

babies

in

prison

Though it's illegal to shackle a woman in prison while she's giving birth, this horrific practice continues in the U.S. Afterward, some mothers get to keep their babies with them until the infants are 18 months old. Others immediately lose their children to foster care, or lose parental custody altogether. Jan Goodwin reports

The national female prison population has increased a staggering 500 percent since the early 1980s, due to mandatory sentencing. Three-quarters of the 154,686 women incarcerated are mothers, the majority are single parents, and 10 percent are pregnant.

In Europe, and even Third World countries, pregnant women's sentences are deferred or alternatives to incarceration are used. This is because research shows that infants and children of inmates can be damaged permanently when separated from their mothers. Plus, studies show that inmates who keep ties with their children have a greater chance of rehabilitation and a lower risk of recidivism.

Shockingly, women are often shackled during delivery, though this is against international law. "Women prisoners in labor are chained like animals," says Reverend Annie Bovian, executive director of a nonprofit crisis-intervention program >

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