

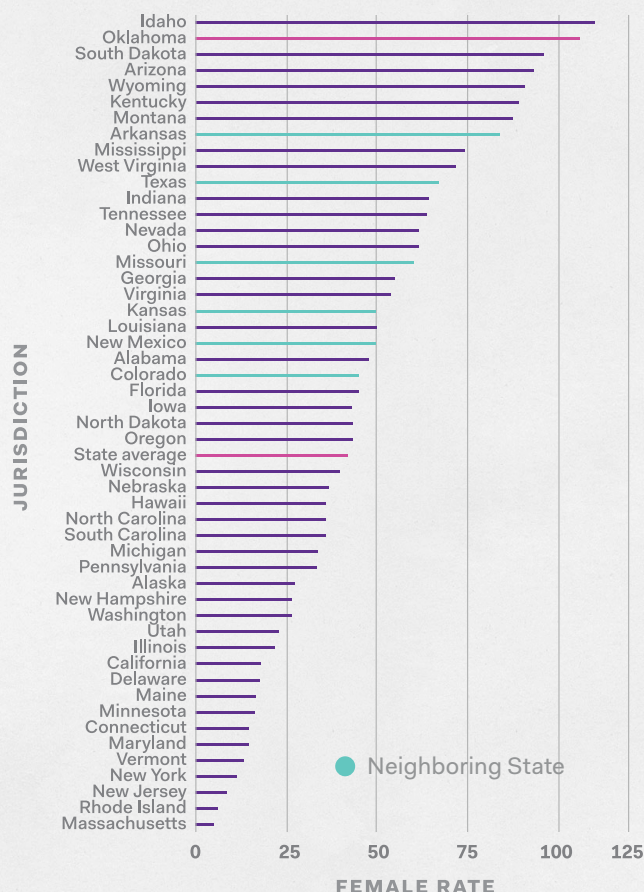
Oklahoma Fails to Support Domestic Violence Survivors Which Drives its High Women's Imprisonment Rate

Oklahoma sends women to prison at especially higher rates than other states instead of addressing the root causes of crime. Research shows that incarcerated people and crime survivors are not mutually exclusive groups. Most people in prison, especially women, are survivors of physical and sexual violence and other forms of abuse. Efforts to cope with trauma or defend themselves from abuse can serve as a pathway to incarceration for women in Oklahoma.

Oklahoma's imprisonment rate for women is a national outlier.

Oklahoma's female imprisonment rate is more than twice as high as the average state.

Female imprisonment rate per 100,000 residents, 2020



For nearly 30 years Oklahoma incarcerated more women per capita than anywhere else. Today, Oklahoma has the second-highest rate of women's imprisonment, locking up more than twice as many women in prison per capita than the average state, and imprisoning women at a far higher rate than any of its neighbors.

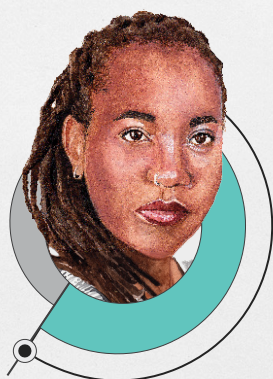
Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Prisoner Series

Most women in prison are survivors of some form of abuse.

A study of women in Oklahoma prisons found that as children, 57% experienced sexual abuse, 47% physical assault, 70% experienced either, and 35% experienced both. As adults, about 46% experienced at least one rape, and 66% experienced physical abuse by a partner within a year before prison.

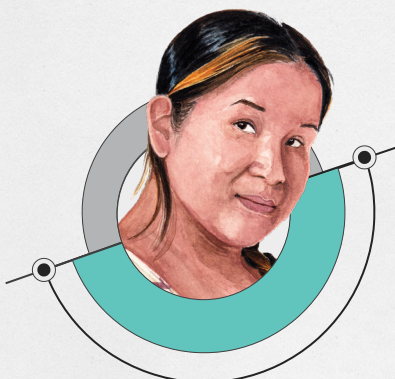
Most women in prison are survivors of physical and sexual violence and other forms of abuse and neglect.

Experiences of women in Oklahoma prisons



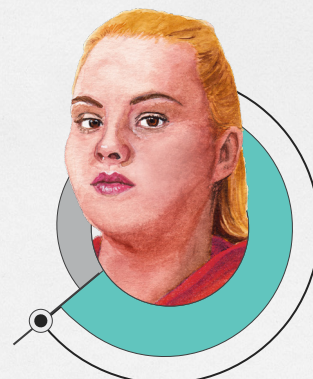
57%

Sexually abused as a child



47%

Physically assaulted as a child



66%

Experienced intimate partner violence
within a year of incarceration

Source: Sharp, Jones, and McLeod, 2014

Domestic violence is a rampant issue and can have deadly outcomes.

Survivors are often tied to their abusers financially, emotionally, and legally. They might have children together, be married, live together, share bank accounts, and rely on their partner for basic needs. They are often isolated from friends and family and feel as if they have nowhere to turn. They might be told that the abuse won't happen again or fear that the abuse will only escalate if they attempt to leave. Indeed, the most dangerous time in an abusive relationship is when an abused person attempts to cut ties.

For three years in a row, research from the Violence Policy Center has ranked Oklahoma in the top 10 for the number of women killed by men in the United States. The latest report ranked Oklahoma second in the country, with a homicide rate of 3.28 per 100,000, which is more than double the

national average. In 2021, women in Oklahoma made up nearly 70% of victims of intimate partner homicide. Women of color were overrepresented. Almost one in four women killed by an intimate partner were Black and more than one in 10 were Indigenous.

The most common offenses for women in Oklahoma prisons are closely linked to domestic violence.

Currently, one in every six women in Oklahoma prisons is serving a child abuse or neglect sentence, making it the most common charge for women in prison in the state. Many of the women prosecuted for these offenses are survivors of domestic violence, including some prosecuted for failing to protect their children from abuse they themselves concurrently suffered.

Additionally, murder and manslaughter charges (which account for three of the 10 most common offenses for women in prison) can be connected to incidents where a woman defends herself against an abusive partner or a child fatality that the woman was not directly responsible for.

As one currently incarcerated woman noted, “When women under 25 years old get sentenced to more years than they’ve been alive. When you sit at a table with six women under 40, five out of the six have 25 years or more at 85%, six of six have been physically or sexually abused and six of six had drug or alcohol addictions upon incarceration. Why didn’t the state take the time to help any of us but lock us away when there still is no hope or reform?”

It is time for Oklahoma lawmakers to stop unfairly punishing survivors by investing in supportive services and providing pathways out of prison.