitted to the jail. The youngest inmates (male and female) admitted to the jail was 17 (the minimum age of an adult in Illinois' justice system), while the oldest female admitted in 2011 was 85 years old, as was the oldest male admitted. When age was examined by grouping the age into broader ranges, 30 percent of the women admitted to the jail in 2011 were over the age of 40, compared to 26 percent of the men. At the other end of the age continuum, 29 percent of women admitted to the jail were under 26 years old, compared to 36 percent of the male admissions. Some slight differences were evident when the race of male and female detainees was compared, with roughly two-thirds of both males and female accounted for by African-Americans, but a smaller

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<sup>3</sup> Between January 1, 2012 and September 7, 2012, there were 7,167 females admitted to the Cook County Jail, compared to 6,167 during that same period in 2011.

proportion of females accounted for by Hispanics (12 percent) than male detainees (21 percent), and a larger proportion of females were accounted for by whites (20 percent) than among males (13 percent).

More substantive differences were noted between female and male jail admissions when the most serious current criminal charges were compared, with males being more likely than females to be admitted for violent crimes (31 percent versus 23 percent, respectively) and traffic offenses (16 percent versus 12 percent, respectively). Roughly similar proportions of male and female jail admissions were for drug-law violations (28 percent and 25 percent, respectively). On the other hand, women were *more likely* than men to be admitted to the jail for property crimes (23 percent versus 18 percent, respectively) and prostitution, with 7 percent of female admitted to the jail being charged with prostitution compared to less than 1 percent of male jail admissions. Examining the current offense in more detail reveals the varied nature of the criminal charges against women admitted to the Cook County Jail. Among the top 5 offenses for females admitted to the jail in 2011 were felony possession of a controlled substance (1,596, or 17 percent of all female admissions), domestic battery (1,085, 12 percent of all female admissions), retail theft (1,028), prostitution (642) and driving on a suspended license (668).

**Table 1**  
**Characteristics of Female and Male Admissions to the Cook County Jail in 2011**

	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Age</b>			
Average Age (in years)	33.8	32.5	32.7
17 to 25	29.0%	35.6%	34.8%
26 to 40	40.6%	28.5%	38.8%
41 and older	30.4%	25.9%	26.4%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<b>Race</b>			
Black	68.2%	66.7%	66.9%
White	19.5%	12.7%	13.5%
Hispanic	12.3%	20.7%	19.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<b>Current Charge</b>			
Violent Offense	23.1%	30.9%	29.9%
Property Offense	22.6%	17.7%	18.3%
Drug-Law Violation	24.8%	27.9%	27.5%
DUI/Traffic Offenses	12.1%	16.3%	15.4%
Prostitution	7.1%	0.0%	1.0%
Other	8.8%	6.4%	6.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

## Prior Criminal History of Women Under the Custody of the Cook County Sheriff

In addition to their current charge, detailed data regarding the criminal history of individuals under the custody of the Cook County Sheriff on September 7, 2012, were also obtained and analyzed. It is important to point out that the characteristics of those admitted to the Cook County Jail can be different from the characteristics of those in the Cook County Jail on any given day. While a snapshot of the population will include detainees who have only been in the jail for a few days, it tends to be skewed towards those who have been in the jail longer, often because they have more serious current charges and/or higher bond amounts. Illustrative of this is the fact that while 30 percent of the jail admissions through September 7, 2012 were charged with a violent crime, 34 percent of those in the jail on that date were charged with violent offenses. Despite this caveat, examining the population this way does provide a sense of what the jail's population characteristics are "on any given day." On September 7, 2012, there were a total of 722 females detained in the Cook County Jail in a pre-trial status, compared to 8,783 male detainees.

Consistent with other research in Illinois and other parts of the country, generally speaking, women had slightly less extensive and less serious prior criminal histories than did the males under the custody of the Cook County Sheriff, but their criminal histories were still significant (Table 2). For example, of all the women in the Cook County Jail on September 7, 2012, in a pre-trial status, the median number of prior arrest charges was 16. In other words, 50 percent of the female pre-trial detainees had 16 or fewer prior arrests, while 50 percent of the female pre-trial detainees had 17 or more prior arrests. Because a significant proportion of these female detainees had extremely extensive criminal histories (10 percent of the women had 50 or more prior arrest charges), the average total prior arrests for female detainees was higher (23) than the median (16). By comparison, for male pre-trial detainees in the jail on that date, the median number of prior arrests was 22 and the average was 27. Differences in the volume of prior arrests were also seen across the female detainees when their current charges were examined separately. For example, female pre-trial detainees held on property-crime charges had a median of 25 prior arrest charges (similar to the median of 27 prior arrests among males with property charges), compared to a median of 8 prior charges for females in jail and charged with a crime of violence.

**Table 2**  
**Mean & Median Prior Arrest Charges Among Male and Female Pre-trial Detainees in the Cook County Jail, September 7, 2012, by Current Charge**

Current Charge	Male <sup>1</sup>		Female <sup>2</sup>	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
Violent	23.4	19	14.9	8
Property	32.9	27	33.4	25
Drug	29.3	26	25.2	20
Prostitution			46.2	39
DUI	29.8	25	20.3	15
All Inmates	26.8	22	23.1	16

<sup>1</sup> On September 7, 2012, there were a total of 8,783 male inmates in the jail in a pre-trial status. Exact matches on criminal history records were made on 8,341 of these male inmates and these cases were used in these analyses.

<sup>2</sup> On September 7, 2012, there were a total of 722 female inmates in the jail in a pre-trial status. Exact matches on criminal history records were made on 678 of these female inmates and these cases were used in these analyses

Significant proportions of the women in the Cook County Jail on September 7, 2012, also had criminal histories that included arrests for violent crimes, such as domestic battery, robbery, assault, and weapon offenses. Of all the women in the Cook County Jail on that day, 75 percent had 1 or more arrests for a violent crime, compared to more than 85 percent of the male detainees. When examined across the current charge, the prevalence of a violent arrest history did vary for both females and males; however, the majority of all sub-groups had one or more prior arrests for a violent crime. Among all the female detainees, the median number of prior arrests for a violent crime was 2, with an average of 2.7, which was lower than the overall median (3) and mean (4.6) number of prior violent arrests seen among the male detainees.

### **Discharges/Exits from the Cook County Jail**

During 2011, a total of 9,464 females were discharged from the custody of the Cook County Sheriff. Detainees are discharged from the jail for one of four general reasons: 1) they post the necessary bail ordered by a judge to obtain their release prior to trial (accounting for 37 percent of the 2011 female discharges), 2) they stay in the jail until their criminal case results in their conviction and sentencing to prison, probation or supervision (accounting for 46 percent of all female discharges), 3) they stay in the jail until the charges in their criminal case are dropped or they are found not guilty (16 percent of discharges), or 4) they are sentenced to the jail as a result of their conviction, and are released once the jail sentence has been served (13 percent of female discharges). When compared to males discharged from the custody of the Sheriff, females were slightly more likely to be discharged because they posted bond (37 percent of females were discharged as a result of posting bond compared to 32 percent of males), and less likely to stay in jail until they were convicted and sentenced to prison/probation/supervision (34 percent versus 37 percent, respectively). Most of these differences can be explained by differences in the nature of the current charges against the female and male detainees.

### **Time Served Among Jail Exits**

The length of time inmates spend in the Cook County Jail varies widely, and is influenced primarily by the mechanism by which they are released from the jail, such as posting bail or being detained until their criminal case reaches its conclusion. Among all females discharged in 2011, the average length of time that elapsed before they were discharged from the custody of the Sheriff was 35 days, with 50 percent spending 9 days or less in custody (the median), and 50 percent spending 10 or more days in custody.

However, the length of time under custody varied depending on how the detainees were discharged. For example, among those females discharged because they posted the necessary bond, which accounted for 37 percent of the discharged females in 2011, the median length of time in custody was 1 day (50 percent of those discharged as a result of posting bond stayed in custody 1 day or less), although the average time in custody for those who posted bond was almost 11 days. By comparison, those females who are discharged because they were convicted and sentenced to probation/supervision, the median length of time under the custody of the Sheriff was 30 days and the average was 58 days.

## **Female Reentry to the Community**

When analyses were performed to determine what areas of Cook County the women admitted to the jail were living at before their admission to the jail, and where they likely returned following their release, it was revealed that the highest concentration was on Chicago's west- and southwest-sides. A consistent pattern was also seen when the addresses of women released from prison were mapped and compared to where jail releasees lived.

Although the focus on reentry back to society following incarceration has primarily focused on those exiting the state prison system, it is important to recognize the unique needs and circumstances of those released from the Cook County Jail back to communities, particularly given the volume of these individuals discharged from the Sheriff's custody. For example, during 2011, there were roughly 8,500 women discharged from the custody of the Sheriff and released back into the community (i.e., those discharged but *not* sentenced to prison), compared to a total of just over 1,100 women released from Illinois Department of Corrections' facilities during state fiscal year 2011. Thus, there are nearly 8-times more women released from jail back to communities throughout Cook County than from prison. However, as noted above, for many of these women, their time in jail was relatively brief compared to the average of 1.1 years served in prison by those women released from the state's prison system back to Cook County after serving their court-imposed prison sentence.

When detailed analyses were performed to identify the communities in Cook County where these females from both jail and prison were released back to, a number of patterns emerged. First, while not necessarily surprising for criminal justice practitioners in Cook County, it is important to realize that specific community areas on Chicago's west and southwest sides have considerably higher rates of both admissions to the jail, but also subsequent rates of reentry. Specifically, there were 13 contiguous zip codes, incorporating parts of the Armour Square, Auburn-Gresham, Austin, Brighton Park, Cicero, Englewood, North Lawndale, Roseland, West Garfield Park and Woodlawn community areas, that accounted for nearly one-third (32 percent) of all the women released from the Cook County Jail in 2011, and these same zip codes accounted for 41 percent of all the women released from Illinois' prisons back to Cook County. The geographic concentration of these exits from the jail and prison system is illustrated in Maps 1 and 2 on the following pages, and also by the fact that these zip codes represented just 7 percent of the land area of Cook County.

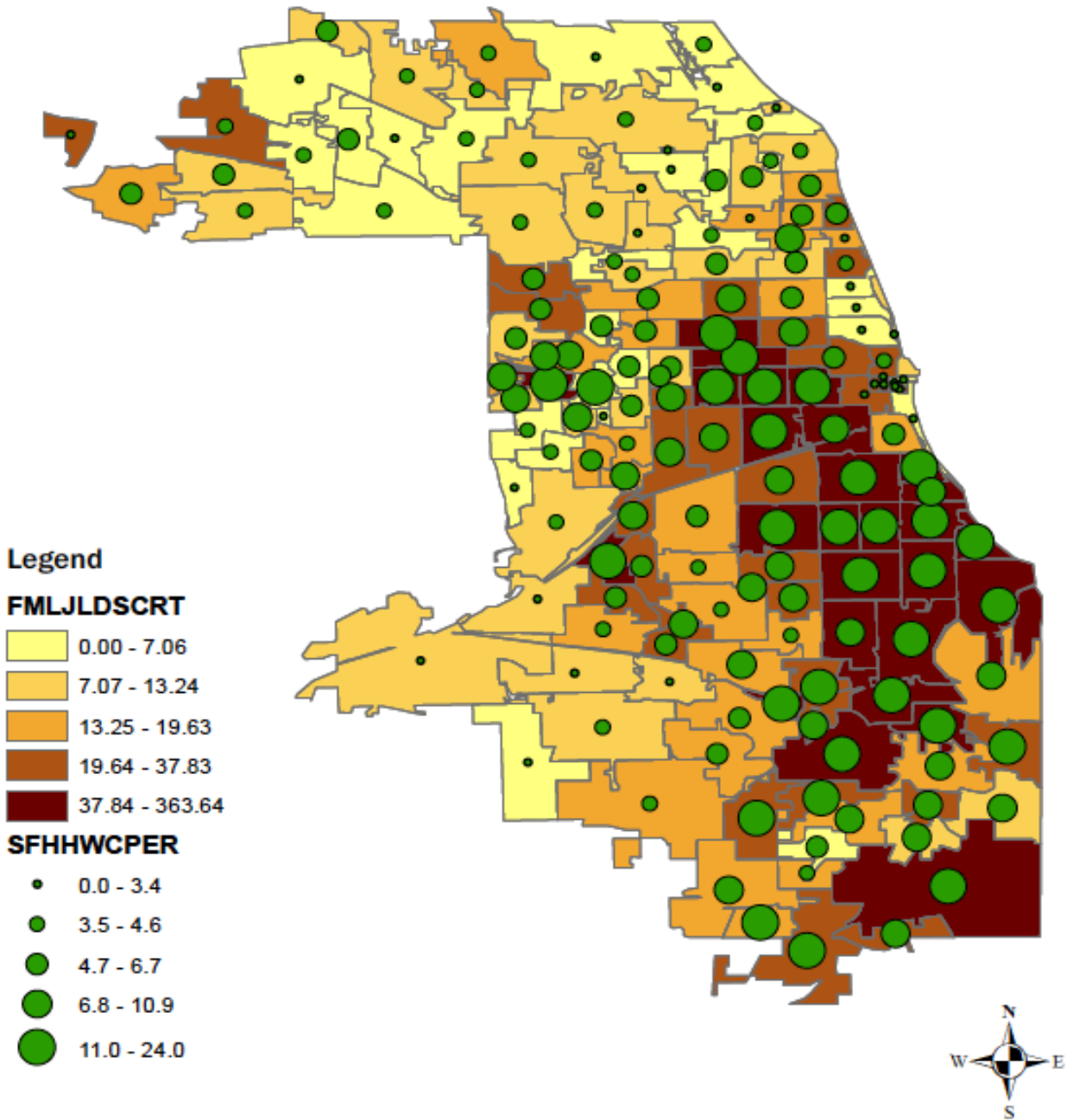
The other pattern evident from the analyses, and consistent with a wide array of existing criminology research, was the strong correlation between the rate of females released from the Cook County Jail and different measures of concentrated disadvantage, including the percent of single female-headed households with children and the percent of owner-occupied housing. Areas with high rates of women returning from incarceration, be it jail or prison, were also areas where higher proportions of single female-headed households with children (Map 1), and lower rates of owner-occupied housing.

Similarly, as seen in Map 2, there was a strong correlation between the rate of women discharged from the jail and the rate of women discharged from prison. Zip-codes and community areas with high rates of women returning from the jail also had high rates of women discharged from prison returning to those neighborhoods and communities. This pattern illustrates the critical need to ensure that efforts to enhance the services available to women being released back to communities from jail are coordinated with state efforts to provide reentry services and programs for females who are simultaneously being released from prison back to those same communities.



Map 1

**Rate of Female Jail Discharges per 10K Female Adult Residents  
(2011) and Percent of Single-Female-Headed Households  
with Children (2010)**



Map 2

### Rate of Female Jail and Prison Discharges per 10K Female Adult Residents (2011)

