

Women and The Drug War

Facts and Figures at a Glance

- ✍ From 1986 to 1996, the number of women sentenced to state prison for drug crimes increased ten fold (from around 2,370 to 23,700) and, in part, explains the huge increase in the imprisonment of women. *Amnesty International, "Not Part of My Sentence: Violations of the Human Rights of Women in Custody" (Washington, DC: Amnesty International, March 1999).*
- ✍ From 1985 to 1996, female drug arrests increased by 95%, while male drug arrests increased by 55%. *Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Reports 1985 (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1986) and Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1997 Uniform Crime Report (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1998).*
- ✍ In 1994, a study found that women were over-represented among those convicted of low-level drug-related crimes and, despite having no prior criminal histories, received sentences similar to those convicted as "high level drug offenders" under the federal mandatory minimum sentencing laws. *Department of Justice, "An Analysis of Non-violent Drug Offenders with Minimal Criminal Histories," February 1994.*
- ✍ In 1995, a study found that one in three women incarcerated in a state prison and one in four women in a county jail served time for violating a drug law. The comparable figure for men was one in five for both prisons and jails. *Amnesty International, "Not Part of My Sentence: Violations of the Human Rights of Women in Custody" (Washington, DC: Amnesty International, March 1999).*
- ✍ Between 1990 and 1996, the number of women convicted of drug felonies increased by 37% (from 43,000 in 1990 to 59,536 in 1996). The number of convictions for simple possession increased 41% over that period, from 18,438 in 1990 to 26,022 in 1996. *Bureau of Justice Statistics, Women Offenders (Washington, DC: US Department of Justice, December 1999).*
- ✍ In 1999, 72% of women in federal prisons and 33.7% of women in state prisons served time for drug-related crimes. *Bureau of Justice Statistics, Women Offenders (Washington, DC: US Department of Justice, December 1999) and Bureau of Justice Statistics, Prisoners in 2000 (Washington, DC: US Dept. of Justice, August 2001).*
- ✍ Regardless of similar or equal levels of illicit drug use during pregnancy, African American women are 10 times more likely than white women to be reported to child welfare agencies for prenatal drug use. *Neuspiel, D.R., "Racism and Perinatal Addiction," Ethnicity and Disease, 6: 47-55 (1996); Chasnoff, I.J., Landress, H.J., & Barrett, M.E., "The Prevalence of Illicit-Drug or Alcohol Use during Pregnancy and Discrepancies in Mandatory Reporting in Pinellas County, Florida," New England Journal of Medicine, 322: 1202-1206 (1990).*