

TITLE:

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DATE PUBLISHED:

October 17, 2012

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RESEARCH BRIEF

Economic costs of incarceration versus education in the juvenile population in Tennessee.

Prepared by Valerie L. Radu, PhD, LCSW (Founding member of the Grove Street Settlement House, Inc.)

The last decade in the Scenic City of Chattanooga, has created a renaissance in terms of improving the physical environment and enhancing the arts and cultural aspects of the city. However, this renaissance has been selectively implemented with many neighborhoods and communities excluded, overlooked, or ignored. A 2008 report by the *Brookings* Institute found that 42.7% of the city's population met the definition of 'low income' (making 200 percent or less of the poverty level). A 2010 report by the *Brookings Institute* listed Chattanooga in the top ten metro areas for increases in city poverty in the United States. The city poverty rate in Chattanooga increased eight percentage points in 2010 – coming in second behind Allentown, PA which increased ten percentage points. Approximately 68% of poor families are female-headed with 41% of children living below the poverty line.

American Corrections Cooperation analysis of data found that the average cost for 12 months of youth incarceration was \$88,000 as compared to \$10,259 for the average annual cost of public school or the \$2,713 cost of a year at a two-year college. Sources: American Correctional Association (for costs of youth incarceration); College Board (for costs at public universities and public two-year colleges), U.S. Census Bureau (for costs of public education), Cohen and Piquero (2008) (for costs of YouthBuild), and Public Private Ventures (for costs of Big Brothers Big Sisters program).

State of Tennessee Trends.

Tennessee has a population of more than 750,000 high school dropouts. At a cost of nearly \$3,000 per individual annually, dropouts cost the state more than \$2 billion a year (D'Andrea, 2010). Furthermore, this group shares similar characteristics of: being either unemployed, in need of Medicaid assistance, or incarcerated. As the general level of education

increases (from associate's degree to bachelor's degree, etc), the use of public assistance programs decreases. This \$3,000 annual cost can be broken down into the following categories:

- each high school dropout costs Tennessee approximately \$750 per year.
- each dropout costs the state more than \$950 a year in incarceration costs, which includes capital outlays and staffing.
- each dropout costs the state nearly \$1,100 in Medicaid services each year.

The impact of incarceration on the educational experience of juveniles in Tennessee is especially significant:

- Three years after being released, 74-75% of juveniles in Tennessee were rearrested for a new charge (misdemeanor or felony).
- A recent analysis of young people included in the National Longitudinal Youth Survey found that incarceration at age 16 or earlier led to a 26 percent lower chance of graduating high school by age 19.

National General Data Trends. The United States has about 5% of the world's population but incarcerates 25% of the population meaning the US has the highest percentage of people in prison in the world. A 2011 report by the NAACP found that:

- While one-third of the nation's population is African American or Latino, these ethnic and racial groups account for 58 percent of the nation's prisoners
- With 1 in 10 white men without a high school diploma likely to end up in prison, white families and communities are now being caught up in America's growing reliance on prisons to solve social problems

National Disparity Data Trends.

A 2011 report and summary of existing research published in the *Howard Law Journal* found that:

- One in eleven African-Americans and one in twenty-seven Latinos are under some form of correctional control, compared to one in forty-five whites
- African-American, Latino, and Native-American youth, in particular, are more likely to be suspended and expelled from school and to face corporal punishment.

- African-American suspension rates are three times that of white students, and African-American students are 3.5 times as likely to be expelled as white students (p. 365)
- One in every twenty-eight children (2.7 million children total) has a parent currently behind bars, and two-thirds of these children's parents are incarcerated for non-violent offenses.
- Approximately ten million children have a parent who previously has been incarcerated.
- In 2008, 11% of African-American children and 3.5% of Latino children had a parent who was incarcerated in comparison to 1.75% of white children who had an incarcerated parent (p. 389).

National Education Outcomes Data.

- 75 percent of America's state prison inmates, almost 59 percent of federal inmates, and 69 percent of jail inmates did not complete high school (NAACP, 2011).
- According to Postsecondary Education Opportunity, a research institute specializing in educational access and equity issues, after healthcare, prisons saw the second-biggest increase in the share of state and local government spending between 1980 and 2006, while spending for higher education declined.
- The quality of education that youth receive while incarcerated is typically abysmal and approximately 66% of youth who leave juvenile justice facilities end up dropping out of school (Majd, 2011, p. 379)

Recommendations.

1. Collaboration with public school systems to identify at-risk students early (grades 5-8).
2. Programming that is sustainable and effective must include culturally relevant models with an emphasis on communal rather than individualistic efforts.
3. Interdisciplinary approach with multiple points of entry situated in the community to reduce barriers which prevent students/families/communities from accessing services.

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