WHAT PROGRAMS ARE AVAILABLE TO HELP PARENTS IN PRISON AND THEIR CHILDREN PAGE 12

INCARCERATED PARENTS

How to avoid EXTREMISM on social media

TRACKING MIGRATION amid war and disease

A new approach to fighting SYNTHETIC OPIOIDS
Climate Migrants

Legal frameworks for displacement focus on refugees, people fleeing war, violence, persecution, and other forms of conflict. They do not focus on the growing population of people affected by climate shocks and stresses, such as wildfires and other disasters. The United States should consider giving people who are displaced by a changing climate similar protections to those afforded to refugees under international frameworks.

MORE AT www.rand.org/t/CTA1968-1

CBITS for American Indian Youth

CBITS—Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools—was designed for use with groups of students who’ve experienced significant traumatic experiences and are suffering from related emotional or behavioral problems. A team of experts adapted the CBITS program for American Indian youth, weaving in culturally appropriate and meaningful concepts about resilience and healing while maintaining CBITS’ core cognitive–behavioral skill-building techniques.

MORE AT www.rand.org/t/TLA1134-1
Incarceration and Families
Examining the role that prison programs can play in the lives of parents and children

Online Extremism
A scorecard to help social media users avoid extremist content

Research Briefly
A concerning school year and more

The Q&A
Combating the illegal flow of synthetic opioids

Commentary
A new and more dangerous drug market

Stand and Be Counted
Measuring migration in almost real time—with help from Facebook

Giving
Helping the “hidden heroes” caring for U.S. veterans

Tausha Monroe plays with her son, whom she nicknamed Doodle Bug. She served almost a year in an Oregon prison and was unable to visit with her son for most of that time. She credits an in-prison Head Start program with helping her prepare to be a full-time mother when she got out.
Mental Health and Political Polarization in Schools

This was supposed to be a year of recovery for American schools after two years under the shadow of COVID-19. Instead, it has been a year of staff shortages, enrollment declines, disruptions from students—and, at heated school board meetings, disruptions from parents, too.

That helps explain the results of a RAND survey of more than 350 superintendents and other school leaders conducted early in the 2021–22 school year. Ninety percent of them said they have moderate or major concerns about the mental well-being of their students. Almost as many said they were worried about the mental health of teachers and principals.

Concerns about student mental health were especially acute in districts with higher numbers of students of color. Leaders in high-poverty districts and urban districts, meanwhile, expressed concern about low attendance rates. In more-rural districts, leaders said they were worried about keeping students engaged when they had to switch to remote learning.

Nearly three-quarters of the survey respondents said political polarization about COVID safety measures or vaccines was interfering with their ability to educate students. That was especially true in majority-White districts and non-urban districts. At the same time, around two-thirds of the respondents cited parent or community beliefs in COVID misinformation as a problem; 43 percent cited political polarization around so-called “critical race theory.”

The survey provides some guidance as districts look toward the 2022–23 school year, their fourth in the COVID era. Previous RAND surveys have found that most districts are already taking steps to provide more mental-health support for their students. Districts should also draw up contingency plans that reflect continuing staff shortages and further enrollment declines. And, as long as COVID safety measures are in place, districts need to develop communication plans that better anticipate divided opinions among parents and staff.

MORE AT
www.rand.org/t/RRA956-8
Education and Training After High School

Workers who continue to learn and build their skills after high school can add thousands of dollars to their annual earnings. But when it comes to choosing the right program, a RAND paper cautioned, time really is money.

In a review of the research, senior policy researcher Lindsay Daugherty found that several types of postsecondary credentials can provide a pathway to the middle class. College degrees, which generally require the greatest time commitment, continue to have the highest payoff. An associate degree, for example, boosts average earnings for women by $7,160 a year, and for men by $4,640 a year. But apprenticeships, certificates, and workforce training certifications can also improve earnings by several thousand dollars a year.

Women tend to see larger salary gains from such post-secondary credentials than men. White people tend to see larger gains than people from other racial and ethnic backgrounds. And degrees, certificates, and other credentials were most valuable, from a pay-raise standpoint, when they provided training in a particular vocation, especially health care. Likewise, a four-year college degree was most valuable when it led to a diploma in a field such as science, technology, math, engineering, business, or health care.

But college degrees and other longer-term programs come with higher tuition rates and lost wages, and many have high dropout rates. And, Daugherty points out, lifetime earnings are not the only way to measure the value of shorter, nondegree programs. Those programs can also lead to better working conditions and a more-fulfilling job.

Given the trade-offs, it’s crucial that workers better understand the value of different credits and credentials, Daugherty wrote. That will help workers make smarter investments with their time and money, for them and their paychecks.

MORE AT
www.rand.org/t/PEA1141-9

Funding for this research was made possible by the Lowy family, whose generous gift established the RAND Lowy Family Middle-Class Pathways Center in 2021.

Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome

A baby is born with opioid withdrawal every 15 minutes in the United States. But doctors have never had a standard clinical definition of what symptoms to watch for to help them diagnose and treat it.

That could lead to inconsistent care and prevent public health agencies from understanding the true nature of the problem. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) asked RAND to help develop a clinical definition of “neonatal abstinence syndrome” to guide health care providers caring for babies born with withdrawal.

Researchers convened 20 experts in fields such as neonatology, nursing, and clinical pharmacology. They asked the experts to rate each symptom according to how important they are for making a diagnosis. Then they shared the results with the group, discussed them, and asked the experts to re-rate the symptoms if their thinking had changed from the discussions. That approach, known as the modified-Delphi method, was developed at RAND to help experts reach consensus. The researchers used an online tool called ExpertLens that was also developed at RAND.

In the case of neonatal abstinence syndrome, the experts agreed on five common symptoms: excessive crying, fragmented sleep, tremors, increased muscle tone, and gastrointestinal dysfunction. Any two of those, with a known history of prenatal exposure to opioids, would be sufficient to make a diagnosis, they decided.

HHS adopted the definition earlier this year, describing it as a “major step towards improving standards of care for infants prenatally exposed to opioids.” HHS also adopted a set of bioethical principles that RAND and the clinical experts recommended to make clear that the new definition should not be used to imply or prove harm or to assess a baby’s risk of abuse or neglect. As the experts noted, a baby can develop neonatal abstinence syndrome after exposure to prescribed opioids, such as methadone, as well as non-prescribed opioids.

MORE AT
www.rand.org/t/RRA577-1

MAY–JUNE 2022 | RAND.ORG
Combating the Illegal Flow of Synthetic Opioids into the United States

David Luckey is a senior international and defense researcher and Jayme Fuglesten is director of Congressional Relations at RAND.
America’s overdose crisis, driven by powerful synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, has become one of the “most pressing national security, law enforcement, and public health challenges” facing the nation. That’s the consensus of a top-level commission, guided by RAND, that brought together Republicans and Democrats, members of Congress and White House advisers, to meet that challenge.

Around 100,000 Americans died of drug overdoses between April 2020 and April 2021. Nearly two-thirds of those deaths involved synthetic opioids. A dose the size of a few grains of salt is enough to kill. As little as 3 metric tons of synthetic opioids, smuggled across the U.S.–Mexico border in pills or packets, or shipped by mail from China, could satisfy American demand that in 2016 added up to 47 metric tons of heroin.

The Commission on Combating Synthetic Opioid Trafficking issued its final report earlier this year. It called for a whole-of-nation effort to shut off the flow of illicit opioids, expand access to treatment, and drive down the death toll with overdose-reversing drugs like naloxone and other harm-reduction efforts. It involved four sitting members of Congress; officials from seven executive-branch departments; four nongovernmental experts; and the support of more than 60 RAND researchers, analysts, and associates.

David Luckey, a senior international and defense researcher at RAND, helped lead the commission’s research and draft its report. He came to RAND after nearly four decades of service in the federal government, most recently as director of homeland security for the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs. Jayme Fuglesten, RAND’s director of Congressional Relations and a former Senate aide, served as a guide to help the project team navigate the different—and sometimes competing—political and policy agendas of the commission members.

Q: What was RAND’s role in the commission’s work?

DL: The short answer is that RAND, through the Homeland Security Operational Analysis Center, conducted the commission’s research and analysis and drafted its report. But I would suggest that RAND’s role, really, was to bring together the breadth and depth of our abilities to tackle this challenge that is so large and so daunting and so wicked. This isn’t just about drug policy or drug law. This involves national security, homeland security, intelligence, diplomacy, supply chain issues, cryptocurrency. We were able to draw on RAND’s expertise across all those areas.

What do people not understand, or misunderstand, about this challenge?

DL: This is a crisis that affects everyone in one way or another, and I’m speaking literally. You know someone who died from this, or you know someone who knows someone who died from this. Two degrees of separation is all you get. We had 15 commissioners. One had a son die of a fentanyl overdose, and another had a nephew who did. This is an indiscriminate poison. The folks who are making this stuff are not chemists, and more people are dying from this, and more people will die.

JF: That really added urgency to the commission’s work. We’ve seen the consequences of synthetic opioids in the illegal...
drug supply; we've seen the consequences in our communities. During the course of the project, we hit this really grave milestone: 100,000 overdoses deaths in one 12-month period, approximately 65,000 of them from synthetic opioids. Everyone understood the urgency of our work.

DL: Let's say around 170 Americans die from a synthetic opioid–related overdose daily. Every day this report was delayed, every day this topic was not addressed as well as it could be, 170 more Americans were going to die. And Americans are going to keep dying every day that this challenge is not addressed as completely as it should be.

What would you say is the main message of the commission's report?

DL: It's a call to action about what it's going to take to save American lives. This report is only the beginning of addressing the challenge and creating a consensus on the strategic approach to combating illegal synthetic opioids.

JF: When you talk about synthetic opioids, the challenge is harder and the consequences are much more lethal. On a positive note, the message from the report is that there is a bipartisan consensus on the seriousness of this problem, and there is a bipartisan road map to advance some real, credible solutions to dealing with it.

Are you optimistic that this is something toward which we can mount an effective response?

DL: We must. I look at this as a challenge like 9/11. On 9/11, roughly 3,000 Americans were killed, and in response to that, the United States came together and put forth a bipartisan, whole-of-government, whole-of-nation effort. Can you imagine if the 65,000 people who died from synthetic opioids in the past year were all killed on one day? The difference is that it happens day after day, and Americans get anesthetized to it. But even if this report has only a modest effect—let's just say we can reduce the number of those deaths by 10 percent, an extremely modest amount—that's more every year than died on 9/11.

JF: It was encouraging to see the level of bipartisanship and commitment to this single issue from across the aisle, across the political spectrum. Everyone had a different perspective, but what they ultimately wanted was a consensus plan around saving lives, and that's what they got. That's a positive message that the American people don't hear as often about Congress and the federal government writ large.

What made you personally want to be involved in this project?

JF: This is the kind of work we all come to RAND to do. We had 15 commission members, including from Congress, outside experts who are the big names in this area, executive-branch directors working together on this—these are the people who are going to be most responsible for the solutions that came from this report. This is such a serious problem, but we knew we could make a difference.

DL: I spent 33 years in the federal government, and the rest of my career supporting the federal government; this was an opportunity to be part of something that could have an immense impact on the welfare of the nation's most precious asset, our people. That's why I wanted to be part of it. There are few times in this life when I can look back and say, what an impact we had. This is definitely one of those occasions.
More than 100,000 Americans died from a drug overdose in 2021—double the number that died in 2015. This is more than the number that died in the United States from firearms and car crashes combined. Drug overdose is now the leading cause of death for people aged 18 to 45.

This tragedy has continued to play out for decades, but has worsened sharply since 2014 when illegally manufactured, highly potent fentanyl was introduced to American drug markets. Many of the same traits that make fentanyl an attractive drug for illegal suppliers and Mexican traffickers can make it a death sentence to users: As a synthetic opioid, fentanyl is not made from poppy, but chemicals sourced from large industrial chemical sectors in China and India. It is cheap and easy to produce. By weight, fentanyl is up to 50 times more potent than heroin, meaning very little is needed to meet America’s demand for opioids. Perhaps only a few pickup truck loads of pure fentanyl are needed to supply our country for an entire year. Dealers and traffickers are substituting fentanyl for the more-expensive (and laborious to
produce) heroin; some are even pressing a tiny amount of fentanyl into pills made to look like actual prescription medications, potentially misleading those that take drugs and leading to deadly results.

America’s illegal drug markets are more dangerous than ever, and many traditional policy tools are failing to stem rising overdoses. In short, we won’t simply be able to arrest, interdict at the border, seize inside the United States, or treat our way out of this crisis. New thinking and a new strategic approach were needed, prompting the formation of a joint legislative-executive branch Commission on Combating Synthetic Opioid Trafficking, in 2020. The bipartisan commission was guided by a goal to save American lives. To do so, it found, the United States must also focus on ways to reduce the demand for opioids and promote critical ways to reduce the harms, including overdose, for those who use illegally sourced drugs that might contain fentanyl.

Using drugs purchased off the street is always risky, but doing so has become much deadlier since fentanyl arrived. Fentanyl is so potent that tiny errors in dosing, perhaps as little as a couple extra milligrams, could result in fatal overdose for unsuspecting buyers.

What the commission’s work revealed is that the problem of rapidly rising drug overdose deaths will not be resolved by any single set of policies, nor can it be reversed overnight. The complex phenomenon of addiction has many drivers; however, the introduction and continued diffusion of fentanyl into illegal drug markets is making a bad problem much, much worse. The commission determined these tough challenges require a serious, bipartisan, and whole-of-nation effort to safeguard the lives of those who use drugs sourced in unregulated markets, while also seeking ways to reduce the use of drugs through entry into recovery.

Reducing access to the many chemical ingredients needed to make fentanyl might help disrupt criminals who use the internet and commercial cargo system to transact. The commission’s report includes recommendations that the United States must work with the two major suppliers of the chemicals needed to make fentanyl—China and India—to stem the flow of precursor chemicals needed for its production. But even if a disruption in the flow of necessary chemicals were successful, it could be short-lived if traffickers in Mexico find new sources of chemicals.

To address the fentanyl poisoning epidemic with any meaningful results and save lives in the short term, Americans should turn much of our attention to within our borders: expanding access and reducing barriers to medication therapies, such as methadone and buprenorphine, which are the gold standard for treating opioid addiction; and promoting and exploring overdose prevention efforts, like increasing the availability of naloxone or other innovative harm-reduction tools that can save lives.

Short of a major effort to expand drug treatment therapies and overdose prevention tools, other innovative supply reduction efforts could be explored, such as online sting operations targeting those interested in buying fentanyl or the chemicals needed to make it or expanding know-your-customer laws for the precursor chemicals used to make fentanyl. Possible supply disruptions, even if temporary, might save lives. That said, synthetic opioids are increasingly likely to reach illegal drug markets. Failure to recognize and respond to how rapidly drug markets have changed with the arrival of illegally manufactured synthetic opioids, however, will continue to put many at risk of exposure to fentanyl, endangering the lives of hundreds of thousands more Americans for years to come.

A version of this commentary appeared on The RAND Blog in March 2022. Commentary gives RAND researchers a platform to convey insights based on their professional expertise and often on their peer-reviewed research and analysis.
YOU WOULD NOT WANT TO SEE WHAT ALEXANDRA EVANS HAS SEEN.

She’s a policy researcher at RAND. Her recent work has focused on the growing threat of online extremism—work that has required long days immersed in violence, racism, misogyny, and hate. It led her and fellow extremism researcher Heather Williams to oversee the creation of a scorecard to help social media users—or parents, or advertisers, or the social media companies themselves—avoid the kind of content they’ve seen.

That’s not as easy as it might sound. Extremist groups have been trolling the internet for decades, and they have learned to temper their words and disguise their intentions. Nazis and hard-right militia members don’t always shout their fury at the digital masses. Sometimes, they whisper.

“There’s this idea that there’s a dark part of the internet, and if you just stay away from websites with a Nazi flag at the top, you can avoid this material,” Evans said. “What we found is that this dark internet, this racist internet, doesn’t exist. You can find this material on platforms that any average internet user might visit.”
In her previous life, before she pulled herself out, Acacia Dietz was a lead propagandist for the National Socialist Movement, marketing one of the largest neo-Nazi groups in America. She didn’t do it with swastikas and White power salutes. She did it with articles about illegal immigration or social unrest, dropping breadcrumbs here and there to lead people deeper into the rabbit hole.

“Say we had a podcast about Hitler,” she says now. “We would market it as a show about World War II history. It literally has almost nothing to do with that, but nobody knows until they go and listen to it. And if you can get people to listen, one of two things will happen. Either they’ll just go in the opposite direction—or it will pique their interest.”

The internet has been a haven for extremists since long before most people even knew it existed. The Anti-Defamation League issued a bulletin on “Computerized Networks of Hate” in 1985—the year Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg turned one. Today, extremists share their likes and tweet their thoughts like everyone else. But they have also spun off into an ever-widening array of social media sites with greater appetites for hateful words and violent images.

Evans, Williams, and other RAND researchers had planned to study online manifestos posted by far-right extremists in the days and hours before acts of violence. But as they started their search, they realized there was no good way to identify sites that provide safe harbor for such content. They changed direction and started working on a ratings system for websites and social media platforms based on how receptive they are to extremist content.

The researchers looked at traffic volume, ownership information, and the presence or lack of advertising. They dug into content policies and awarded extra points to sites that actually enforce them. They added more points if a site had never been shut down by its service providers. They deducted points for swastikas or other extremist symbols.

In the end, the sites with the most points—think Facebook or Twitter—landed in a category the researchers called “mainstream.” That didn’t mean they were free of extremist content; far from it. But that content wasn’t their main reason for being. At the other extreme were “niche” sites like Stormfront or 8chan, for which it was.

But then there were the sites in the middle. The researchers called them “fringe.” They hosted a mix of extremist and non-extremist content, often under the banner of protecting free speech and standing up to what they describe as censorship on the mainstream platforms. Some, like Gab, are designed to look almost exactly like a mainstream site, down to the fonts they use.

“People sometimes fall into extremist material on these sites; they don’t understand what it is because it’s coded or hides its violent intent behind humor or memes,” said Williams, a senior policy researcher at RAND. “We wanted to give individuals and communities a better tool to help them appreciate when they could be interacting with extremist content.”

The researchers used their scoring system to identify dozens of sites that could host all manner of extremists: anti-government militia members, neo-Nazis, White supremacists. They also included incels—viciously misogynistic “involuntary celibates” who blame women for their inability to find a partner, and who sometimes get
overlooked as ideological extremists. On some sites, the researchers found content that was so disturbing, they decided it was probably criminal.

Companies that host social media sites could use RAND’s scorecard as a checklist to strengthen their defenses against extremist content, if they wanted to. Advertisers and other service providers could also use it to decide which sites they want to do business with and which they want to avoid.

The scorecard also gives everyday users a way to anticipate what kind of content they might find on an unfamiliar website—especially on a “fringe” website, where that might not be obvious. In that, it supports one of the key pillars of the nation’s strategy to combat domestic terrorism: making people more careful and skeptical of the content they find online.

“This isn’t an impossible problem,” Evans said. “We know there are things sites can do to make it more difficult for these groups to find each other or to organize or to attract large audiences. But consumers also need to become more informed about what they are consuming online. Maybe this is a way for individuals to think about what they expect and what they can petition companies to do.”

Acacia Dietz knows how slippery the slope can be. She was following news of social justice protests several years ago when she stumbled on a site with a seemingly simple premise: Nobody should feel guilty about their heritage. It was her door into the American neo-Nazi movement.

She got out in 2019, having watched in horror as a gunman who espoused the same White supremacist beliefs stormed mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, and murdered 51 people. She works now as the managing director of Beyond Barriers, a group that works to prevent people from joining extremist movements and helps them deradicalize when they do. As part of that work, she still monitors social media sites to see what extremists are talking about—and with whom. She sees teenagers as young as 15 in some of those chat rooms.

“It looks pretty innocent. It’s not until you actually get in there and start talking to people that you realize, wait a minute, this is not what it looks like,” she said. “It’s very easy for individuals who are just curious, just looking, to get sucked in. That’s a lot more common than what most people would want to admit.”

“It’s very easy for individuals who are just curious, just looking, to get sucked in. That’s a lot more common than what most people would want to admit.”

ACACIA DIETZ

The Online Extremist Ecosystem: Its Evolution and a Framework for Separating Extreme from Mainstream is available for free download at www.rand.org/t/PEA1458-1

How Extremism Operates Online: A Primer is available for free download at www.rand.org/t/PEA1458-2

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A FOCUS ON THE RESEARCH OF
Dionne Barnes-Proby, Celia J. Gomez,
Monica Williams, Matt Strawn, and Isabel Leamon

The Effects of Incarceration on Families

By Doug Irving, Staff Writer

(Top) Tausha Monroe with her son.
(Bottom) A father high-fives his son during a special Father’s Day visit at California Men’s Colony in San Luis Obispo, California, in 2015. (Left) A daughter kisses her mother at California Institute for Women state prison in Chino, California, in 2012.
Tausha Monroe could feel the fear pounding in her chest as she waited in a drab prison dining hall for the little boy she called Doodle Bug. It had been seven months since she had seen her son face to face. Would he remember her? Would she remember how to be his mom?

Around 2.3 million people live behind the razor wire of American jails and prisons, and most of them, like Monroe, are parents. Research has shown that their children will suffer consequences for the rest of their lives: lower academic achievement, social and emotional struggles, and a much higher risk of going to prison themselves. Yet no nationwide study in recent years has looked at what prisons are doing to help parents be better parents when they get out.

Researchers at RAND developed a survey to start filling that gap, to see whether incarcerated parents and their children are getting the support they need. The initial results suggest parenting programs are common in American prisons—but they’re also inconsistent, under-studied, and rarely tailored to the specific needs of incarcerated parents like Tausha Monroe, especially those who are Black or Latinx.
The shared sentence

Having a parent in prison can be so traumatic that children who experience it continue to have higher rates of depression and anxiety—even in their mid-40s. One study described it as a "shared sentence" for both parent and child, one that may help explain how social inequities like poverty get passed from one generation to another. So many children have experienced that shared sentence—more than 5 million, according to recent estimates—that Sesame Street introduced a character whose father is in jail.

What prisons do, and can do, for the parents of those children is more than just a policy question—it’s a social justice question. Around one-third of all Black men born in 2001 can expect to serve time behind bars at some point in their lives. For Latino men, it’s closer to one in six; for White men, one in 17. Helping parents in prison maintain and build connections with their children, RAND researchers thought, might be one way to address the disproportionate toll that mass incarceration has had on communities of color.

“My objective in any project, but especially this one, is to improve the outcomes of marginalized, vulnerable populations,” said Dionne Barnes-Proby, a social policy researcher at RAND and director of RAND’s Graduate Student Summer Associate Program, who helped lead the project. “That can best be done by, first, understanding what programming is available, and then assessing whether it improves the lives of people who need it. For me, that’s the short- and long-term goal of this effort.”

The state of parenting programs

Tausha Monroe begged the judge not to separate her from her son, then 2 years old. She had struggled with heroin and meth. A relapse put her in violation of the terms of her probation from an earlier drug-related arrest. The judge gave her 22 months. She reported to a prison south of Portland, Oregon, on Christmas Eve in 2020.

“It was horrible,” she says now. “The worst torture I’ve ever experienced. I missed just holding my son, looking in his eyes, being in his presence. I just didn’t get to have that connection anymore.”

RAND’s research team surveyed prison administrators in five states to start piecing together information about what programs are available for parents like Monroe. Each of the states they chose—Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Montana, and Vermont—has a high percentage of children with parents in prison. Each also reflects the national disparity in Black and White incarceration rates.

The researchers found that 80 percent of the prison facilities in those states offer at least one parenting program. Most focus on improving parent-child relationships or building parenting skills. Prison administrators considered almost all of them to be successful, most often because of the interest and enthusiasm of the parents involved.

But the survey also found opportunities to improve. Most of the programs used materials developed for parents outside prison—materials that might not meet the needs of those on the inside. Most also made limited effort to provide culturally responsive support, aside from books or occasional classes offered in a language other than English. That’s a troubling oversight, the researchers wrote, given the disproportionate number of Black and Latino parents in prison.

“This was where we knew we wanted to make a contribution, shining a light on the caregivers, the parents,” said Celia Gomez, a policy researcher
and codirector of the RAND Center for Qualitative and Mixed Methods, who helped develop and lead the survey. “There’s been a lot of research and programming focused on supporting children who are affected by incarceration. But there’s really been limited attention paid to the parents who are currently in those institutions.”

### Opportunities to improve programs and services

For months, Tausha Monroe could only talk to her son from the other side of a videoconference screen. Then she moved into a minimum-security side of the prison, with a Head Start program available. She signed up immediately. On Thursdays, she would attend parenting classes, learning how to handle tantrums or reinforce table manners with cool patience. On Tuesdays, with her coach watching, she would play trucks with her son over video or read him *Pete the Cat*.

“I felt like he was mad at me,” she says. “Like, ‘Where have you been, mom?’ It was probably just my own feelings, my own worries, but I felt like he was angry at me for not being there. I had this fear that I wouldn’t be able to be a good mom when I got out. I didn’t know if I’d remember even how to be.”

Few of the prisons in RAND’s initial study provided the kind of parent-specific reentry support that could help parents like Monroe make that crucial transition back to being a full-time mom or dad. Fewer still provided any kind of follow-up support or continuing services after a parent had gone home.

Researchers are now working to refine and scale up their survey to bring in all 50 states. That will allow them to start to compare what different states do to support incarcerated parents and which approaches appear to be the most promising for parent and child.

“This is an area where institutions have an opportunity to grow, to become more responsive to various demographic groups,” Barnes-Proby said. “As a social worker by training who has worked with children whose family members were incarcerated, I have a personal interest in trying to make sure supports are provided for them.”

Tausha Monroe knows the date when she was finally able to see her son—really see him, not just on a video screen—as well as her own birthday: July 30, 2021. A prison guard warned her she could not hold him or touch him because of COVID-19 precautions. But she could sit with him.

The door opened. Her mother walked in, carrying her son in a car seat. Tausha caught her breath, waiting to see how her son would react. He looked up from his car seat—and then he reached for her.

She got out a few months later. She’s in recovery, in treatment—“doing really good.” She credits the prison Head Start program with helping her become the mother her son deserves. “I didn’t expect to get hugs or any kind of love when I got back,” she says. “Literally the third day, he was in my arms. He knew I was mom.”

She still likes to get down on his level and play trucks with him, or hold him close and read him *Pete the Cat*. ☑️

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*Helping parents in prison maintain and build connections with their children might be one way to address the disproportionate toll that mass incarceration has had on communities of color.*
Unprecedented waves of refugees and economic migrants—displaced by conflicts, political and economic instability, natural disasters, and environmental change—highlight the need for new ways to capture data on international migration.
“It’s really hard to make good policy decisions using existing statistics,” said Stijn Hoorens, who leads the project as the director of RAND’s Brussels office and a senior research leader at RAND Europe. “You need accurate, complete, and, particularly, recent data. Those are pretty much absent in the context of migration.”

They stood in the crowded ticket hall of a Polish train station eight miles from the Ukraine border, holding up cardboard signs for the exhausted women and children arriving there. “Can take a family—Warsaw,” one read, according to the BBC. “40 places available on bus to Germany,” read another.

Millions of people were on the move, streaming west, the most sudden evacuation from a country in Europe since World War II. The countries that welcomed them with backpacks, baby formula, beds, and bus rides will be changed for years to come in ways that will be hard to measure.

Good government runs on good numbers: How many students in the schools; how many workers in the labor market; how many people needing housing or health care. But shock events—a global pandemic, a refugee crisis, a war—can change the numbers much faster than official surveys and census-takers can count. Researchers from RAND and RAND Europe have been working on a way to better track migrant numbers, country by country and state by state, in almost real time. They do it by tapping into one of the largest information-gathering operations on the planet, Facebook.

“Early 2020, for example, countries around the world sealed their borders and shut down travel to slow the spread of COVID-19. No one knew exactly how many migrants were living and working in other countries at the time—but they were now trapped, with no easy way to get back home, just as jobs started to disappear.

A few years ago, researchers from RAND Europe started to look for new ways to measure labor migration within the European Union. They were trying to solve a paradox of population statistics: They can be accurate, and they can be timely, but in an open society, they can’t often be accurate and timely at the same time. The gold standard of government statistics in the United States, for example, is the U.S. Census—which won’t be completed again until 2030.

Facebook, the researchers realized, provided a workaround. Its 2.9 billion monthly users freely provide data that government statisticians could only dream of having. If you want to know how many teenage soccer players in Seattle have “liked” a particular soft drink, Facebook can
Using Social Media Data to ‘Nowcast’ International Migration around the Globe is available for free download at www.rand.org/t/RRA1563-

Funding for this research was provided by gifts from RAND supporters and income from operations.

One data point in particular, which Facebook calls “lived in” but users might recognize as “places lived,” gave researchers the key they were looking for.

It’s a measure of users whose geolocation puts them in one place, but whose profile shows that they have lived in another.

It’s a measure of users whose geolocation puts them in one place, but whose profile shows that they have lived in another. Paired with other data points, like age and gender—and with a heavy dose of probability theory and mathematical modeling—the researchers found it could provide a signal for how migration numbers were rising or falling in a given state or country.

They could then use that signal to adjust the official statistics up or down. They were, essentially, trying to predict what the U.S. Census Bureau or the statistical office of the European Union would find if they did their counts at that very moment. They called it “nowcasting.”

The researchers from RAND Europe teamed up with their counterparts at RAND’s U.S. offices to test their method in individual U.S. states as well as in the countries of Europe. They were able to show, for example, that the number of Senegalese migrants living in Belgium had been increasing in late 2019, just before the pandemic—but then leveled out as travel bans went into effect.

Likewise, the number of Honduran migrants in Texas had been growing in recent years, but then started to slide as COVID-19 took hold.

That level of detail could help governments better anticipate changes in migration levels that could affect everything from labor markets to housing needs. That could help fill the gap between when a shock event like war or disease jolts population numbers, and when official headcounts can catch up.

“You can really see, in almost real time, the latest migration trends along individual corridors,” said Matthew Cefalu, a statistician at RAND who worked on the project. “That is the major takeaway, the ability to have this information in the next month instead of having to wait for the official statistics to be released.”

The researchers are still working to refine their approach. Facebook is not as dominant a social media force in some countries as it is in others, which could weaken its predictive power. The researchers have also found that their estimates are more precise when they have more years of social media data overlapping with the official statistics.

But as a test of what’s possible, their approach shows the value of looking beyond traditional statistics—especially at a time when those statistics are changing by the day or week, not by the year. “Being able to see migration trends in almost real time—we’ve done that probably more comprehensively than anyone has before,” Hoorens said.

That is going to be a long-term challenge for the countries of Europe and beyond. The millions of Ukrainians fleeing Russian tanks and bombs will need local services and support, from health care to employment to language help in the schools—long before official statistics even show they’re there.
RAND president and CEO Michael D. Rich announced he will retire in 2022 following a search for his successor. Rich became RAND’s fifth president in 2011. He began his RAND career as a summer intern in 1975 and went on to hold several senior leadership positions.

Since Rich became president, one of his primary goals has been to have RAND deliver research and analysis that make an ever-greater impact, leading directly to improvements in policy and decisionmaking. During his tenure, RAND has seen annual revenues grow from $250 million to more than $350 million; seen the value of RAND’s Long-Term Investment Fund increase from $178 million to more than $318 million; raised more than $200 million in philanthropic gifts as part of the Tomorrow Demands Today fundraising campaign; and tackled such policy challenges as health care costs, international security, the COVID-19 pandemic, and gun policy in America. He has helped define truth decay—the diminishing role of facts and analysis in public life—and made counteracting truth decay a top research priority at RAND.

Earlier, Rich was instrumental in the creation of the RAND National Defense Research Institute, a federally funded research and development center that provides research and analysis to the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, the Combatant Commands, the Navy, the Marine Corps, the defense agencies, and the intelligence community. He also helped lead RAND’s diversification and expansion into international markets, including Europe, the Middle East, and Australia. He co-led the development of RAND’s headquarters building in Santa Monica, California, which was awarded the U.S. Green Building Council’s Gold Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification for the environmentally responsible design in 2006.

Throughout his career, Rich has been an enthusiastic supporter of the Pardee RAND Graduate School, where he has taught and advised graduate students and chaired numerous committees.

“There’s no perfect time to leave a job you care so much about. But I’ve always wanted the next president of RAND to have the benefit of entering the role at a time of organizational strength and opportunity. That certainly characterizes RAND now.”
Giving

A grant from the Elizabeth Dole Foundation launches the next chapter of military caregiver research.

Who are military caregivers? They are the mothers and fathers, spouses and partners, neighbors and friends caring for America’s wounded, ill, and injured military service members and veterans. In 2014, RAND shined a light on what these “hidden heroes” do and what they need to succeed.

The landmark RAND Military Caregivers Study—the first comprehensive, evidence-based national study of military and veteran caregivers—was commissioned by the Elizabeth Dole Foundation. It revealed the sacrifices that millions of military caregivers make every day, as well as the gaps in support programs meant to help them.

Now a grant of almost $2 million from the foundation, as part of the Tomorrow Demands Today campaign, will launch the next chapter of RAND research on America’s hidden heroes.

“We are honored to continue our partnership with Senator Elizabeth Dole and the foundation she established,” said Michael D. Rich, president and CEO of RAND. “Supporting America’s military and veteran caregivers continues to be a top priority for RAND, and we look forward to building on our history of evidence-based research and analysis to improve the lives of veterans and their families.”

The follow-up study commissioned by the Elizabeth Dole Foundation will explore where military caregivers still need more support. The research will be housed in the RAND Epstein Family Veterans Policy Research Institute, which launched in 2021 through a $10 million campaign gift to help advance innovative, interdisciplinary research to meet the needs of diverse veteran populations while engaging and empowering those who support them.

“Our first study with RAND was so profound and instructive that it enabled us to launch a movement behind our military caregivers,” said Steve Schwab, CEO of the Elizabeth Dole Foundation. “This second generation of research is going to tell us more about the military caregivers and care recipients who are historically underserved by current resources, so we can ensure they have the support they need and deserve.”

The study will measure how demographics, including geographic location, race, and gender, affect caregiving, with the goal of using the data to design more-sophisticated and customized caregiver solutions and make critical inroads with underserved populations.

“We know these findings will become a clarion call to the nation,” Schwab said.
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