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**Exploring the Emotional Impact of Parental
Imprisonment on Children through Children's,
Parents' and Carers' Accounts**

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U0055422012

**A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

October 2014

**School of Human and Health Sciences
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Dedication

For Christine; and Simon, Liz, Richard and Emma

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Contents

	<i>Page</i>
Abstract	8
1. Introduction	9
1.1 <i>Background: the COPING project</i>	9
1.2 <i>The thesis</i>	12
1.3 <i>Structure of thesis</i>	14
2. Literature Review	16
2.1 <i>Childhood and the Family</i>	16
2.2 <i>Relevance of attachment theory for children of prisoners</i>	19
2.3 <i>Theorising resilient children and families</i>	21
2.4 <i>Information and Stigma: crucial issues for children of prisoners</i>	26
2.5 <i>Debates about Intergenerational Crime</i>	30
2.6 <i>Gender and gender differences</i>	34
2.7 <i>Parenting styles and family support</i>	39
2.8 <i>Families with imprisoned parents</i>	39
2.9 <i>Imprisoned mothers</i>	42
2.10 <i>Imprisoned fathers</i>	44
2.11 <i>Recent studies focussing on children of prisoners' experiences</i>	45
2.12 <i>COPING research</i>	49
2.13 <i>Capacity of schools to support children of prisoners</i>	51
2.14 <i>Children experiencing other kinds of loss</i>	53
2.15 <i>Research issues arising from the review</i>	58
2.16 <i>Research questions</i>	59
3. Methodology	61
3.1 <i>Debates about research methodology</i>	61
3.1.1 <i>Realist, constructivist and narrative approaches</i>	62
3.1.2 <i>Case Study research</i>	65
3.1.3 <i>Interviews</i>	67
3.1.4 <i>Reflexivity in research literature</i>	68
3.2 <i>Developing an approach to research with children</i>	69
3.2.1 <i>Children's rights</i>	69
3.2.2 <i>Consent</i>	71
3.2.3 <i>Safety</i>	71
3.2.4 <i>Good practice</i>	72
3.2.5 <i>Personal reflections on interviewing children</i>	73
3.3 <i>Methodology for the thesis</i>	74
3.3.1 <i>Reflexive Position</i>	74
3.3.2 <i>Philosophical standpoint</i>	75
3.3.3 <i>Links between the thesis and the COPING project</i>	77
3.3.4 <i>COPING interview framework</i>	78
3.3.5 <i>Research design</i>	80
3.3.6 <i>Conceptual framework</i>	82
3.3.7 <i>Appropriateness of methodology</i>	83
3.3.8 <i>Sample</i>	84
3.3.9 <i>Children's consent</i>	89

3.3.10	<i>Children interviewed alone; with siblings; or with parents/carers</i>	89
3.3.11	<i>Reflections on interviews</i>	91
3.4	<i>Developing a thematic analysis</i>	93
3.4.1	<i>Analysing interview data</i>	93
3.4.2	<i>Triangulation</i>	94
3.4.3	<i>Interpretation of Interview data</i>	95
3.4.4	<i>Categories and patterns</i>	96
3.4.5	<i>Narratives and key themes</i>	97
3.5	<i>Ethical and practice issues</i>	101
3.5.1	<i>Ethical approval</i>	101
3.5.2	<i>Practice issues arising from interviews</i>	102
3.5.3	<i>Participants' reaction to interviews</i>	103
3.6	<i>Researcher's Gaze: participants seen, and timings of interviews</i>	104
3.6.1	<i>Participants seen; and other children and relatives not seen</i>	104
3.6.2	<i>Timing of Interviews</i>	106
3.7	<i>Notes on pseudonyms and terms used</i>	108
4.	Children's experiences of parental imprisonment: resilience, trauma and recovery.	109
4.1	<i>Children's resilience and vulnerability: a preliminary overview</i>	110
4.1.1	<i>Demographic analysis</i>	114
4.1.2	<i>Home stability and domestic violence</i>	115
4.1.3	<i>Children's welfare: future prospects</i>	115
4.1.4	<i>Intelligence, school progress and behaviour problems</i>	115
4.1.5	<i>Emotional intelligence</i>	116
4.1.6	<i>Needing and receiving help</i>	117
4.1.7	<i>Schools and Agency support</i>	117
4.1.8	<i>Main findings from Table 3</i>	118
4.2	<i>The trauma of separation; and survival</i>	118
4.3	<i>Recalling Arrest and Imprisonment</i>	120
4.4	<i>Impact of parental offences</i>	124
4.5	<i>Children's experience of stigma</i>	128
4.6	<i>Multiple loss; multiple problems</i>	131
4.7	<i>Impact of separation on children</i>	134
4.8	<i>Factors linked to emotional harm experienced by children</i>	137
4.9	<i>Children's recovery from the impact of parental imprisonment</i>	143
4.10	<i>Children's emotional intelligence: handling feelings about imprisonment</i>	146
4.10.1	<i>Children trying to handle their feelings</i>	146
4.10.2	<i>The significance of parents' example for children's adjustment</i>	147
4.10.3	<i>Children's ambivalent responses</i>	149
4.10.4	<i>Learning disabilities and emotional intelligence</i>	150
4.10.5	<i>Holding feelings in check: and the use of understatement</i>	152
4.10.6	<i>Importance of privacy and caution in handling parental imprisonment</i>	153
4.10.7	<i>More open approaches to handling parental imprisonment</i>	154
4.11	<i>The "steeling effect"; and adaptive distancing</i>	155
4.11.1	<i>The steeling effect</i>	155
4.11.2	<i>Adaptive distancing</i>	156
4.12	<i>Children's contact with their imprisoned parent</i>	158
4.13	<i>Parental imprisonment and the significance of gender</i>	162
4.13.1	<i>Girls with their mother in prison</i>	163
4.13.2	<i>Girls with their father in prison</i>	165
4.13.3	<i>Boys with their mother in prison</i>	167
4.13.4	<i>Boys with their father in prison</i>	169

4.13.5	<i>Main themes emerging about gender</i>	171
4.13.6	<i>Like father, like son?</i>	172
4.14	<i>Family Structure: implications for children of prisoners</i>	175
4.14.1	<i>Findings from previous research</i>	175
4.14.2	<i>Experiences of 'Only' children</i>	175
4.14.3	<i>Experiences of Siblings</i>	176
4.14.4	<i>Relationship between children's age and their vulnerability</i>	177
4.14.5	<i>Main themes emerging relating to family structure</i>	179
4.15	<i>Dominant themes in this chapter</i>	179
5.	Care giving parents: roles, support and family policy.	183
5.1	<i>Experiences of parenting: parents/carers</i>	183
5.2	<i>Parenting Styles</i>	187
5.3	<i>Parents' relationships and children's well-being</i>	193
5.3.1	<i>Stability of parent/child relationships prior to imprisonment</i>	195
5.3.2	<i>Parents co-operating for their children</i>	197
5.3.3	<i>Impact of parental conflict on children</i>	198
5.3.4	<i>Significant tensions in parents' relationships</i>	198
5.3.5	<i>Trends</i>	201
5.3.6	<i>Improvements in parents' relationships</i>	202
5.3.7	<i>Improvement in children's relationships with parents/carers</i>	203
5.3.8	<i>The impact of increased responsibility on children</i>	204
5.3.9	<i>Impact of relationships between parents and families: main themes emerging</i>	206
5.4	<i>Reappraisal of the Imprisoned Parent and the Emergence of Family Policy</i>	207
5.4.1	<i>Reappraisal</i>	207
5.4.1.1	<i>Imprisoned parents' status unaltered</i>	211
5.4.1.2	<i>Imprisoned parents' status reduced</i>	213
5.4.1.3	<i>Revised status: permanent or changeable?</i>	214
5.4.1.4	<i>Children's views about their imprisoned parent</i>	215
5.4.2	<i>Emergence of Family Policy and strategies</i>	217
5.4.2.1	<i>Definitions</i>	218
5.4.2.2	<i>Overview of Family Policy</i>	219
5.4.2.3	<i>Case Illustration</i>	220
5.4.2.4	<i>Differing reactions of sibling pairs</i>	221
5.4.2.5	<i>Openness/Honesty</i>	222
5.4.2.6	<i>Privacy and Secrecy</i>	224
5.4.2.7	<i>How children adapt to Family Policy</i>	226
5.4.2.8	<i>Survival as a policy</i>	229
5.4.2.9	<i>Family Policy: emerging themes</i>	230
5.5	<i>Family support and external help</i>	231
5.5.1	<i>Conceptualising help</i>	231
5.5.2	<i>Extended family and agency support</i>	231
5.5.3	<i>Help from schools for families of imprisoned parents</i>	238
5.5.4	<i>Main themes emerging about help for families of prisoners</i>	239
6.	Imprisoned Parents : responsibilities, relationships, and child well being	241
6.1	<i>Role of Imprisoned Parents</i>	241
6.2	<i>Responsibilities of imprisoned parents; and their views about their offences</i>	243

6.3	<i>Imprisoned parents' attitudes to prison</i>	247
6.4	<i>Concepts of imprisoned parenthood</i>	248
6.5	<i>Imprisoned parents' capacity for honesty with children</i>	253
6.6	<i>Children's relationships with Imprisoned Parents</i>	254
6.7	<i>Contact and children's progress</i>	256
6.7.1	<i>Imprisoned parents' overall impact on children's well-being</i>	257
6.8	<i>Being an imprisoned parent: an overview</i>	258
6.9	<i>Harm and benefits attributable to parental imprisonment</i>	260
6.10	<i>Dominant themes for parents/carers and imprisoned parents</i>	262
7.	Discussion	265
7.1	<i>Impact of parental imprisonment on children's experience of childhood</i>	266
7.1.1	<i>Childhood and children's rights</i>	268
7.2	<i>Children of prisoners' experiences of attachment disruption and loss</i>	269
7.2.1	<i>Gender differences</i>	270
7.3	<i>Signs of resilience in children of prisoners</i>	272
7.3.1	<i>Resilience and emotional intelligence</i>	274
7.4	<i>How children deal with stigma</i>	275
7.4.1	<i>Children's ability to handle stigma</i>	276
7.4.2	<i>Evidence about the importance of caution and discretion for children</i>	277
7.5	<i>The significance of gender impacting on children's reactions</i>	278
7.6	<i>The significance of time for children's resilience</i>	281
7.6.1	<i>Children's understanding of past, present and future</i>	281
7.6.2	<i>The value of parents/carers' narrative accounts for children</i>	284
7.7	<i>Parents and parenting: contributions to children's well being</i>	285
7.7.1	<i>Accounting for the effectiveness of parents/carers</i>	285
7.7.2	<i>Being organised</i>	287
7.7.3	<i>Loyalty: benefits for children</i>	287
7.7.4	<i>Imprisoned parents: contributions to children's welfare</i>	288
7.7.5	<i>Imprisoned parents: parenting capacities</i>	289
7.8	<i>A dynamic family process model</i>	291
7.9	<i>Contribution to knowledge</i>	293
7.9.1	<i>Adjusting to parental imprisonment</i>	293
7.9.2	<i>Children's reactions and gender issues</i>	294
7.9.3	<i>Overall impacts and schools: new emphases</i>	295
8	Conclusions	297
8.1	<i>Main findings from the thesis</i>	297
8.1.1	<i>Children's resilience</i>	297
8.1.2	<i>Children: gender issues</i>	298
8.1.3	<i>Family Processes</i>	300
8.1.4	<i>Imprisoned Parents</i>	301
8.2	<i>A note on practice implications; and on future research</i>	302
8.2.1	<i>Practice implications</i>	302
8.2.1	<i>Future research</i>	304
8.3	<i>Limitations of the thesis</i>	305
	References	308
	Tables and Figures	
Table 1	<i>Research Participants (22 families)</i>	85
Table 2	<i>Children interviewed alone; with siblings; or with parents/carers</i>	90

Table 3	<i>Children's resilience and vulnerability</i>	112
Table 4	<i>Boys with behaviour problems</i>	116
Table 5	<i>Level of emotional harm experienced by children</i>	139
Table 6	<i>Process of recovery</i>	144
Table 7	<i>Parenting styles</i>	189
Table 8	<i>Parents' relationships and children's well being</i>	194
Table 9	<i>Summary of Reappraisal process for imprisoned parent</i>	211
Table 10	<i>Children's level of maturity and independence</i>	215
Table 11	<i>Family Policy: how children adapted to parents/carers' policy</i>	227
Table 12	<i>Summary of Family Support data</i>	232
Table 13	<i>Self-sufficient parent/carers' characteristics</i>	234
Table 14	<i>More needy parent/carers' characteristics</i>	235
Table 15	<i>Imprisoned parents and relationships with their children</i>	242
Table 16	<i>Children's relationships with their imprisoned parents</i>	255
Table 17	<i>Damage and benefits caused by parental imprisonment</i>	259
		260
Figure 1	<i>Map illustrating Coping Surveys and Interviews</i>	10
Figure 2	<i>Beginning Qualitative Research</i>	81
Figure 3	<i>Conceptual framework</i>	83
Figure 4	<i>Key Themes – children</i>	99
Figure 5	<i>Researcher's Gaze: Timing of Interviews</i>	106
Figure 6	<i>Parents: Focusing on children's needs</i>	187
Figure 7	<i>Parental imprisonment: changing relationships within families</i>	208
Figure 8	<i>Families looking for help</i>	233
Figure 9	<i>Dynamic family processes</i>	291
Appendices		
Appendix 1	<i>Case Summaries for research participants</i>	320
Appendix 2	<i>Consent Form</i>	340
Appendix 3	<i>Interview Guide: Children's Interviews</i>	341
Appendix 4	<i>COPING Information Leaflet</i>	354
Appendix 5	<i>My role in the COPING research</i>	355
Appendix 6	<i>Table identifying researchers involved in the 22 Families</i>	359
Appendix 7	<i>Gender Differences: factors impacting on children's well-being</i>	360

Abstract

This child-centred case study, which explored the impact of parental imprisonment on children, developed from the European COPING research project (2010 - 2012).

Qualitative methods and a thematic analysis were used to review data from interviews with children, their parents/carers and imprisoned parents, in 22 families, mainly from the north of England. My findings confirmed that the quality of children's relationships with their parent/carer and other relatives is the most important protective factors for them. Children's resilience is frequently characterised by a two-way empathetic process, children being supported by their parents/carers and supporting them in return. Time is a crucial dimension in how children experience parental imprisonment. The experience of stigma was almost universal for families in this study. Children were cautious about sharing information about parental imprisonment. Paternal and maternal imprisonment impact differentially on children. Children seem more likely to experience emotional turmoil from the imprisonment of their same sex parent. Girls tend to be more resilient and boys more vulnerable. Schools are most often the agencies best placed to help children of prisoners.

Parents/carers frequently gained self-confidence from successfully fulfilling their responsibilities. They re-appraised their imprisoned partner's role and status, and families developed either more open or more closed policies about handling parental imprisonment. Imprisoned parents can partially fulfil their parenting roles. Alongside the harm caused to children by parental imprisonment, a majority of families experienced some benefits.

Further research should explore the differential impact of parental imprisonment on girls and boys in more detail.

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 *Background: The COPING Research Project*

This thesis developed out of my involvement in the COPING¹ Research project between 2010 and 2012, and in particular from my contribution to in-depth interviews with children of prisoners and their parents and carers, as part of this research.

COPING was funded by the European Union (seventh framework programme, health theme). The Project's focus was exploring the resilience of children with a parent in prison. The research was carried out by a consortium² comprising 6 non-governmental organisations and 4 research institutions from England, Germany, Romania and Sweden, led by the University of Huddersfield. COPING was a multi-strand research project including a survey of children and care-givers, in-depth interviews with children and young people, parents/carers and imprisoned parents (on which the thesis is based), consultations with stakeholders, including service providers, schools, social workers and prison staff, and service mapping for the four countries. Participants for in-depth interviews were mainly drawn from a wider

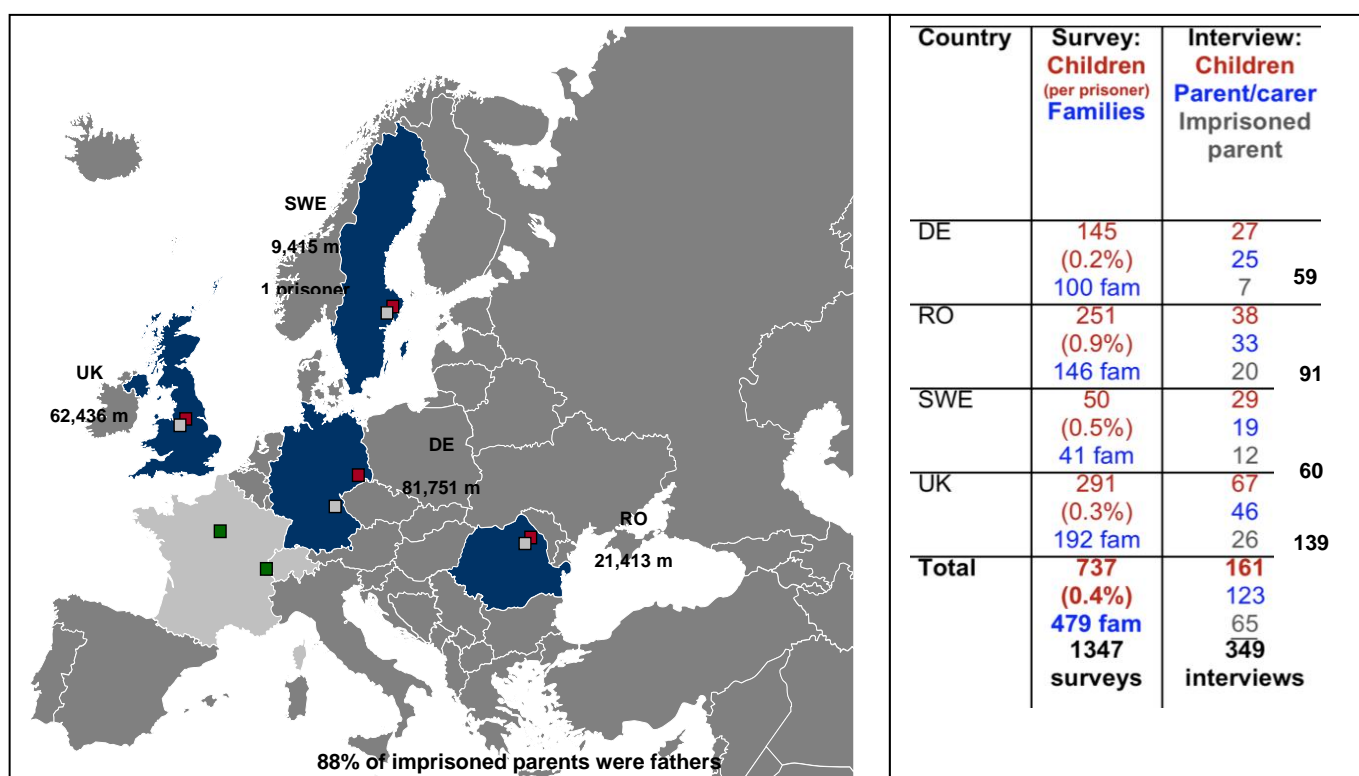
¹ Children of Prisoners, Interventions and Mitigations to Strengthen Mental Health. Jones & Wainaina-Wozna, Eds.2013.

² Research Institutions: University of Huddersfield, Dresden University of Technology, Universitatea Alexandru Ioan Cuza, and Karolinska Institute. Non-Governmental Organisations: Partners of Prisoners Support Group, Treff-Punkt, Alternative Sociale Association, Bryggan, Quaker United Nations Office and EUROCHIPS.

survey (part of the COPING research) designed to assess the mental health of children with parents in prison.

The survey was based on three pre-tested and validated instruments (Kid Screen, The Goodman Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale). The survey was administered to a sample of 737 children, aged 7-17 in Germany (n=145), Romania (n=251), Sweden (n=50) and the UK (n=291). Fifty-four percent of the sample was male and 46% was female.

Figure 1: Map illustrating COPING Survey and Interviews



Reproduced by kind permission of Professor Anne Berman, Karolinska Institute, from her presentation to the COPING dissemination conference in Brussels, 6 November 2012

An important finding from the wider survey based on the SDQ scores was that children of prisoners had 25% increased vulnerability to mental health problems

compared to country norms. (This figure rose to 50% higher than norms for children of prisoners in Romania).

A purposive sample based on children with a range of SDQ scores was identified for a total of 349 in-depth interviews comprising 161 children, 123 non-imprisoned parents/carers, and 65 imprisoned parents/carers. In the UK sample, 67 children were interviewed of whom 39 were boys and 28 were girls. Their mean age was 11.44 years. Most of the sample was White³. Stakeholder consultations about the needs of children with parents in prison were held with children, non-governmental organisation (NGO) staff, prison staff, prisoners, social workers and policy makers. Other strands of the COPING research included mapping of services and interventions across the four countries, overall evaluation, development of recommendations, and dissemination of findings.

My responsibilities in the COPING project, in so far as they are connected to the thesis, are described in Chapter 3 (Methods) below.

By the third year of the COPING research I was close to completing my overview of the qualitative data, for the UK and the other three countries. I had built up a data set of interviews with over twenty families whom I had interviewed myself, including both boys and girls, and children with mothers as well as others with fathers in prison, and interviews with parents/carers, and imprisoned parents, both fathers and mothers. I believed that this gave me a unique opportunity to explore the factors impacting on

³ In the UK 9/67 children, 6/67 non-imprisoned parents/carers and 9/67 imprisoned parents were Black, Asian or dual heritage. In Romania 6/38 children, 7/38 non-imprisoned parents/carers and 8/38 imprisoned parents were classified as 'Other', ie non -Romanian. For legal reasons ethnic data was not recorded in Germany and Sweden.

children's reactions to parental imprisonment in much greater depth, including gender differences. This was how I came to embark on writing this thesis.

1.2 *The thesis*

The thesis took shape during 2012. It is based on 50 interviews which I completed with 21 families, including 20 children, 17 parents and other carers, and 13 imprisoned parents.⁴ . The design of the thesis is a case study comprising a sample of 22 families (one interviewed by a colleague), using a qualitative methodology.

The thesis focuses on the experiences of children as revealed through their interviews.. Its aim was broad: to explore the emotional impact of parental imprisonment on children, based on their experiences, and on the views of their parents/ carers and on those of their imprisoned parent. Its objectives included exploring factors, both positive and negative, which helped to account for children's reactions to their parent being in prison. The sample included children with either their father or their mother in prison; and a further aim was to explore differences between the impact of paternal and maternal imprisonment, on both boys and girls. I also wanted to understand how family relationships, between children, between children and parents, between parents, and within the wider family and community, and how children and families talked about their situation, impacted on children's reactions to their parent being in prison; and how these children and families could obtain help when they needed to.

⁴ Details about the interviews completed by myself and other research colleagues are included in Appendix 6.

The needs of children of prisoners have so far largely escaped the notice of policy makers in the UK. Numbers of children who have experienced having a parent in prison, estimated by the Ministry of Justice to be approximately 200,000 in any given year (Williams et al, 2012), have not been accurately recorded: these numbers are similar to those for children experiencing parental divorce. Although there has been a strong research interest in intergenerational crime in the UK (Murray & Farrington, 2005; Farrington et al, 2009) there have been fewer qualitative studies exploring the experiences of children of prisoners, both boys and girls. Qualitative studies in the USA will provide important context for the research. The thesis should help to guide professional practice in identifying and responding to the needs of children of prisoners and their families.

My argument, based on previous research findings and on evidence from this study, is that children with a parent in prison experience a distinctive kind of loss. For many this is unexpected and sudden, ambiguous, public, socially disapproved and stigmatised. The thesis will explore the different kinds of loss experienced by children and their parents; and how children adapt to and recover from parental imprisonment. Children with a parent in prison may have lost parental guidance and discipline, their role model, companion, mentor and guide; their parents experience loss of a partner, provider, status and reputation. Having a parent in prison may impact on all aspects of children's lives: their home, their extended family, and contact with friends, school and the local community; and the length of the prison sentence and the nature of the offence are important variables. The loss of a parent in prison appears to me to have similarities to, and important differences from, other losses experienced by children, such as divorce, or parental death or illness, and these will be explored throughout the thesis..

1.3 *Structure of the thesis*

The literature review includes relevant theory about childhood, attachment, resilience and stigma; and also previous research about gender differences for children of prisoners, inter-generational crime, parental imprisonment, other recent qualitative studies about children of prisoners, and children experiencing other kinds of loss. This is followed by the methodology chapter which includes relevant research literature; and as noted already, my contribution to the COPING research. I describe how children and families were recruited, how interviews were structured, and how safeguards for children and ethical standards were ensured. The rest of the chapter covers the development of my thematic analysis; the importance of the timing of interviews, and the significance attaching to which family members were able to take part. Terms used in the thesis are explained.

The first data chapter provides an initial overview of children's resilience and vulnerability; and then explores children's experiences and the impacts of parental imprisonment from their parents' arrest onwards; and the kind of factors which enabled or impaired children's adjustment to their situation. The second chapter explores the impact of parenting styles and of parental relationships on children, and the kinds of support available to them and their families, including from schools. I describe processes of family re-appraisal of the role and status of the imprisoned parent and the emergence of family policy to deal with parental imprisonment; and changes in family relationships and dynamics. The third data chapter explores opportunities and constraints experienced by imprisoned parents, both mothers and fathers, in carrying out their parenting role; and also attempts to assess negative and some more positive impacts of parental imprisonment for families.

In the discussion chapter I reflect on learning from the thesis, and on new findings about children handling and struggling to cope with parental imprisonment, and on

the contributions of both parents/carers and imprisoned parents. This is followed by a final conclusions chapter which summarises the main findings, and covers practice implications, and discussion of the thesis' limitations.

The first appendix provides Case Summaries for the 22 families. Other appendices include consent forms; the interview guide used with children; background information provided for participants; a note clarifying my role in the COPING project; a Table showing which participants I interviewed myself, and which were undertaken by, or with, other research colleagues; and Tables analysing different aspects of the experiences of girls and boys interviewed.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 *Childhood and the Family*

Children can be viewed as strong and resourceful and able to work with adults to solve problems; or as deprived or damaged or ignorant, and in need of services or education. (Alderson, 2005) The first concept was more influential in my study. The idea that children can have expertise based on their experience is a relatively new concept. Developmental psychology has placed most emphasis on defining stages of children's cognitive growth towards becoming competent adults, and has given less recognition to children's contribution to the construction of knowledge (Kellett et al, 2004). Childhood has been seen as a stepping stone towards adulthood, and therefore an incomplete stage of development. As a result, children could be overlooked as contributors to research as they were seen as lacking knowledge, dependent on adults, and as unreliable informants. Developmental psychology has theorised childhood and children, but accorded them little status in theory development (Hogan, 2005). Children's knowledge can be disregarded and controlled by adults (Robinson & Kellett, in Fraser S (Eds), 2004). The pursuit of objective knowledge about children and childhood left little space for children's contributions (Hogan, 2005).

Contemporary expectations about children being informed, involved and consulted about activities that affect them, as delineated in the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, are associated with a sociology of childhood which recognised that children's actions shape and change their social life. The focus has switched

from the dominance of adult/child relationships to child's interrelationships with others, including peers (Christensen & Prout, 2005). Concurrently, social constructionists have challenged previously stable, scientific and objective views of childhood, recognising multiple perspectives and perceiving concepts such as child development and even child abuse as socially constructed. (Kellett et al in Fraser S. et al (Eds) 2004))

Christenson & Prout (2002) have analysed children's contributions to research: as either (i) being objects of research based on adult accounts and perspectives; or (ii) as research subjects, allowing a child-centred perspective, modified by judgements about children's maturity and cognitive ability. Children may also (iii) be seen as social actors, having an autonomous status, separate from the family, or from school; or (iv) they can be encouraged to take an active role in all aspects of the research process. My study has been child-centred and has viewed children as experts in calling to mind and describing their experiences; and also as members of family units, with opportunities for mutual support and influence.

From this review tensions are evident between concepts of children's autonomy and (age-related) dependence on parents and care givers. While current social research values children as individuals, anthropological studies have highlighted tensions between the individualist orientation in the west, (or the minority world), and the collectivist view of much of the rest of the world (the majority world) (Kellett et al, in Fraser S (Eds) 2004). While notions of the child as an individual self underpin western psychology and sociology, the collective family has been valued above the individual rights of children in many other cultures. Miller (2007), for example, has highlighted the role of kinship care and of the extended family in enriching the lives of African-American children of prisoners brought up in families headed by mothers.

The attachment and resilience literature, considered below, provides strong evidence for the role and contribution of parents and other care givers in fortifying children encountering adversity. Parents facing disasters can provide children with “... *safety and sustenance; social and emotional support; stimulation; surveillance; structure; and social connectedness*” (Bradley, 2007, p106). This description could either be seen as the commonplace, taken for granted attributes of parenthood, or as an idealised set of unachievable expectations.

The notion of “family” as a source of nurture and support for children has been strongly contested. Mullender et al (2002), for example, described the family as both the primary site for domination and subordination of women, and also their main source of support (p146). A positive and functionalist view of families socialising children and stabilising adults was proposed by traditional sociologists (Parsons, 1949), cited in Cree, 2000). In her overview of the sociology of the family, Cree recognised that, from a Marxist perspective, families perpetuate social inequality, and enabled men to protect property and to dominate women, and supported capitalist structures. She also highlights a feminist critique of the realities of family life, including experiences of violence, child sexual abuse and the burden of responsibility for child care carried by women. The family life of the poorest sections of society have been subjected to state surveillance, entrusting health and social services professionals with the policing of family relationships and standards of “good enough” parenting (Parton, 1991).

A more positive view is provided by Frost (2011, pp 35 & 36)) who embraces Giddens’ concept of the “democratic family” and a democracy of the emotions (1999, p 63), where women have more say and children have a voice and their rights are respected. Relationships within the “ideal” democratic family are based on equality,

mutual trust and communication, which Giddens contrasts with the traditional family, dominated by the father and where women and children were subjugated. The COPING research, emphasising children's rights, children's perspectives and children's voices, was conceived against the background of the "Every Child Matters" (DfES, 2003) programme and the 2004 Children Act. While these reforms gave rise to widespread intervention in children's lives (Frost, p. 47) they vigorously promoted the rights of children, including the most disadvantaged, to enjoy productive health and education, to have their point of view heard by shapers of opinion and policy makers, and to contribute to research programmes.

2.2 *Relevance of attachment theory for children of prisoners*

Attachment theory has been described as a theory of personality development (Howe et al, 1999). Bowlby (1988)'s central tenet, based on observing childhood trauma following children's separation from their parents, was that parents provide a secure base for children's sorties into the outside world, knowing that they will be welcomed back and nurtured. If the child's attachment figure is available and responsive, s/he feels secure and values the relationship. Threats of abandonment create intense anxiety and arouse anger, especially in older children and adolescents. Bowlby observed that children become 'clingy' if they have experienced separation, and are anxious about further loss. Separation anxiety is a normal human disposition, a response to increased risk.

Bowlby's observations illuminate the experiences of children of prisoners.

Attachment behaviours are characteristic of human nature throughout the lifespan.

Mothers who have been abused expect care and attention from children, inverting their relationship, and this can lead to school refusal and agoraphobia. Parent-child relationships may become symbiotic if the child's relationship to his/her mother is so

close that the child cannot develop an independent social life. Free-flowing communication between parents and children AIDS attachment; secure children remain in communication with their mother when distressed as well as when content. Bowlby accepted Rutter's finding (1987) that the risk of psychological disturbance for children increases where they face cumulative risks.

Children maintain deep emotional bonds with their imprisoned mothers, and can experience post-traumatic stress and sustained re-call of disturbing events, including arrest (Kampfner, 1995). Survivor guilt and displays of aggression amongst these children have also been evident (Johnston, 1995). Poehlmann (2005) found that attachment problems of children of imprisoned mothers, aged up to 7, were mitigated by secure caregivers. While most children showed signs of insecurity, they were able to develop secure relationships when living in a stable care- giving situation. Stability of caregiver contributed to children developing secure relationships which could help ameliorate the effects of parental loss. Young children reacted to parental imprisonment with feelings of loneliness, fear, embarrassment, stigma and behaviour problems.

Parke & Clarke-Stewart (2001), reviewing the effects of parental incarceration on young children, found that key predictors of children's adjustment were the quality of the parent-child relationship, and relationships with their extended family and informal social networks, enhanced by opportunities to maintain contact with the absent parent. Children were able to form multiple attachments, to fathers and other non-maternal caregivers, as well as to mothers. The authors found that problem behaviours of children of prisoners could be related to other adverse factors, for example, prior familial instability or parental conflict, or to poverty, child abuse, and neglect, or father absence. Children with imprisoned parents tended to adjust well where parent-child and extended family relationships were of good quality, and

where children could access supportive informal social networks. Opportunities to maintain contact with the imprisoned parent were also found to be crucial. Nesmith & Ruhland (2008) found that stress experienced by children of prisoners was frequently linked to strain experienced by caregivers.

Poehlmann (2005) found that, for two-thirds of children sampled, representations of attachment were characterised by intense ambivalence, and also disorganisation and violence, following prolonged separation from their imprisoned mothers and changes in caregivers. Ambiguous loss (Boss, 2010), loss which is unclear, traumatic, confusing and unresolved, is relevant to the experience of children of prisoners, whose plight can be regarded equivocally by their communities. Disenfranchised grief (Doka, 1989) and self disenfranchising grief (Kauffman, 1989) are closely related concepts. Disenfranchised grief, a sociological phenomenon, can follow loss of meaningful attachment; such loss “...cannot be openly acknowledged, socially validated, or publicly mourned”. (Doka, 1989, p xv) Self disenfranchising grief is an internal psychic phenomenon; incipient grief is not recognised, or is covered over because of shame or embarrassment (Kauffman, 1989 p 25). Bocknek et al (2009) elaborate concepts of loss for children of prisoners where loss of a family member results in ambiguity about family boundaries and family membership.

2.3 *Theorising resilient children and families*

Resilience has achieved a dominant position in research literature about how children and adults handle just about everything, from life's ordinary vicissitudes, to coping with disasters. The capacity for resilience may be innate; resilience combines personality traits, and individual responses may be facilitated or impaired by context and relationships (Zolkoski and Bulbock, 2012). Masten (2001), focused on the “ordinariness” of resilience, arising from normative functions of human adaptational

systems (p227). Resilience has been defined as “*manifested competence in the context of significant challenges to adaptational development*” (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998, p206). Competence requires relationships with caring adults, and children demonstrate self-regulation by gaining control over their emotions and behaviour, and demonstrating social competence with peers. Resilient functioning may lead to the development of cognitive skills and an absence of aggressive tendencies (Kim-Cohen et al, cited in Hinshaw (2007), p173).

Previous research has emphasised children’s capacity to learn from adversity. Outcomes for children facing chronic adversity are improved through positive relationships with competent adults, enabling children to become good learners and problem solvers. Protective factors include a robust constitution, an easy temperament and good parenting (Masten et al, 1990). Older children and adolescents may be more impacted by disasters than very young children, as they have more understanding of the magnitude of these events and their implications (op. cit.,1990).

Resilient children have been described as having temperamental characteristics that promote positive responses from family members and strangers (Werner,1984, cited in Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). More secure children demonstrate high esteem, self efficacy and emotional competence, and experience less anger over shorter periods of time (Howe et al, 1999, p48). Girls have been found to be more resilient than boys in childhood, but more vulnerable in adolescence; younger girls may benefit from having mothers and female teachers as same sex competent role models (Masten et al,1990). Rutter (1987) also found that girls and women had a slight edge on resiliency compared to boys and men. Some children show sleeper effects, coping well initially, with problems developing later on (Landreth & Lobaugh, 1998).

Resilience has been observed to be an interaction between personality and environmental factors (Ungar, 2005). Neenan highlighted the importance of self-belief, humour, tolerance, perspective, and emotional control. Norman (2000), emphasised the importance of a sense of direction or mission, which could be fostered by responsibility for dependent others. Rutter (1987) placed resilience firmly in its social context: *“(resilience) does not lie in the psychological chemistry of the moment, but in ways people deal with life changes and what they do about stressful or disadvantageous circumstances”* (1987, p321). Foresight and planning which involve taking charge of events could ensure positive outcomes. Rutter considered temperament, equable mood and mild/moderate emotional reactions to be key resilience factors.

There has been a lack of consensus about the importance of intelligence for resilience. Intellectual functioning was found to be a moderator of risk for pro and anti-social behaviour by Masten & Coatsworth (1998). Ungar (2005) has contended that access to education can enhance resilience. Other authors have concluded that resilience is not related to IQ (Rutter, 1987) or cognitive ability (Dumont et al, 2007). Miller (2007) defines resilience as *‘a process of growing from life stressors, or (a) recovery outcome from a traumatic experience or risk’*. Children may recognise their internal strengths, and experience a positive sense of self to help allay negative effects from exposure to adverse conditions. According to Norman (2000) children can develop the ability to remove themselves psychologically and maintain a healthy separateness from the maladaptive situation. This is the concept of ‘adaptive distancing’: being able to put some emotional distance between themselves and their imprisoned parent is a necessary survival skill for children of imprisoned parents.

Neenan (2009), from a cognitive behavioural standpoint, defines resilience as *“... a set of flexible cognitive, behavioural and emotional responses to acute or chronic*

adversities" (p17). He describes resilience as an individual response, facilitated or impaired by context and relationships. Masten & Obradovic (2006) observe that low risk and poor adaptation is much less common than cases of high risk and good adaptation; from this they affirm "*....the adaptive and self-righting bias of development in a species shaped by eons of natural and cultural selection*" (p20). This suggests that children are more likely to survive than to be overwhelmed by adversity. Masten (2006) identifies three core protective factors for children, which seem apposite for children of prisoners: firstly, positive relationships and a capacity for recruiting and forming lasting bonds with parent figures, partners or mentors; secondly, agency - the capacity and confidence to steer their own lives; and thirdly, the ability to reflect, including optimism about the future and a belief that life has meaning. Coping, according to Masten, involves both adapting to the external world of school and community while maintaining internal integration, psychological wellbeing and physical health. Masten's determined optimism may obscure the psychological damage children sustain in adapting to severe and challenging circumstances.

Ungar (2005) also stressed the role of children's agency in achieving resilience, describing them as "*the architects of their own experience*" (p437). Miller (2007) emphasised children's uniqueness in the face of adversity helped by temperament, intelligence, problem solving skills, humour and self-esteem. Resilience theory is strengths based, avoiding a focus on deficits (Hinshaw, 2007). Hinshaw's key variables for resilience include: individual characteristics (positive self-esteem, easy temperament, high intelligence and humour); family relationships, including child rearing and positive relationships with adults outside the home; and the wider environment (schools and neighbourhoods) (p172).

For Neenan (2009), turning adversity into advantage, by developing positive attitudes rather than succumbing to negative consequences, is a key concept. This idea resonates with the challenges faced by children with imprisoned parents. What counts is less the harshness of their experience, which they cannot control, but rather their attitudes and how they handle their response, which they can try to determine for themselves. However, their lives may be complicated by other disadvantages. Johnson & Waldfogel (2002) identified cumulative risk, including severe maladjustment, low social status, overcrowding, large family size, paternal criminality, maternal psychiatric disorder and admission to local authority care as more damaging than a single risk; and noted that children of prisoners are often exposed to multiple risk factors.

Rutter (2007) has described the inoculation effect of exposure to environmental hazards for children of prisoners: exposure to risks rather than risk avoidance can have a steeling effect. Mullender et al (2002), in their study on the impact of domestic violence on children, found that some children were strengthened by very harsh experiences. For others, their experiences were so horrific that they could not talk about them, for example where violence had extended over a long period and the family had had multiple moves. Masten & Obradovic (2006) also recognised that there are levels of risk and adversity so overwhelming that resilience cannot occur and recovery is rare or impossible.

Rutter (2007) refers to the “*huge heterogeneity*” in outcomes in all studies of physical and psychosocial adversity (p205) explained by individual differences. He argues that a lifespan perspective is required to assess trauma impact. Children may cope well initially with the shock of parental imprisonment, but problems may emerge later.

Secombe (2004), from a structuralist position, suggests that resilience will be enhanced more by national economic policies tackling poverty than by focusing on individual personality characteristics, family attributes or unique community features, and argues against the view that resilience is an individual disposition or family trait.

2.4 Information and Stigma: crucial issues for children of prisoners

Clear information and explanation can play a crucial role in helping children to survive difficult experiences. Cooklin (2009), writing about children's experience of parental mental illness, concluded:

“Children can survive extreme emotional adversity if they understand what is happening, and have at least one reliable and non-partisan adult with whom they can affirm a more objective perception of events affecting them” (p108).

This pertinent observation seems highly relevant to the problems faced by children of prisoners. Cooklin's view was that clear information from a concerned adult was more important for children than counselling or therapy, and could reduce children's confusion and self-blame, and raise their self-esteem. Mullender et al (2002) found that children who had experienced domestic violence needed clear information, especially at the point where they were required to leave home.

Having an imprisoned parent may result in children experiencing stigma, discrimination and bullying which can affect their mental health or increase anti-social behaviour (Boswell and Wedge, 2002; Sack, 1977; Sack et al, 1976). This stigma can be “sticky”, spreading and adhering to family members (Braman, 2004, p173); or it can lead to peer hostility and rejection (Boswell, 2002). Duff's (2001) reference to

normative exclusion - individuals being treated as though they do not share a community's values-, appears relevant to families with an imprisoned parent.

Children with an imprisoned parent may experience a strong sense of shame, as though they were confessing their own crime or wrong-doing by announcing their father's confinement (Sack, 1977). These children had to face the *"....bruising reality that their fathers were considered as in need of punishment and potentially dangerous"* (p172). This experience of stigma contributed to boys' aggressive, anti-social identifications. Miller (2007), found that youths could blame themselves for parental imprisonment, reinforced by stigmatisation processes. Parental imprisonment can be seen as a family crisis in which social stigma plays a considerable part (Sack et al, 1976), although previously Morris (1965) had described the imprisonment of a husband as a crisis of family dismemberment, rather than one of demoralisation through stigma or shame. Feelings of stigma may be experienced more acutely amongst children of prisoners than for other groups of children experiencing parental problems or loss (Steinhoff & Berman, 2012). The more secrecy children felt required to engage in about their mother's imprisonment, the more stigma they felt about their mother's imprisonment (Hagen & Myers, 2003).

Where imprisonment is extremely common in the home communities of offenders, experience of stigma and shame may be less. Morris (1965) found evidence of shame and stigma amongst the wives and partners of first time offenders, but little amongst those of repeat offenders. Baunach (1985) did not identify shame or stigma as problems for the children of imprisoned women in her study, and this may have been because it was a widely shared experience in their communities.

NGOs supporting children and families of prisoners (see for instance the European Network for Children of Imprisoned Parents, Children of Prisoners Europe

(http://children_of_prisoners.eu) have consistently emphasised the importance for children of receiving clear information about their imprisoned parent. How much children are told about parental imprisonment appears closely connected to stigma about incarceration. Caregivers may overestimate how much children know about parental offences, and the knowledge children have may be vague (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Poehlmann (2005) concluded that “.....*telling children about difficult situations in honest, sensitive and developmentally appropriate ways*” (p682) affirmed children’s trust in caregivers, whereas hidden or distorted information could result in distrust or mental health problems. Bocknek et al (2009) found that children with a greater understanding of their imprisoned relative’s whereabouts appeared more comfortable when interviewed; and most children wished they knew more. However, they also recognised that children may be afraid of knowing that their parent is a criminal, and may feel that they themselves are to blame. Blaming oneself appears closely related to self-stigma, which is associated with low self-esteem, and which has been defined as comprising awareness of a stereotype, agreement with it, and applying it oneself (Corrigan et al, 2009).

Arditti (.2012) was reflective about the merits and demerits of truth telling, describing “*passing*”, not revealing the truth about parental imprisonment, as “*likely inevitable and in some cases adaptive, ...protecting caregivers and children from stigma and resulting marginalisationWhen truth equates to social pain, it is a hard pill to swallow* ” (p.134). Arditti (2012) also highlights the significance of Fritsch & Burkhead’s finding (1981, see below p37) that children who knew the truth about the whereabouts of their imprisoned parent had elevated post traumatic stress disorder symptoms compared to those who thought their parent was in a socially acceptable location such as a hospital.

Children and families have to decide with whom information about parental imprisonment can be shared. Some children choose to lie about their parent's imprisonment, sometimes using "working abroad"⁵ as a cover story (Chui, 2010). Hagen & Myers (2003), exploring secrecy and social support issues for children of female prisoners, found that more socially skilled children experiencing higher levels of support were more likely to exercise caution about sharing information, restricting this to trusted friends. By contrast, children with less guidance from caregivers and less social support were less discriminating, and talked more freely about parental imprisonment.

Wade & Smart (2002), exploring how young children handled parental separation and divorce, found that some children wished this to be kept private. Children who confided in others were highly discriminating in deciding whom they would trust. Speaking to friends could leave children open to inquisitive or persistent questioning, and this is likely to be even more of a risk for children with imprisoned parents because of curiosity about their parents' offending. Children whose parents had separated were particularly concerned about talking to school friends, preferring to keep their family lives private in school; the children's greatest anxiety was that personal information would become public knowledge. Children appreciated kindness from teachers, although some younger children saw them as too busy or too impatient.

⁵ Romanian families in the COPING research frequently referred to imprisoned fathers as "working abroad". In Romania, many fathers had to find work abroad to support their families (Manby et al, 2012).

2.5 *Debates about Intergenerational crime*

The Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development (CSDD) (Murray & Farrington, 2005; Farrington et al, 2009) has made a major contribution to research internationally about the impact of parental imprisonment on children. Its main emphasis has been on the increased vulnerability of sons and grandsons of prisoners to mental health problems and anti-social behaviour, based on evidence of transmission of crime across three generations (1960's onwards) in the UK. The authors argue convincingly that “... *offending runs in families. Criminal parents tend to have criminal children.*” (Farrington et al, 2009, p109). Boys who experienced parental imprisonment during childhood tended to develop anti-social personalities in adulthood independently of other risk factors. Having a convicted parent or a convicted older sibling by their 10th birthday was the most accurate predictor of boys' later offending and anti-social behaviour. About twice as many (63%) males in their study with convicted fathers were themselves convicted, compared with those (33%) whose fathers had not been convicted.

The authors acknowledge there are other possible explanations for their findings, including boys from criminal families being targeted by police and therefore more likely to be convicted. Prisoners' children may have been deviant before their parents were imprisoned, or unmeasured environmental differences may have accounted for their delinquent outcomes. Other risk factors included large family size, poor housing, poor parental supervision, disrupted family (usually involving loss of the father) or low school attainment. Convicted fathers disapproved of their sons' offending. The authors refer to the possibility “... *that convicted parents in some way caused poor socio-economic, family and individual conditions, which in turn caused the boys' offending*” (Farrington et al, 2009, p117). In the most recent phase of the

study it was found that unemployment or not being a home owner could also be risk factors.

One of the acknowledged limitations of the CSDD is that the numbers of prisoners' children (N = 40) in their sample was fairly small. As well, crime patterns, including the emergence of drug related crime, have changed markedly since data collection for the CSDD began in the 1960s. Changes in demography, including the current predominant role of the nuclear over the extended family, and increases in numbers of families headed by a single parent, may also have impacted recently on patterns of inter-generational crime.

Nijhof et al (2009) found some confirmatory evidence of inter-generational transmission of offending in their research based in Holland. This research found that both the frequency and seriousness of parental offending positively related to the frequency and seriousness of juvenile offending. No similar links were found with maternal offending. The authors concluded that children with criminal parents were at higher risk of becoming involved in criminal activities. Hjalmarsson & Lindquist (2012), using evidence from the Stockholm Birth Cohort Survey going back to 1953, found that both sons and daughters had double the odds of having criminal convictions compared to children with non-criminal fathers, with the odds increasing fairly steeply for children whose fathers had multiple sentences.

Findings from these studies are directly relevant to the experiences of only a small minority of children whom I interviewed, few of whom were from families of professional or habitual criminals. The CSDD is important in other ways. The research is unique in the UK in studying crime patterns over three generations, and has achieved high international standing. Some of its findings, particularly the oversimplified mantra that two thirds of sons of convicted fathers will be convicted

themselves, have entered into professional and popular culture, and have influenced public perceptions about the dangerousness of prisoners' families. There is evidence in my research that some of these attitudes and fears were shared by some of the children and families I interviewed, and also by a small minority of schools who were afraid of reputational damage if they accepted responsibility for prisoners' children. These were unintended consequences. Murray has criticised the UK government's punitive penal policies (Murray, 2007). The authors' avowed intention was to advocate evidenced interventions to support prisoners' families and to reduce intergenerational crime (Murray, 2007; Farrington et al, 2009).

The Texas intergenerational study (Foster & Hagan, 2007) found evidence of (rather different) adverse impacts of paternal imprisonment, on children's transitions from adolescence to adulthood, educational detainment and social exclusion. Their focus included the impact of fathers' imprisonment on housing, health and children's political participation. The effects of fathers' imprisonment were found to be generic for sons and daughters. Daughters of imprisoned fathers were found to be at special risk of abuse and neglect by non-biological father figures and through homelessness. The authors note that single parents with a partner in prison may simply have less money and less time for their children. They emphasise that parental incarceration disrupts the process by which children master developmental tasks.

Families with an imprisoned parent can be concerned that children may follow the imprisoned parent's example. Students taking part in supportive group work for children of prisoners in Los Angeles (Lopez & Baht, 2007) raised fears about being perceived as "bad" like their parent in jail. Miller (2007) reported that incarceration could become an expectation and part of the experience of African American families

in the USA; and that youths with parents in the correctional system can potentially become desensitised to criminality. These young people may feel that they are destined to follow the criminal paths of their parents, and can blame themselves for their parent's incarceration, reinforced by stigmatisation processes.

Other longitudinal research, Phillips et al (2006), USA and Kinner et al (2007), Australia, both using large-scale samples, placed more weight on socio-economic factors than on parental imprisonment as probable causes of problem behaviours in children of prisoners. Phillips et al (2006) noted the adverse economic repercussions of even brief arrests on families. They identified children whose parents become involved in the criminal justice service as an 'at risk' group; however the most prevalent risks impacting on these children were parental substance misuse (74%), mental ill health (42%) and lack of education. The authors emphasise that children of prisoners are at risk of economic adversity and family instability, leading to increased likelihood of children's emotional and behavioural problems.

Kinner et al's (2007) study was based on a large Australian birth cohort recruited in the early 1980's. The authors found that paternal imprisonment was associated with maternal reports of increased child internalising and externalising behaviours, and alcohol and tobacco use at age 14. However these factors were less significant than socio-economic status, maternal mental health and substance use, parenting style and family adjustment. The authors conclude that the association between parental arrest and imprisonment and adverse outcomes in adolescence is accounted for by well established social and familial risk factors.

The authors also identified some beneficial outcomes from paternal imprisonment. A possible explanation based on their literature review was that paternal incarceration could be less problematic than exposure to paternal modelling of anti-social

behaviour during childhood, particularly for boys; so that for children whose father is regularly involved in anti-social behaviour, his imprisonment may be the lesser of two evils. Arditti et al (2003) noted that about a third of the care-givers in their study, visiting an incarcerated family member, commented on the benefits of imprisonment, including tackling drug or alcohol addiction, and a small number of families referred to improved family functioning related to enhanced communication through weekly visits.

While the CSDD thoroughly explored the transmission of inter-generational crime, more recent studies, using larger population samples, have broadened the agenda to acknowledge the connections between parental imprisonment and societal disadvantage, mental health, substance misuse and educational deficits, and recognition of potential benefits for some children of the removal of delinquent role models through incarceration. These wider perspectives illuminate the challenges faced by many of the families whom I interviewed.

2.6 *Gender and gender differences*

Much the clearest difference between the impact of paternal and maternal imprisonment is that most children whose father is in prison, in the UK and also in the USA, are looked after by their mother, while only a small minority of children whose mothers are in prison are looked after by their fathers; most are cared for by grandparents, other relatives or in foster homes (see, for example, Dallaire, 2007).

Previous research has found few definitive differences between the experiences of boys and girls. Parke & Clarke-Stewart (2001), reviewing research in the USA, conclude that evidence about differential impacts of imprisonment on boys and girls is unclear, although boys appeared more likely to demonstrate externalising problem

behaviours, and girls more internalising behaviours, such as depression and anxiety. Rutter's (2007) review of resilience outcomes did not identify gender as a key variable. Main findings from the CSDD (Farrington et al, 2009; Murray & Farrington, 2005) and some related studies, as noted above, highlighted the increased vulnerability of boys (rather than girls) with fathers in prison to anti-social behaviour and delinquency. However, Besemer et al's (2011) results in Holland revealed no significant difference between the impact of maternal compared to paternal imprisonment on children's offending.

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1980) has strongly asserted the damaging impact of children being separated from their mothers, with high risks for their future development, including involvement in criminal activities. Juby and Farrington's (2001) research, using evidence from the CSDD cohort, reinforces the damaging impact of maternal imprisonment for children. They found that boys whose mothers were in prison were more likely to be delinquent than boys with their fathers in prison; and that boys from disrupted families living with their mothers had similar (low) delinquency rates compared to boys from intact harmonious families. Living continuously in a lone mother family following the father's death predicted lowest delinquency rates. They considered that their evidence supported Bowlby's emphasis on the damaging impact of maternal separation for children, and on their behaviour. Their view was that paternal loss was less damaging than maternal loss. However, the authors noted that boys separated from a criminal parent, either a father or a mother, were more delinquent than boys not separated from a criminal parent. Their evidence showed that delinquency rates for boys not with their mothers were very high, indicating that absence of a mother often led to family instability.

Some caution is needed in interpreting these findings. In the 1960's when the boys in the CSDD cohort were young, mothers would usually have taken the major role in

child-rearing. Boys living continuously with their fathers were more than three times at greater risk of juvenile conviction, compared with those continuously cared for by mothers. The level of involvement of fathers in caring for children has increased in the last twenty years, and it may be that contemporary fathers could provide more protection and more stability for children. Nonetheless, the lasting impact of Juby and Farrington's research is to reinforce the vulnerability of children, and particularly boys, separated by imprisonment from their mothers.

There is further supportive evidence. Dallaire (2007) drawing on evidence about longer term outcomes of prisoners in USA prisons, found that incarcerated mothers were two and a half times more likely to have adult children imprisoned than incarcerated fathers. She concluded that the key risk factor (out of many, including the mothers' histories of mental illness, sexual abuse and drug misuse) for children was disrupted attachment relationships with incarcerated mothers. Dallaire & Wilson (2010), in a small scale study based in a medium security (USA) jail, found more severe impacts for children with a mother than for those with a father in prison. Poehlmann's (2005) study evidenced severe trauma of younger children separated from imprisoned mothers.

Turning to the impact of paternal imprisonment on children, Boswell (2002) found that most children expressed feelings of sadness or distress about their father's imprisonment. (One five year old girl said, poignantly: *I feel sad, my mum does the shouting now. My dad used to do it.* (p19)). Fahmy and Berman (2012), analysing the Swedish cohort in the COPING study, found that girls who had had close prior relationships with their fathers experienced severe loss when their fathers were imprisoned.

In their seminal research based in a Kentucky prison, Fritsch & Burkhead (1981) concluded that the absence of a father in prison correlated with child 'acting out' behaviour; while the absence of a mother in prison correlated with child 'acting in' behaviour. Children's behaviour followed this pattern only for children who had been told their parents were in prison. From the survey, children with a father in prison displayed more discipline problems, while children with a mother in prison had more emotional problems, including nightmares. The logical link is that the absent father was not available to discipline the children; and the absent mother was not available to nurture and provide emotional support. The authors state that sex, age and race of the children made little difference to their findings; most of the imprisoned parents (64/91, 70%) were African American.

Fritsch and Burkhead's findings are plausible, and subsequent researchers, including Joyce Arditti in her generally impressive recent review of the impact of parental incarceration on family life (Arditti, 2012), have broadly endorsed the differential impacts of paternal and maternal imprisonment asserted by the authors. However, they themselves acknowledge that fathers and mothers in their sample report problems in those areas where they traditionally accept major responsibility for child rearing: behaviour and discipline for fathers, and emotional development for mothers. Fathers may not have been looking for signs of emotional disturbance, such as nightmares or day dreaming, and mothers may have been less inquisitive about children's behaviour problems, and these factors may partly account for differences in their perceptions. The authors noted that parents reported more problems when they were in closer contact with their children, including by telephone. Here again, parents may have asked more questions about their traditional areas of responsibility, and found "evidence" to reinforce their concerns. There was no independent evidence from the children's homes to verify that the problems imprisoned

parents reported actually existed; and these quantitative findings were not subjected to statistical significance testing.

Fritsch and Burkhead's findings were based solely on the views of imprisoned parents, and were not confirmed by evidence from care giving parents or by their children. Fahmy & Berman (2012), drew on evidence from children, parents/carers and imprisoned parents, and found that children's (mainly girls') reactions to paternal imprisonment included both 'acting in' and 'acting out' behaviour. This suggests that the dichotomy between the two types of behaviour in Fritsch and Burkhead's research may have been over-emphasised, and that children may be more likely to demonstrate a range of behaviours at different times.

Kroll (1994) speculated that boys whose parents had divorced or separated may be more vulnerable to the effects of separation, and more likely to hide their feelings or express them in physically dramatic ways. Children may stay closer to their mothers because they continue to live with them, as is usually the case for children with imprisoned parents. For boys, loss of the same sex parent may have a greater impact. Kroll considered that girls were better at expressing their feelings and talking to people about them, although problems could re-emerge for older girls in adult relationships.

Mullender et al (2002) found that gender was not a significant variable for the impact of domestic violence on children. They found no evidence that 'acting in' (withdrawn behaviour) and 'acting out' (behaviour problems) were gender specific. However, the authors did find that while girls grew to appreciate the dangers and complexities of domestic violence, boys' attitudes towards male violence seemed to harden throughout secondary school.

2.7 Parenting styles and family support

The concept of “good enough” parenting, attributed to Winnicott (1964), has emphasised parents meeting all children’s basic needs, and providing emotional warmth, consistency and commitment, while recognising that expecting perfection of parents is unrealistic (Harris & White, 2013). Achieving a clear definition of “good enough parenting” has proved difficult: professionals have found it easier to recognise “good” and “poor” parenting (Taylor et al, 2009). Authoritative parenting (Baumrind, 1991, and Darling, 1999, both cited in Frost (2011, pp.84 & 85)) combines control and boundary setting, and responsiveness to children’s needs, (Baumrind) and expecting children to be assertive, socially responsible and co-operative (Darling).

Parenting cannot be viewed in isolation from environmental contexts of poverty and disadvantage (Ghate & Neal, 2002). Poor parents, including single parents and parents with large families, experience more physical and mental health problems than adults in the wider population, associated with multiple stress factors and cumulative disadvantage. Most of them are resourceful and self sufficient, and positive about their local community and support networks. Family support services need to ensure that parents feel respected, listened to, and in control (p. 251).

Support can be a negative concept if it involves interference, or loss of privacy and confidentiality (p. 257).

2.8 Families with imprisoned parents

A lack of reciprocity and dependency frequently characterises imprisoned parents’ relationships with their partners. Because of their enhanced responsibilities parents/carers have less opportunity to develop other social networks (Christian et al,

2006). Families with an imprisoned parent frequently experience financial hardship and poverty, both through loss of income and increased costs (Phillips et al, 2006; Chui, 2010; Arditti et al, 2003). Arditti et al (2003) conceptualised parental imprisonment as an outcome of poverty and as a contributor to financial adversity. Most participants in their study were financially worse off following imprisonment and many regularly sent considerable sums of money to their imprisoned partner. Deteriorating health following their partner's incarceration was reported by nearly half of them, and a quarter reported that their children's health had declined as well. Prison related family difficulties included emotional stress, parenting strain, work/family conflict and concerns about children, typified as "... *no peace, no break, no patience, and no help*" (p. 200). Prison visiting could be psychologically and physically demanding for both children and adults.

Codd (2007) argued that families of prisoners should be supported in their own right, not because of their role in reintegrating and resettling the imprisoned parent, important though this is. (Prisoners in the UK receiving a single visit family have been found to be far less (39%) likely to re-offend than those who received no visits (May et al, 2008)). Codd has highlighted the costs of maintaining contact with imprisoned parents in the UK, and the likelihood of families experiencing social stigma and hostility. During visits families enter "*liminal space*" (Codd, p. 257), in which they are not entirely prisoners, but not entirely free either; a concept developed by Comfort (2008, p. 64). She observed how mothers' personal allegiance to their partner sullied women with the stigma of the offender leading to "*.....the secondary prisonisation of prisoners' families.... affecting their social lives, routines, priorities,... deprivation of liberty, goods, services, heterosexual relationships, autonomy and security*" (p.29). Prison could also provide women with a safe haven, and a respite from men's destructive and abusive behaviours. Arditti (2012) characterised prison visitation as, paradoxically, providing a "*...context for (both) connection and*

emotional pain” (p.119), awakening traumatic memories and coming with “...*high economic emotional, and social opportunity costs*” (p. 139).

Clopton & East (2008) found that children were excitable or hyperactive before prison visits; they adjusted fairly quickly and most children were reassured about the imprisoned parent's well-being. The benefits for families from well organised visits in the UK, including Family Days where children can spend much more time with their imprisoned parent in a relaxed atmosphere, are unmistakeable. Family Days proved particularly valuable in women's prisons which may be a long distance from prisoners' families homes (Manby et al, 2013).

Fahmy & Berman (2012) describe the important role of the free parent as gatekeeper for their children to access their imprisoned parent. Nesmith & Ruhland (2008) found that female care-givers either nurtured or inhibited children's relationships with the imprisoned parent; and that gate-keeping could be protective of children's interests. Caregivers had to interpret the imprisoned parents' behaviour, or help the child communicate with them.

I have argued elsewhere (Manby et al, 2014) that children of prisoners' ability to cope with their parent's absence is influenced by how this is talked about in their families. Parents/carers have to re-appraise the role and status of the imprisoned parent, which may stay the same or, more frequently, be reduced. They then have to develop a policy, which may be more open or more closed, about how to deal with parental imprisonment outside their family. Children benefit from open discussion within their family; and they face additional dilemmas where parents/carers struggle to deal with the stigma of their partner being in prison.

2.9 *Imprisoned mothers*

The tone of much research about imprisoned mothers has been fairly optimistic. Their experiences have been explored in depth by Kathy Boudin (USA, 1998), a trained therapist who had been imprisoned for many years herself. Imprisoned mothers needed to recognise their own emotions, including their guilt, shame and grief, before they could consider and respond to their children's feelings. Children needed to be able to learn that their imprisoned mother was capable of both good and bad actions. Boudin reflected that women were able to redirect their lives from prison, and that being able to be truthful with children helped build trust.

Motherhood can carry high status in prison (Sharmai & Kochal, 2008; Moe & Ferraro, 2006). Sharmai & Kochal found that motherhood provided imprisoned women with a defence against insanity, although one of their interviewees explained: *"I didn't feel like a mother ... I couldn't do the things mothers do"*. Motherhood could be a source of hope and change, but also of guilt and self blame. Prison could provide imprisoned mothers with a nurturing experience of positive parenting and of gaining control. Women studied by Moe & Ferraro were mainly poor, from ethnic minority backgrounds and at high risk of violence, drug addiction and prostitution.

Nonetheless, they saw themselves as devoted to their children, and in their role as mothers, valued members of society. Like Sharmai & Kochal, Moe et al described motherhood as a motivating factor helping imprisoned mothers to tackle their drug addictions. Prison provided time for future planning (Moe et al), and prison regimes could enable change (Sharmai & Kochal).

Imprisoned mothers experience stress related to loss of maternal identity, separation from their children, and about how to guide and discipline them; and, importantly, they may find it easier to maintain models of themselves as loving and attached

parents than as responsible and competent ones (Houck & Loper, 2002). In a five year follow up study of female imprisoned parents, most of whom had either committed crimes against persons or homicide, Martin (1997) found evidence of mothers' tenacious contact with their children. Five years after release from prison, two-thirds of them were the primary and highly involved parents of at least one of their children; while others longed to be mothers but found the difficulties too great.

Separation from their children has been seen as the most damaging aspect of women's imprisonment (Arditti, 2012). Most imprisoned mothers demonstrate a high degree of maternal behaviours, and concern about the effect of imprisonment on their children's social and emotional development (Kazura, 2000). Baunach (1985) had found that imprisoned mothers experienced guilt about their drug use and a tendency to be dependant on their children, a characteristic noted also by Boudin (1998). Baunach's mothers were over-protective of their children, and very accepting of their behaviours.

Some evidence has been found that enhanced levels of contact between mothers and children is associated with children displaying less anger, fewer behaviour problems and lower levels of frustration and anxiety. (Snyder et al, 2002). Contact visits can provide opportunities for imprisoned mothers to develop positive relationships with their children (Snyder, 2009). Higher levels of contact can also reduce parenting stress (Tuerk & Loper, 2006). The same authors also found evidence that imprisoned parents writing letters to children improves attachment and enhances a sense of parental competence. Kazura (2000) found that mothers showed more concerns than fathers about how to parent from a distance, improve their communication skills, and receive post release counselling. The support needs of imprisoned mothers in the UK have been found to be very high, including ensuring

their inclusion in future plans for their children, maintaining contact with their families and liaising with statutory agencies (Manby et al, 2013).

2.10 *Imprisoned fathers*

Although Hairston (1998) observed that neither imprisonment nor engagement in illegal activities is synonymous with being a bad parent in the eyes of prisoners' children and families, and asserted (2002) that imprisoned fathers can contribute to their children's lives, the tone of much research about imprisoned fathers has been more pessimistic. Children may fear that their imprisoned fathers are lost, or dead; and fatherhood becomes displaced or routinised, and fathers "... *face a type of social and cultural limbo*" (Roy, 2005). Fatherhood during imprisonment has been described as "*dormant*" and associated with powerlessness and dependence (on children's mothers) (Arditti et al, 2005). Fathers become "*prisonised*" and mirror the norms and values of the prison environment. The authors found evidence of mothers discouraging fathers' contact with their children, as this could be associated with stigma, emotional pain and ambiguity. Although fathers could provide emotional support for their children, they could play little role in disciplining them.

Clarke et al (2005), whose research was in English prisons, also found that prison overwhelmed active fathering and diminished paternal identity. Some fathers distanced themselves from their children because of the punishment and shame of being in prison, and couple relationships deteriorated. Men could feel outsiders in their relations with their families, and experienced the strain of "*taking and not giving*" (p. 230). A positive relationship with the children's mother was critical for fathers' access to children. Nonetheless, about a third of the fathers interviewed felt that they were good fathers, benefitting from a respite from drug and alcohol abuse, and with time for reflection. Young fathers in the UK have shown positive attitudes towards

parent education training; and considered that contact with their children helped them most in their role as parents (Meek, 2007).

Tripp (2009), cited in Arditti (2012, pp74 & 75), provides a compelling analysis of changes in the identity of fathers in prison. Their pre-prison identities fade, and are replaced by inmate identities, characterised by criminal thinking and ideation and exaggerated masculinity. Imprisoned fathers experience “*feelings of distress, helplessness and a profound lack of control*” (p.76). They can lose confidence in their role and shift to the margins of their family, although face to face contact with their children and co-operative relations with their children’s mothers can help them to stay involved as fathers. Some mothers may be reluctant to relinquish familial responsibility and may validate their own parenting identity as more important than the role of fathers (Arditti, p. 86). Imprisoned fathers may think of themselves, either in the past or the future, as “*dedicated family men*” (p. 79) and may adopt a “*redemptive script (involving) a wilful decision to break with the past*” (p.91). Arditti posits that imprisoned fathers may frequently have had histories of authoritarian parenting themselves, and that this, combined with hyper-masculine inmate identities may it difficult for them to find a new civic identity and acceptable ways of resuming fatherhood on their release (pp 90 & 91).

2.11 Recent studies focussing on children of prisoners’ experiences

Children’s experience of having a parent in prison has been explored in previous qualitative research studies (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Bocknek et al, 2009; Lösel et al, 2011; and Steinhoff & Berman, 2012). Steinhoff & Berman found that mothers of children with imprisoned fathers commented on children’s sadness, introversion and aggression. Those with close relationships with their fathers before their imprisonment felt abandoned and insecure and experienced disturbance in

attachment subsequently. The authors contrasted children's stressful experiences, which included sleep disturbances, depression and sadness, with the maturing aspects of parental imprisonment for children through gaining new insights. Children coped with parental imprisonment particularly through talking to friends and family, and receiving support from school, viewing the future positively, and perceiving parental imprisonment as a transient problem.

Children interviewed by Nesmith & Ruhland were mainly African/American or Native/American; nearly all of them had their father in prison and most never visited them. They appeared resilient at interview and spoke positively about their lives and their families; they seemed to be doing well at school with few reports of behaviour problems or delinquency. The authors found that children's resilience was evident through their participation in sports or theatre, which improved their self-confidence. Lösel et al, in their research in East Anglia, found that older young people who played a supportive role looking after younger siblings in their families experienced less anxiety; and that high frequency of contact and quality of communication between father and family during imprisonment predicted positive resettlement outcomes.

Overall, these studies reinforced findings about children's vulnerability. Lösel et al described "*... a sense of fragility about the well-being of most of the children and young people interviewed. Their fathers often represented security and safety in their lives and their absence provoked feelings of anxiety, confusion and anger*" (p. 57). The absence of a father figure coincided with "*....a precariousness about the direction of their lives*" (p. 52); their school experiences were unsettled and their behaviour volatile.

Children in Nesmith & Ruhland's study demonstrated awareness of the needs of both their care giving and imprisoned parents. These children wanted to protect and support their imprisoned parent and to be assured that their needs were being met. They wanted active relationships with them, although they had conflicting emotions about violent fathers. They struggled with isolation, anger and worry, related directly or indirectly to their father's imprisonment. Children in Bocknek et al's study, who were mainly African American or Hispanic, also seemed isolated, and described troubled relationships with other children. A few were successful at school, but most were not. They avoided other people and preferred keeping things to themselves, even where they had close relationships with their siblings or their mother. Some felt to blame for not stopping violence leading to imprisonment, and some imagined having someone to talk to at a deep level about their situation. The children had survived ambiguous loss, and were more likely to internalise stress because of lack of clear social support for grief (Bocknek et al, 2009, p330).

Two USA studies of older children of prisoners confirmed the prevalence of school and behaviour problems. Amongst the 9-14 year old, mainly African-American, children of incarcerated addict mothers studied by Hanlon et al (2004), while most had coped well, avoiding substance use and deviant lifestyles, a large majority had experienced school problems. Half of them had been suspended and a third had been involved in multiple fights. Risk factors included absence of fathers and father figures, and delinquency prone peer associates. Girls had better outcomes than boys as regards delinquent activity and school problems. For most of the children, mother surrogates (usually grandmothers or other family members) had functioned for many years as primary care givers prior to the incarceration of birth mothers.

Trice & Brewster (2004) found that both boys and girls were equally damaged, in their study of adolescents (aged 13-20) with mothers in prison. The authors found

that these adolescents were much more likely to be out of school than their best friends, and also more likely to be suspended and failing classes. Maternal drug use was a negative indicator for school problems and delinquent behaviour. On the other hand, frequent communication with their imprisoned mothers predicted better outcomes for these children. The intellectual ability and educational attainment of incarcerated mothers appeared to be protective factors for them.

The standpoint of participants influences research findings. Hanlon et al's research is more optimistic and Trice and Brewster's more pessimistic. Hanlon et al based their conclusions exclusively on children's reports, and children may have been more likely to understate their delinquent behaviour and school based problems. Trice and Brewster's data comprised surveys completed by imprisoned mothers and children's guardians, and these parental figures may have been more likely to view children's behaviour more critically.

The tone of these research studies varied widely. Nesmith and Ruhland and Hanlon et al were more positive about the resilience of children of prisoners. Hanlon et al acknowledged that their stereotypes and expectations that the children would be especially vulnerable were not borne out by their findings. Fahmy and Berman, Bocknek et al, and Losel et al placed more emphasis on trauma and psychological problems experienced by children of prisoners. Differences in the impact of parental imprisonment on boys and girls are mentioned only fleetingly (Hanlon et al, Losel et al, and Trice and Brewster), or not at all (Fahmy and Berman, Nesmith and Ruhland, and Bocknek et al). In another recent USA qualitative study of more than a hundred children of imprisoned mothers, the author makes no attempt to probe the different reactions of boys and girls to maternal incarceration (Siegel, 2011). Losel et al noted that a small number of children found respite and reduction in stress in their fathers' absence.

2.12 COPING research

Most children surveyed (n =737) across the four countries (Germany, Romania, Sweden and the UK) had some contact with their imprisoned parent. About half of these children identified bad effects, related for example to feelings, behaviour and money, of parental imprisonment. This compared to one fifth of these children who identified good effects from parental imprisonment, related to feelings, spare time, family relations and home. Around three-quarters of the children said they had received some kind of help, related to feelings, school, behaviour, family relations and home. Children rated money, school and their homes as their highest needs, whereas parents rated prison visits, strengthening family relationships, and help with homework as most important (Jones & Wainaina-Wozna, 2013, p. 443).

The four countries conceptualised needs differently (p. 450). Money was a higher concern for Romanian and German children than for those in Sweden and the UK. For Romanian children, their highest need was eating well enough (80%), and then basic body care (77.6%). Information and support needs for children were rated as more important by parents in Sweden. Needing help with how they were feeling was rated highest for Swedish children (72%), followed by Germany (56%), the UK (44%) and then Romania (19%) (p. 450).

Less stigma is attached to services for children of prisoners and families in Sweden. A linked finding was that Sweden seemed more at ease about identifying and responding to a wider range of needs of children of prisoners than the other countries. Most children with imprisoned parents in Sweden received some form of support from school (except where the school had not been informed), from their class teacher for younger children, and from a school counsellor or school nurse for older

children. The highest number of reports about bullying were for the UK, and the lowest in Sweden. Self-stigma was a concern for families in Germany.

More services for families of prisoners were provided, mainly by NGOs, in Germany, Sweden and the UK than in Romania. In the UK most services were provided by unqualified support workers (44%) and volunteers (52%). Professionals, including social workers, psychologists and social pedagogues, played a greater role in service provision in Germany and Sweden. More children (two thirds) surveyed in Germany and Sweden had spoken to or contacted someone about their situation than in the UK (one third) and Romania (one fifth).

COPING had a child centred and child focused approach and recognised the role of imprisoned parents, including fathers, as active agents in promoting children's welfare. Parents/carers and extended family members were able to provide good enough care for children. Children demonstrated much resilience, although many were shocked and traumatised when their parent was imprisoned. Protective factors included children having a stable and continuing relationship with a parent or carer; and children being given enough information to understand what was happening. Early contact with the imprisoned parent was usually of critical importance for children's well-being. School gave children opportunities to achieve, social contact with peers, and for some, support from trusted staff. Parents recognised how parental imprisonment impacted differently on children in their families. Conflict within families frequently stemmed from discovery of the offence; from drug and alcohol issues, and from loss of income following imprisonment. Parents/carers developed a wide range of strategies regarding information sharing. Disclosure about the imprisoned parent could be *"complete, partial, misleading, confused or sometimes untruthful"* (Jones & Wainaina-Wozna, p. 318).

2.13 *Capacity of schools to support children of prisoners*

Research findings about school support and the impact of parental imprisonment on school performance for children of prisoners have been divergent. Parental imprisonment is known to be linked to enhanced risks for children (Murray & Farrington, 2005, Phillips et al, 2006), including risks to children's education and academic performance (Dallaire et al, 2010; Chui, 2010). A high proportion of children with imprisoned mothers in Siegel's (2011) study stopped attending school, and more than a quarter fell back at least one grade. However, Nesmith & Ruhland (2008) found that most children in their study did well at school; and Cho (2009) identified positive grade retention and educational progress amongst elementary school children whose mothers were in prison in Chicago, possibly attributable to teacher or caregiver (mostly grandparent) encouragement for these children. In Dallaire et al's (2010) research, teachers were reported to have found that children of imprisoned parents showed more academic related problem behaviours than other students, and teachers had higher expectations for competency for female than male students. Gabel and Shindeldecker (1993) found that boys whose fathers had been incarcerated received higher teacher ratings than other children for delinquency and aggressive behaviour. The possibility that teachers' views reported in these two studies, strongly criticized by Arditti (2012), may have been prejudiced against prisoners' children should not be discounted.

Previous research has found differing views about the potential for schools to support children of prisoners, who are one group amongst many who may need additional support. Lopez & Baht (2007) describe well developed group work support for children of prisoners in middle grade schools in Los Angeles. In the UK, Action for Children (Frankel, 2006), has urged teachers to support children of prisoners, and school-based training has been provided by the Ormiston Trust in East Anglia.

Frankel quotes a head teacher in East London whose school had a significant proportion of children with a parent in prison, who stressed that teachers are educators first and social workers a distant second. Her philosophy was to encourage children to leave their problems at the school gate, although counselling was available where needed.

Morgan et al (2011) in their small scale study, about school support for children aged 9-13 with a father in prison in the South-West of England, commended support provided by primary schools but had concerns about the level of support available from secondary schools, and found that prisoners' children needed more support at the point of transition between the two. Children of prisoners were often hidden at school; they displayed behavioural problems; their caring responsibilities increased at home; and their problems continued after their father's release. Schools generally had little access to information about the impact of parental imprisonment on children. The authors argued from a children's rights perspective that children of prisoners should be offered school support whether or not they appeared to be at risk. Their proposals included extending schools' responsibilities to support children of prisoners to the same level required as looked after children, including more help being provided for children of prisoners who had to take on additional care responsibilities, and after their parent was released from prison.

O'Keeffe (2013) found evidence from Head teachers of primary schools in the North West of England that schools were well placed to help children of male prisoners to adjust while still encouraging their academic and social development, if they were trusted by families to help, and if school staff had sufficient training. Some children needed more specialist counselling than schools could provide. Referral routes to schools were unclear, and children could remain invisible. Parents had less compunction about talking to schools in areas where parental imprisonment was not

uncommon, and more concerns in schools serving smaller communities where their situation could stand out and attract more comment. The Head teachers' view was that children's behaviour visibly changed when their fathers were imprisoned: some became worried or withdrawn; others became more respectful to their mothers and other adults.

Barnardo's (Gill & Morgan, Eds., 2013) have argued strongly for schools to understand the impact of parental imprisonment on children and to provide children of prisoners with as much support as possible, encouraging parents to share information about parental imprisonment with schools. Schools cannot help children of prisoners unless they are informed, and they may face difficult dilemmas if they are aware of children with a parent in prison, but have not been notified or asked for support by parents. Children's rights to consent to schools being notified add a further layer of complexity; children may have concerns that teachers' reactions to them may be prejudiced because of parental criminality.

2.14 *Children experiencing other kinds of loss*

Children of prisoners are a discrete group with shared experiences which span diverse cultures. In this last section the research viewpoint is broadened to include children's reaction to other kinds of loss and trauma, including parental separation and divorce, domestic violence, and coping with HIV/AIDS, in their family. These groups of children provide valuable comparisons with the experiences of children of prisoners. Children facing other unwelcome and harsh experiences have to adjust and find sources of support within and outside their families. The stigma attaching to children of prisoners, for example, is not unique and not necessarily more severe than stigma experienced by children whose parents have HIV/AIDS. Children of prisoners' exposure to violence may be less extreme than that experienced by

children facing domestic violence. As well, children of prisoners may face multiple losses including parental violence, relationship breakdown and divorce.

Wade & Smart (2002), exploring the experiences of children who had experienced parental separation or divorce, found that children appreciated sympathy and advice and comfort from other children. Many children valued talking to a friend as this could help cheer them up and forget their worries. Being able to choose the person they confided in was particularly important for them. The authors recommended that teachers could do more to offer a listening ear and emotional support for these children, opening up access to welfare services outside school. Their research suggested that children can often handle family transitions without outside intervention: *“The support of parents, close family and friends can be all they need to manage their initial upset”*. Children are able to adjust, exemplifying Masten’s (2001) concept of the “ordinariness of resilience”

Kroll (1994) found that parental conflict rather than their separation impacted crucially on children whose parents divorced. These children worried about the welfare of the departed parent. Disciplining children could become muddled and inconsistent. Children of imprisoned parents may also find that feuds between parents are equally distressing as parental imprisonment. These children frequently demonstrate heightened concern about their absent parent; and they can lose direction, particularly boys looked after by their mothers, because their imprisoned father is not available to provide guidance and control.

Like Wade & Smart (2002), Mullender et al (2002), found that in families experiencing domestic violence children preferred informal to formal support; friends were the most likely confidants for both sexes (more so for girls), especially teenagers. Parents and grandparents came next. Some children were strengthened by their

very harsh experiences, echoing Rutter (1987). Children needed clear explanations when they were forced to move home. They needed to experience safety and to have someone to talk to. Older children seemed to have sustained less damage, and had a greater sense of responsibility towards their mother and their siblings. Statutory services seemed less helpful to children than family, friends and specialist projects. Families who coped least well had experienced multiple moves, violence in their families had been long lasting, and mothers had been worn down. Siblings and grandparents provided crucial support. Many children demonstrated resilience and recovered once away from the scene of violence.

Although the authors found important differences between groups of children, for example girls were more likely to condemn and boys more likely to condone their father's violence, they emphasised the uniqueness of each child's experience. Their observation that *"....the richness and detail of qualitative data provides us with windows into the experiences of others, (but) it also warns us against creating models and stereotypes that flatten out the complexity of lived experience"* (p.92) resonates strongly with my experience of listening to and analysing the accounts of prisoners' children.

In her study of children living with mentally ill parents, Aldridge (2006) found that caring (for parents) could reinforce bonds between children and parents; and that children's support needs were relatively modest, and capable of being met by young carers' projects. Her insights are relevant to children with similar responsibilities in my sample.

Children with parents with HIV+ and AIDS are arguably exposed to even greater stigma than children of prisoners. This may be because AIDS, compared to parental imprisonment, is a relatively new phenomenon; because, until fairly recently,

treatment options have been limited and terminal outcomes probable, and because of prejudicial views about patients' lifestyle choices. Children of prisoners encounter some similar prejudices. There are parallels and differences between the experiences of children in both groups.

AIDS can become a toxic family secret. Even when parents become very ill, stigma and concerns to ensure privacy may cause families not to allow children to discuss the disease openly (Gossart-Walker & Murphy, USA, 2005). Stigma can *"expand from the infected person, attaching itself to those closely associated with him or her, especially family"* (p. 290). Children may assume that their actions have caused their parents' illness, in the same way that children of prisoners can imagine they are responsible for their parent's imprisonment.

Disclosure about AIDS has been described as a process, not a one-off event, and knowledge needs to be shared gradually throughout childhood (Saunders, 2012). While disclosure may cause children distress, guilt and shame, non-disclosure may reinforce stigma and required secrecy. Blasini et al (2004) found that most young people whose parents had HIV/AIDS, and almost all care-givers, considered disclosure to be a positive event. Gossart-Walker & Murphy (2005) found that losses children experienced due to HIV AIDS often came on top of violence, poverty and substance abuse, an egregious example of cumulative risk (Johnson and Waldfogel, 2002).

Stigma can dominate the lives of children in families with HIV/AIDS (Tisdall et al, 2004). Children respected their parents' wishes about disclosure and required secrecy. Those who were caretakers for their parents showed no evidence of resentment. Few children experienced support during periods of bereavement. The children (mainly teenagers) wanted to be treated as 'normal' people with 'normal'

parents and not to be criticised or discriminated against. They could be extremely cautious about sharing information with friends, although they appreciated opportunities to talk to other children with HIV+ parents. Few children in this study wanted their schools to know about their parent's HIV illness or to talk to teachers. Children's anxiety about their parent made it difficult to concentrate on school work.

Improved treatment options for HIV/AIDS sufferers and more inclusive recent legislation give grounds for some hope that the levels stigma overshadowing these children, facing daunting risks, may gradually wane. The needs of children, of both HIV/AIDS sufferers and children of prisoners, have only slowly and partially been recognised in their own right, separately from critical public views of the actions of parents. My experience suggests that schools may be one area where more progress has been made in understanding the needs of children of prisoners than for children of HIV/AIDS parents.

Children experiencing different kinds of loss have been found to be circumspect about accessing formal counselling support. Tisdall et al (2004) found that children with HIV/AIDS parents preferred social workers who provided consistency and who did not change job, who gave young people time, and talked about things of general interest, leaving the young person to decide whether to talk about worrying issues. The few children in Mullender et al's (2002) study, which focussed on the impact of domestic violence, who accessed counselling found it helpful, although it carried a risk of the young person being negatively labelled; and professionals came low on the list of people whom children wished to confide in. Rutter (1984) was cautious about the benefits of counselling, and thought that support from teachers could work best *"...at least for children with the ordinary, run of problems"* (p. 65). Wade & Smart (2002) considered that children needed to decide for themselves whether they needed a counsellor's help. They enjoyed expressing feelings through activities and

games, but were more ambivalent about talking, which could be demanding, and sometimes intensified rather than alleviated emotional pressure. The range of attitudes of children towards counselling in these studies paralleled those of children of prisoners in my sample.

2.15 *Research issues arising from the review*

The research literature from the USA, the UK and elsewhere relating to children of prisoners is already extensive. I have identified the following issues from the literature which can be explored further in my study.:

- Factors linked to children's resilience and vulnerability.
- Gender issues, both as regards the impact of paternal and maternal imprisonment; and the impact on boys and girls, which have received less attention in the literature.
- Consideration of the role and contribution of parents/carers, parenting styles and parental relationships.
- Reviewing how parental imprisonment and associated stigma is discussed with children and within families; and how families view the imprisoned parent and deal with their situation.
- Reviewing how children and families experience responses and support from schools and other agencies.
- Exploring the capacity of imprisoned parents to function as parents.
- Re-appraising the benefits alongside the damage associated with parental imprisonment

2.17 Research Questions

The main research question for the thesis has had a broad focus throughout: what is the impact of parental (both fathers' and mothers') imprisonment on children and young people, both boys and girls?. Dimensions of the main question, closely related to research issues arising from the literature review (see immediately above) include:

- How do children react and adjust, both individually and within their families, to parental imprisonment? How do children talk about parental imprisonment with their friends and at school?
- How do relationships between imprisoned parents and parents/carers and between family members impact on children?
- How do families adapt to and deal with parental imprisonment; and how is this perceived by the outside world?
- What are the roles and contributions of informal and formal networks and agencies, including schools, in supporting children and families?

The focus of the research questions has been on impacts on children, on their actions and behaviours as well as their emotions. Responses of parents to their situation have been relevant in so far as these have affected children. The research questions have also developed as interview data has been analysed, as anticipated

by Willig (2008). For example, I have become more aware of the importance of sibling support for children's well-being as the research has progressed.

Chapter Three

Methodology

In this chapter I first review aspects of the research methodology literature which have influenced me: including realist, constructivist and narrative approaches; case study research; the role of interviews; and the importance of reflexivity. The section then explores issues arising in involving children in research and my reflections on this. Next, I describe my reflexive position, and my philosophical standpoint about what can be learned from interview data. I explore the links between the COPING research project and the COPING interview framework, and the thesis. I go on to describe the research design and the conceptual framework for the thesis; and characteristics of the sample of children interviewed.

The chapter includes the development of a thematic analysis for analysing the interview data, covering analysis, triangulation, interpretation, and the development of key themes. Ethical approval and practice issues are covered. A section on the “Researcher’s Gaze” considers the significance of which family members were available to be interviewed, and the importance of the timing of the interviews. A note on terms used in the thesis ends the chapter.

3.1 *Debates about research methodology*

My approach to research methodology is eclectic. I have drawn on a broad range of ideas about how to derive meaning from interview data, and these are explored below.

3.1.1 *Realist, constructivist and narrative approaches*

I broadly share Miles & Huberman's (1998) orientation towards qualitative research. Importantly, they argue for an integrated research methodology, including both quantitative and qualitative approaches which combine counting where need be as well as using text data, in order to aid triangulation. The authors adopt a realist (although my own position is closer to a "critical realist" perspective) stance, describing social phenomena as existing not only in the mind but in the objective world. Their other helpful ideas include: qualitative data focuses on people's lived experiences; and analysis can identify regularities, connections and patterns which can contribute towards causal descriptions of forces at work (p.4). They find no clear boundary between description, explanation and causality. Their view is that qualitative analysis can go beyond exploration towards an understanding of causes; and their advice that patterns should take precedence over individual case descriptions is worth heeding. They also counsel that caution is required against interpreting events as more patterned or congruous than they are. They emphasise the importance of data display and the construction of matrices. Developing matrices depends on researcher judgements, and tables require analytic text to make their significance and meaning clear. I have been influenced by this view and have used tables to illustrate trends and patterns in my evidence.

Grieg et al (2007) identify deduction, testing a theory or hypothesis by analysing data, as the defining characteristic of a positivist/quantitative approach; whereas induction, starting by analysing data and then building theory, characterises the constructivist /qualitative stance. Their argument is that the positivist viewpoint seeks explanation, while the constructivist approach seeks understanding. From a social constructivist perspective, objectivity in research is unachievable, and research is co-constructed between interviewer and participant (Burr, 1995). Maykut & Morehouse (1994)

considered that a qualitative or phenomenological approach assumes multiple realities, and that these are socio-psychological constructions; the knower and the known are interdependent; values are intrinsic to shaping findings; and tentative explanations are possible rather than generalisations (p. 12). Interpretation is delayed during the data collection process until the researcher is able to derive arguments from an accumulation of positive examples. Discovery rather than proof characterises the qualitative approach. Their approach cautions against adopting a position of undue confidence or certainty in relation to findings from analysing qualitative data.

In approaching the task of analysing qualitative data I have also been influenced by narrative and social constructionist theories. Maykut & Morehouse (1994, p. 38) describe the narratives or stories which come out of interviews as “lived experiences”. Willig (2008) argues that story telling provides coherence and meaning to otherwise confusing and disorganised events. Stories are based on memories and can aim “....to persuade, to excuse, justify or entertain” (p. 134). Social constructionists believe that the person is constructed through language, and that personality traits are a function of social relationships (Burr, 1995). Human nature is socially constructed, and identity emerges from those discourses which are culturally available to the individual (Burr, p. 51). Social constructivism and narrative psychology are closely allied; language has a central role in the formulation of concepts of self and identity (Crossley, 2000). Crossley asserts that human experience and behaviour are meaningful, and that lives contain order and coherence which can be threatened by trauma. Normalising narratives, which play down the impact of traumatic events, can be viewed as a responsible approach to ensuring continuity of family life. Narrative tone can be optimistic or pessimistic (Crossley, p. 89). (Crossley argues, perhaps somewhat speculatively, that there is a close relationship between secure and insecure attachment of individuals and

optimistic or pessimistic narrative tone). Riessman (1994) describes narrating about the past as a universal human activity, and contends that respondents organise replies to questions into stories (p. 68). . Riessman cites Arendt who claimed that “... *all sorrows can be borne if we can put them into a story*” (Arendt, 1958, p175). Stories help to make sense of past experiences: restitution (improvement), chaos (overwhelming pessimism), and quest (developing and learning from experience) narratives, concepts derived from research exploring experience of illness, described by Gibbs (2007), have relevance to the stories and experiences of families of prisoners.

Glaser & Strauss (1967) in their formulation of grounded theory saw their data as separate from the scientific observer. More persuasively, Charmaz (2006) argued that the researcher and the research subject jointly construct a version of reality. She assumed that neither data nor theories are discovered, rather that “... *we are part of the world we study and the data we collect ... leading to an interpretative portrayal of the studied world, not an exact picture of it*” (2006, p.10). Her version of grounded theory offered “... *plausible accounts, rather than contributing verified knowledge*” (p. 149).

Willig (2008), agreeing with Charmaz, argues that category discovery depends on what the researcher is looking for. Glaser & Strauss (1967) encourage researchers to remain sensitive to theories emerging from the data, generating sufficient evidence to formulate hypotheses rather than piling up evidence to establish a proof (p. 40). They highlight the importance of producing codified procedures for analysis so that the process is transparent. Braun & Clarke (2006) argue that thematic analysis, which I used to analyse interview data, is a foundational qualitative research method which is both descriptive and interpretive. The authors describe the analytical process as recursive, moving backwards and forwards through the whole data set,

which chimes with my experience. They emphasize the researcher's active role in identifying patterns in data, and discount the possibility of themes emerging, or being discovered.

3.1.2 *Case study research*

I have also drawn on theories about case study research, which applies directly to my thesis. Grieg et al (2007) note that three perspectives (triangulation) are commonly required in case study research to improve the validity of inductive models; and that ecological validity can be enhanced by naturalistic research settings such as homes and schools. Case studies, drawing on a range of methodological approaches, are useful for obtaining rich accounts of subjects' experiences (op. cit., 2007). Willig notes that case studies are not representative, although they may yield explanations which may potentially apply to other cases. Instrumental case studies may be exemplars of a group of participants with shared issues and problems: families of prisoners could be one of these. She argues that case studies are likely to have a realist orientation, aiming to improve understanding of the subject. The researcher has a critical realist view, assuming that the focus of study is complex; participants' experience and behaviour are unlikely to be predictable or uniform. In case study research the focus is on producing an accurate account and the researcher's role should not be overstated.

Willig's observation that case studies aim to improve understanding of the phenomena being investigated accurately describes my objectives in this thesis. I would share the hope that the study may yield explanations relevant to other cases: "other cases" being other groups of children of prisoners with broadly similar characteristics, particularly children being in contact with their imprisoned parents. Children who had lost contact would need to be the subject of another case study.

The social phenomena being investigated are the effects of parental imprisonment on children. I would travel a step further than Willig, with Miles & Huberman, and suggest that one of the aims of investigation is to seek to account for events where this is possible, including providing causal descriptions where these are convincing.

Willig refers to both realist and critical realist perspectives as being characteristic of case studies. Mansoor Kazi, with whom I have worked closely, stated that: “*realism aims to address all the significant variables in social work practice*” (Kazi, 2003, p5). This seems laudable, but over ambitious. Significant variables must include the richness and variety of human perspectives, experiences, attitudes and social contexts, which are not easily reduced to measurable variables. From a qualitative perspective these experiences should be the object of study. Kazi focused on causal connections and finding out what works, for whom and under what conditions. Houston (2001) argued, as a critical realist, that the impact of interventions cannot be predicted with accuracy because of the range of social forces operating, including poverty, class and racism. Reality is multi-faceted and complex (p. 852). Post-modern constructionism regards relativities, uncertainties and contingencies as central and pervasive, undermining human agency (Houston, p848). Critical realism retains its focus on human emancipation, the root causes of social exclusion and the potential for human agency. Context, history and time shape the realist view of the world (Braun & Clarke, 2013). However, aiming to achieve an accurate understanding of events is not a hopeless task. The case study approach may be able to provide sufficiently convincing explanations to reduce the need for equivocation.

3.1.3 Interviews

Interviews have been described as “*a conversation with a purpose*” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p77). Researchers can use either a single key question to frame the interview or a more detailed interview guide/schedule. A more detailed interview guide is likely to be desirable where a number of researchers are involved, as was the case for the COPING interviews. Maykut & Morehouse argue that a more structured interview does not replace the person as the instrument of study; respondents can express their own meanings and understandings within the framework provided. There is a consensus that interviews should start with less threatening questions, focusing on experiences and behaviour, and moving on to more sensitive topics, as the person interviewed gains confidence (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Patton, 1990; Price, 2002); and this approach seems particularly relevant to introducing children gradually to the core research topics. Price considers that the management of intrusive questions is the key to successful interviewing. In my view, while manoeuvring the interviewee through the research topics is clearly possible, this technique relies on the dominant position of the interviewer, and seems to leave open the possibility that the interviewee may have been persuaded to reveal more personal information and opinion than they might have wished or anticipated. The key is ensuring that the interviewee fully understands the hardest - or most intrusive - questions they will be asked before consenting to take part.

Jordan (2006) suggests that researchers interviewing in a participant’s home are entering a private space. Their role is as an invited guest, and this may limit the amount of revelation about the participant’s circumstances which is possible or appropriate. Also, there may be less conflict within families who invite researchers into their families than amongst those who decline to be involved.

Rapley (2001) describes interviews as “*inherently social encounters*” (p303); interviewees aim to present themselves in a morally adequate light; and language is

performative, never merely a neutral means of communication. Rapley maintains that the researcher plays a key role in producing what is said during the interview. The researcher and the interviewee imbue the topic under discussion with their own meanings and perspectives. King et al (2002), drawing on an interpretive phenomenological perspective, perceive research participants as constructing a presentation of the self in the context of the interview, rather than providing simple descriptions of true experience.

3.1.4 *Reflexivity in research literature*

The role and contribution of the researcher in shaping and producing findings has been strongly attested (Charmaz, 2006; Finlay, 2008). Researchers bring their own understandings, knowledge and assumptions to the phenomenon under investigation; s/he chooses the research question, and constructs the collection, selection and interpretation of data (Finlay, 2008). Researchers should examine their reasons for choosing research questions and their attitude towards their topic (Maso, 2008). The researcher may be powerfully influenced by her/his own experience of the subject being investigated. Willig (2008) distinguishes between personal reflexivity, - how the researcher's own standpoint influences the research -, and epistemological reflexivity, which relates to how research questions, design, and methods of analysis influence what is discovered.

The significance of transference in research interviews has been highlighted (Finlay, 2008). Research participants', both children's and adults', views of the researcher may be influenced by previous relationships. Awareness of counter-transference (Gough, 2008) enables the researcher to take account of her/his feelings about participants, and these may also be influenced by past experience and relationships. Gough notes that the researcher cannot uncover the essential or private self of

research subjects, who may present different aspects of themselves in the context of research interviews. Boundaries between research and active interventions need to be carefully patrolled. Although research interviews are clearly focused on obtaining data relevant to the topic under investigation, they have similarities to more therapeutic encounters. Parton & O'Byrne (2000) observed that telling one's story and having it heard respectfully (p. 21), which can form a part of a research interview, are a necessary ingredient for change to happen in people being helped by social workers. Nicholson (2008), who undertook multiple interviews with women with post-natal depression, was aware of the possibility that research encounters could have close parallels with therapeutic interventions. Interviews allow expression of feelings and ideas in confidence, without fear of being diagnosed (p. 139), or assessed.

3.2 *Developing an approach to research with children*

My research is child-centred. This section analyses some of the main principles and methods identified in the literature for undertaking research with children.

3.2.1 *Children's rights*

Research with children aims to balance the rights of children to contribute and make their views known, with the risks involved in adult researchers encouraging children to share their experiences and opinions. The United Nations Convention on Children's Rights' assertion (1989, Article 12) that children should be able to express their views on all matters concerning them has been understood to apply to children's rights to contribute to research (Grieg et al, 2007), including social work research (Cousins & Milner, 2007). The U.K. Children Act 1989 established the right

of children to be consulted on all matters affecting them⁶. In the UK, children's right to consent has been based on the Gillick (1985) competency test, which determined that a competent child is one who fully understands what is proposed, with a presumption that a child can reach decisions on their own, and without parental involvement (Morrow & Richards, 1996). The Gillick ruling referred to issues related to health which could have life or death consequences.

Social researchers have referred to the Gillick principle to support arguments for children to have the right to consent on their own behalf to being involved in research, where hoped for benefits for children may not be realised, or only much later. Most researchers have adopted the safer position of seeking consent from children and also from parents. Risks for children involved in medical research may be justified by anticipated benefits (Knudson, 2012), but these may be much harder to predict in social research.

Research dilemmas with children arise because of unequal power relationships between children and adults, and because adults may not easily understand children's perspectives. The gap between children and adults in research studies is unsurprising: research topics are chosen mainly by adults; most research is conducted by adults; and evidence produced by children is analysed by adults. Hood et al (1996) argued for a more developmental stance, exploring children's worlds from their own point of view. Grieg et al (2007) note that caring professionals seeing children as objects of concern, or objects of study, may disempower them, and that

⁶ A telling example is provided by Bosisio (2012) undertaking research in secondary schools in Italy in 2002, who found that children wished to assert their right to express their view about which parent they should live with, in cases of separation and divorce

children should be given active rather than passive roles in the development of knowledge.

3.2.2 *Consent*

Alderson (1995), cited in Cousins & Milner (2007), has suggested, controversially, that all school age children should be assumed to be competent to consent to participate in research (with the onus being on proof of incompetence). The basic requirement is that children should be given full information about what the interview will entail. Danby and Farrell (Farrell, Ed., 2005, p.52) observed that signing their own consent for research gave children aged 5 – 11 a greater sense of responsibility. Children's capacity to protect themselves from disclosing information they might not otherwise have intended to share may be reduced where researchers seek to develop a therapeutic alliance with them (Mishna et al, 2004). Mahon et al (1996) advise that *".....it is crucial to mark the boundary between research and therapy very clearly"* (p. 151). Ireland & Holloway (1996), interviewing children suffering from asthma, advised that if children seemed uncertain about taking part, despite their parents having given permission, then interviews should not take place. The authors found evidence of parents gently coercing children to take part. Cousins & Milner (2007) also assert that children should be free to decline consent, even if this has been granted by their parent.

3.2.3 *Safety*

Consent issues are closely intertwined with considerations regarding children's safety, and these can be amplified in qualitative research settings. Obtaining qualitative data requires probing into the private thoughts and lives of the respondent.(Price, 2002). The open-ended nature of qualitative research methods gives rise to more risks for

children (Mishna et al, 2004). Consent procedures regularly include children's right to decline to answer a particular question, or to withdraw from the interview. Children may not know how to exercise these rights unless they are helped to do so.

Consent procedures usually stipulate that researchers may be unable to maintain participant confidentiality and anonymity if evidence of harm comes to their notice, an issue particularly relevant when children are research subjects. Where information about harm is disclosed, discussion with the children about the strategy they would like to be pursued is advised (Morrow & Richards, 1996).

3.2.4 Good Practice

Kortesluoma et al (2003) emphasised the importance of researchers getting to know children prior to interviews, for example by inter-acting informally with them to start with. Children need reassurance that there are no right or wrong answers to interview questions. Interview settings require careful consideration. School based or hospital settings can add to the researcher's power and status (Mishna et al, 2004). Mahon et al (1996) in their young carers' study, found that adult researcher authority presented more acute problems in one to one interviews, which seemed more appropriate for older children. Interview responses were generally less rich from younger children, and with boys. Hill et al (1996), carrying out research with primary school aged children about their emotions and well-being, found that focus groups enabled more spontaneous discussion, and allowed children to choose their level of disclosure. Hood et al (1996) observed that children were more confident being seen in pairs or groups when interviewed by adults; and also that being interviewed in their own home could present risks for children if they felt trapped into revealing matters relating to their parents, and this could make children suspicious about the research process. They found that some parents and children preferred to

maintain their home as a private place. The authors had a sociological approach, seeing children's perspectives as valid in their own right, and avoiding perceiving children as either potential victims (requiring rescue or support) or as threats (because of their behaviour).

3.2.5 *Personal reflections on interviewing children*

My experience leads me to confirm Morrow's reference to overwhelming evidence that children involved in research are "...responsive, creative and measured " when asked for their views (Morrow, p162, in Farrell (Ed.), 2005); and that children become actively involved in making sense of research encounters, as previously suggested (Westcott & Littleton, in Greene & Hogan, (Eds.), 2005). I have found that where children are treated respectfully and seriously and understand that their contribution is important, they usually enjoy taking part in research interviews. While research has been developed as an adult process, children seem happy to use their experience to contribute towards socially desirable outcomes. Mahon's observation about boys' more limited responses seems superficial; boys may express themselves more succinctly or less fluently, but their viewpoint is equally valid. I agree that the novelty and unfamiliarity of the interview process can motivate children and they can enjoy having the interviewer's undivided attention (Kortesluoma et al, 2003); and that lack of or declining motivation during interviews may signal children's withholding or withdrawing consent (Mahon et al, 2006).

My strongest convictions throughout the interviews for this research have been, (i) that children needed to understand clearly that interviews would focus on the sensitive issue of how having their parent in prison had impacted on them, emotionally as well as practically; and (ii) about the importance of power imbalances between myself and children being interviewed, not least children with learning

disabilities.⁷ Children usually trust the researcher's integrity. Older children are curious about the process and outcomes of the research. Children need help to assert their right not to answer particularly sensitive questions, and interviewers need to pay attention for signs of discomfort or stress during interviews.

3.3 *Methodology for the thesis*

3.3.1 *Reflexive position*

My position as a researcher is influenced by my background as a social worker. I try to maintain an attitude of Rogerian (Hough, 2006) unconditional positive regard for research participants; and I am influenced by the transactional analysis construct of 'adult to adult' relationships (Berne, 1964). While I am very much aware of power imbalances between researcher and participants, the researcher and the participant approach each other on a basis of equality, each bringing different areas of knowledge and expertise. Ideas of equality and respecting each other's experiences and knowledge are equally relevant for interviews with children, although here power imbalances are strikingly obvious. I am conscious of having a very privileged position as regards access to income and education. Many prisoners' families have

⁷ One example of tackling power imbalances was that when interviewing a 13 year old boy I decided to sit on the floor while the boy sat on the only chair in an otherwise unfurnished room in the house which he and his guardian (his mother's partner) had just moved into: this seemed to help the boy feel at ease. When interviewing another 13 year old boy with serious learning disabilities, my approach was to assume that he had equally as much insight into his thoughts and feelings as other children, and, although he spoke more slowly, this proved to be the case. Although he agreed to the interview being recorded I turned the tape-recorder off after a few minutes as it seemed unnecessarily intrusive.

experiences of poverty, chaos and violence. Sadness, loss and trauma are a fundamental part of people's experience. I am, however, optimistic about the possibility of people being able to help each other. As a researcher with a background in social work I try to keep a clear distinction between the role of the helping professions and the contribution of compassionate research.

As a researcher I am conscious of power, age and gender issues; and try to keep in mind how being a parent (and a grandparent) impacts on my contact and relationships with research participants.

3.3.2 Philosophical Standpoint

My philosophical standpoint, like my position on research methodology, is eclectic, and in flux, and is perhaps closest to an existential position, but also drawing on other traditions and perspectives.

Existentialism has been described as “a philosophical theory emphasising the existence of the individual person as a free and responsible agent, determining his (sic) own development” (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1988, p.338). I believe that people can take responsibility for their lives and make plans for the future: they have “intentionality” (Thomson, 1992). We construct our own values and morality. As human beings we are essentially alone, but yearn to be connected to others (Yalom, 1980). Relationships between individuals and within families matter; children are nurtured by their parents or other adults who are expected to provide conditions which encourage their growth and development.

Although I owe much to the Christian pastoral tradition in which I was brought up, I am sceptical about ideology and belief and recognise that much of the world as we

know it is socially constructed, and that language plays a significant role in this. Social constructionism, from my standpoint, understates the potential for human agency and responsibility, although George Mead acknowledged that a person, although socially constructed, could be a reflexive agentic being (Mead, 1934 cited in Smith, J, 2008) and therefore potentially capable of moral action. Although power, money and influence are grossly inequitably distributed, in my view a determinist Marxist perspective underplays the significance of individual mental processes and human capacity for resilience. Much learning is possible from literature, philosophy, religion and the study of psychology which pre-dated post-modernism, a position articulated by Yalom (1980, p12):

“...the major existential concerns have been recognised since the beginning of written thought.....Their primacy has been recognised by an unbroken stream of philosophers, theologians and poets”

In the parlour game ‘Twenty Questions’ the player is allowed to identify a dominant and a subsidiary mode for his chosen subject. My orientation towards my research topic is primarily realist, from a critical perspective, but with constructivist connections: or as critically realist as possible, and as constructionist as necessary. The quest to understand the world is worthwhile, and through qualitative methods the researcher can gain access to valuable and meaningful information about the lived experience of participants which, in my study, can improve understanding of the impact of parental imprisonment on children. While research participants’ accounts are always influenced by social contexts and may sometimes be self serving, my view is that they are also capable of providing information which bears directly on the research question. (Houston’s advice to social workers, to pay attention to people’s accounts while being alert to the effects of cognitive bias, defence mechanisms and ideology, is pertinent here (Houston, 2001). Also, while I appreciate how my own

experience and attitudes influence my relationship with the research topic, I also believe that as a researcher I am able to make a disciplined attempt to be objective and to analyse data from participants without being unduly biased by my own experience. Parton and O’Byrne (2000) wrote about the importance of the therapist maintaining “curiosity”, and this seems important also for the qualitative researcher, both about her/his own and participants’ motivation.

3.3.3 *Links between the thesis and the COPING project*

I have already outlined the remit of the COPING research in the Introduction (Chapter 1). My role in the COPING Research is described in detail in *Appendix 5*, including interviews which I completed with children and parents/carers on which this thesis is based. The appendix describes the sampling process, which aimed to achieve a balance between children with *normal*, *borderline* and *abnormal* scores on the Goodman Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), which they completed as part of the initial COPING survey

Appendix 6 provides a table indicating those participants interviewed by myself, and those interviewed by colleagues. As recorded in the table, I interviewed 20 of the 28 children, 16 boys and 4 girls; 17 of the 22 parents/carers; and all 13 of the imprisoned parents interviewed in the 22 families. I also met 7 of the 8 children interviewed by other colleagues. In two families (Cases 2 and 10), I was invited to meet the child as part of the interview, at the children’s request, to be shown objects of significance to them; and in other cases I met children with other members of the family at the start or end of interviews. For parents/carers interviewed by other researchers, I was present throughout the interview for Cases 3 and 4, and met the parent/carer in Cases 7 and 15.

3.3.4 *COPING Interview Framework*

Interviews for the 22 families followed the Interview Guides which I developed for the COPING project. This included clarification of the purpose of the interview, focusing on the impact of parental imprisonment and how this had affected the child and her/his family, and their school and social life. Consent procedures were explained, and the child's right not to answer specific questions, or to stop the interview altogether, were emphasised. The child/ren's and the parent/carer's consents were obtained prior to interviews, including consent for tape recording.⁸ Initial questions focused on family, school and social life; and then moved on to changes which had taken place since the child's parent was imprisoned. Children were asked whom they had talked to about their parent being in prison, and whether or not this was a secret. The interview also covered visits to prison and other forms of contact, and issues of support from Partners of Prisoners and from other agencies. At the end of the interview the child was asked about when their parent might be released and for their views about this; and also about their responses to the experience of being interviewed. Interviews with parents/carers and imprisoned parents also focused on the impact of parental imprisonment on children, and the interview guides used for them were based on the one used with children.

The interview guides included questions with scaled responses, for example identifying whether the child's life had been worse, the same or better since their parent had been in prison. Interviewer experiences of these questions varied. Some, including myself, found that they enabled children to think about and position their feelings and responses. Others found that they repeated questions already explored. They were used to help analyse individual interviews.

⁸ For all children, both their own and their parent/carer's consents were obtained.

The interview guide for children contained 43 questions. This amount of detail was included to try to ensure consistency between researchers, and between the four different countries. (The interview guides were translated into German, Romanian and Swedish). Advice to researchers at the start of the interview guide (see *Appendix 3*) was that it should be used flexibly, aiming to cover the key issues, but allowing children to discuss issues in their own way and to focus on the areas which concerned them most, or about which they had most experience. Children had the opportunity to be interviewed on their own, or to be accompanied by their parent/carer or another adult or a sibling.

In constructing the interview guide, particularly careful thought was given to the inclusion of Question 14, asking whether the child knew why their parent was in prison, and for how long this would be. There was concern that the question could be intrusive. I eventually decided, in consultation with colleagues, that it was important to ask whether the child knew the reason for their parent's imprisonment, as this would be likely to impact on how they dealt with their situation. My experience was that children usually knew about their parents' offences where these involved violence or notoriety. In other cases children were sometimes vague or did not show much interest. A small number of imprisoned parents whom I interviewed declined to say what their offences had been.

Interviews were targeted with individual children identified with reference to their SDQ scores. We anticipated, correctly, that in some families other children would wish to take part, out of interest, or to support their siblings. We decided to include these additional children as this would provide a wider participant group; and also because we wished to avoid children feeling excluded. Children in two families whom I interviewed (Eleanor, Case 2 and Alex, Case 19), included in the sample for the thesis, were recruited at a Family Day held in a women's prison. I met these

children there, and arranged to interview them subsequently at home. The other families were mainly recruited from prison visitor centres, with the assistance of Partners of Prisoners and other prison based NGOs, following their completion of their initial questionnaires, in which they were asked if they would like to be included in the in-depth interviews. Their families were contacted by telephone to ask if the children still wished to be interviewed. If they confirmed this, interviews were arranged.

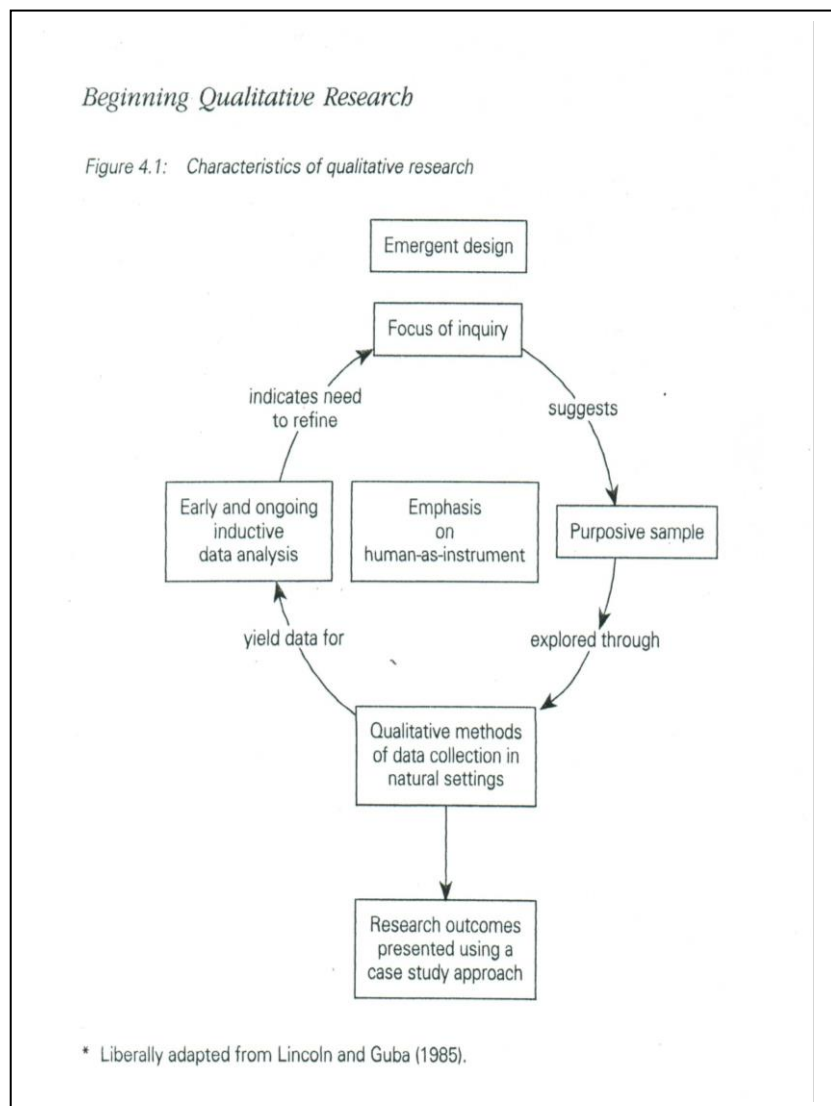
Single (ie - not repeated) interviews provided an opportunity to explore relevant issues, and important additional data was obtained from interviews with parents/carers and imprisoned parents. Interviews were all held after the initial shock of arrest and imprisonment was over. A single interview meant that there was no opportunity to compare children's reactions at different points in time. These issues are considered in more detail in the section on "*The Researcher's Gaze*" below.

3.3.5 *Research Design*

The research design for the thesis is a case study using multiple cases. In each case triangulation of data was achieved through interviews with children, their parents/carers, and imprisoned parents where possible. A case study design was chosen as this allows maximum flexibility for analysing qualitative data. A case study approach relies on the trustworthiness of the researcher (Robson, 1993, p160). The researcher needs to develop familiarity with the phenomenon studied and its setting and a multi-disciplinary approach (Miles & Huberman, 1984, cited in Robson, 1993). I learned a good deal about the prison context during the project; and had support from colleagues with psychology, criminology and social work experience. Robson notes that in multiple case studies the focus is on analytical (not statistical) generalisations.

The case study approach for the thesis is similar to that described by Maykut & Morehouse (1994, p48) analysing qualitative research.

Figure 2 “Beginning Qualitative Research”



The focus of enquiry was the impact of parental imprisonment on children, using a purposive sample (Robson, 1993, p141) of children, both boys and girls with fathers and mothers in prison. The interviews were held mainly in children’s own homes (Maykut and Morehouse’s “natural settings”). Interviews were designed to be as flexible as possible to encourage expression of children’s views. A more open

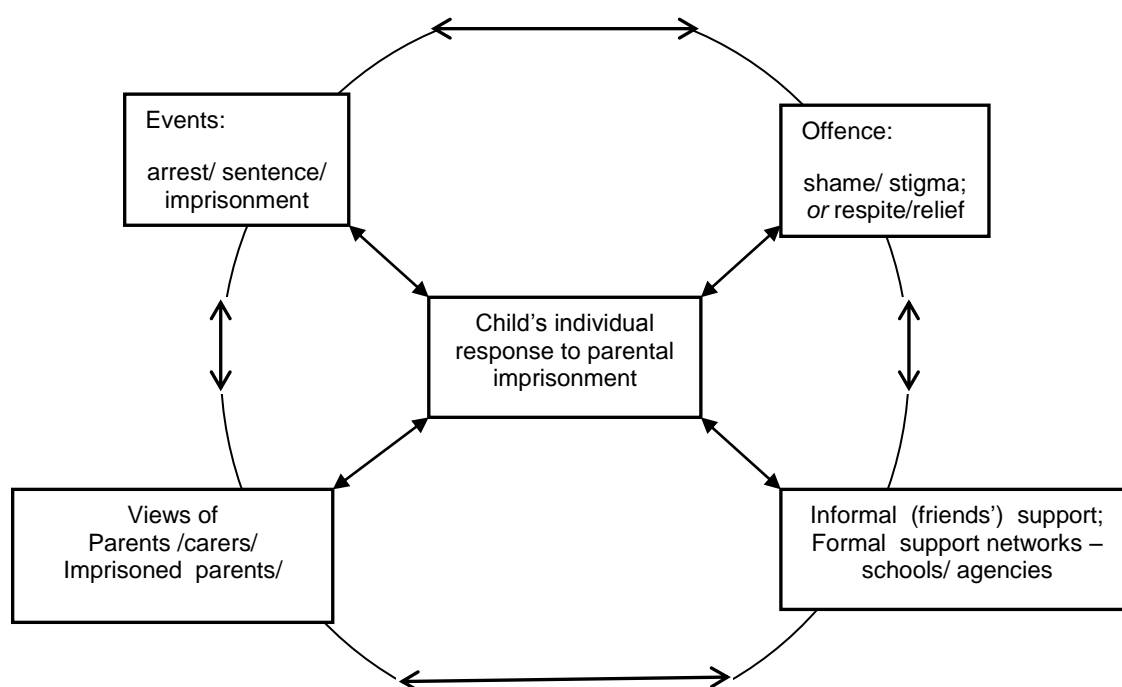
interview structure could have been possible, asking children to talk about their experiences from their own point of view without specific questions or prompts.

The interview guide included some a priori assumptions, closely related to the conceptual framework (see below, p.67). I assumed when developing this that the circumstances of the parent's arrest, the nature of their offence, and support from family and friends would all have a bearing on how the child responded to their parent's imprisonment. The interview guide attempted to adopt a position of neutrality regarding the impact of parental imprisonment, although I, and other researchers, were influenced by previous literature emphasising the mainly harmful effects of parental imprisonment and associated stigma. Children were given the opportunity to describe their reaction in either positive or negative terms: so, for example, they may have experienced parental imprisonment as either upsetting or helpful for them. At the stage of analysing interview data my approach was inductive, allowing the children's (and their parents/carers') evidence to guide analysis. In my view, the case study design for the thesis included a balance between a priori assumptions and inductive analysis.

3.3.6 *Conceptual Framework*

The conceptual framework for the thesis is described in *Figure 3* below.

Figure 3 Conceptual framework for the thesis



The concepts in the four outside boxes are related to each other, as well as related to individual children.

Concepts in this framework included the main a priori assumptions which shaped the children's interview guide. I developed them from previous research and literature and from earlier experience of working with children and families. Earlier family history impacts on the child after their parent is imprisoned. The child's personality, including their temperament, their interests and achievements, is important, as are the forces impacting on him/her, the circumstances of the offence(s), and engagement with family, friends, school and agencies. How family, friends and schools react to the parent's imprisonment impact on the child. This conceptual framework has remained fairly constant throughout the research.

3.3.7 Appropriateness of methodology

COPING used both quantitative and qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews to explore the meaning of children's experiences. The qualitative

methodology adopted by COPING was appropriate for addressing my research questions. It was child-centred. Interviews with children were the most crucial element. Interviews with parents were also vital, but supplementary, facilitating triangulation of data. Interviews encouraged children to talk about parental imprisonment in the broader context of their family, their school and their social lives. The methodology aimed to be flexible and inclusive, allowing other children in families targeted to take part, and enabling recognition of the value of sibling support. It was ethically sound, allowing children to contribute in their own way, saying as much or as little as they wished to, and with support from adults and other family members where children wanted this. The methodology could also be empowering, enabling more and less intelligent children, and children with learning disabilities, to contribute equally to learning and to developing new insights.

The methodology also had significant limitations which are discussed at the end of the thesis (p.304) of which the most important was that children were interviewed just once, which meant that there was only a single opportunity to develop a rapport with them, and no opportunity to explore the issues of parental imprisonment at different points in time.

3.3.8 *Sample*

The 22 families were mainly recruited by Partners of Prisoners and other NGOs running visitor centres in prisons in the north of England while children were visiting their imprisoned parent. Family 5 was recruited following a focus group run as part of the COPING research at a women's prison. The consent of research colleagues was sought for transcriptions of interviews they had conducted to be included in the research. As noted in *Appendix 5*, interview and transcript data were coded by

researchers undertaking the interviews, except for interviews carried out by Partners of Prisoners staff, and Case 22, where the data were coded by myself.

Further information about research participants in the 22 families is included in *Table 1*, below.

Table 1: Research Participants (22 families)

Case No.	Pseudonym	Children's Gender & Age	Parent/Carer	Imprisoned Parent
1	Joe	B/17	M	F
2	Eleanor	G/10	F	M
3	Luke	B/12	M	*
4	Declan	B/13	M	*
	Natalie	G/14		
5	Nasreen	G/13	F	M
6	Caleb	B/13	M	*
7	Jack	B/9	M	*
	Kirsty	G/11		
8	Grant	B/13	M	F
	Amelia	G/7		
9	Becky	G/12	M	*
10	Daniel	B/9	M	F
11	Mark	B/13	SF	F
12	Anthony	B/11	F	M
13	Harry	B/14	M	F
14	Ethan	B/9	OS (23yr)	M
	Samantha	G/17		
15	Piers	B/13	MMP	M
16	Gareth	B/11	MGP x 2	M
17	Jamie	B/10	M	*
	Oliver	B/11		
18	Kyle	B/11	F	M
19	Alex	B/16	F	M
20	Sameera	G/8	M	*
	Abida	G/14		
21	Ben	B/12	M	*
22	Matthew	B/15	M	*
TOTAL		B = 19 G = 9	F=5;SF=1 MMP=1 M=13 MGP=2 OS=1	F=5 M=8 *=9
KEY	Gender:	B=Boy G=Girl		
	Relationship:	F=Father M=Mother SF=Step-Father OS=Older Sister MGP=Maternal Grandparents MMP=Mother's Male Partner		
	Imprisoned Parent	* = Imprisoned parent not interviewed		

Out of the 28 children, 19 were boys and 9 were girls. The boys' and the girls' age distributions were similar. Four of the boys and 2 of the girls were under 11. Twelve of the boys and 6 of the girls were aged 11-14. Three of the boys and 1 of the girls were aged 15 or over. The mean age for both boys and girls was 11.7 years.

Thirteen of the boys had a father (1 of these was a step-father) in prison; and 6 of the boys had a mother in prison. For the girls, 6 had a father in prison (2 of these were step-fathers), and 3 had their mother in prison.

Out of the 22 parents/carers, 12 were mothers; 4 were fathers, and one was the male partner of an imprisoned mother; 3 were grandparents (from 2 families); and 2 were adult siblings caring for younger children (from 2 families). There were 13 imprisoned parents: 4 fathers, a step/father and 8 mothers.

Ethnicity is not recorded in Table 2. All except 2 of the families were White British.

Both Nasreen's parents (case 5) were British Asian, and this was culturally significant for her. Her parents had previously enjoyed a comfortable standard of living, sending Nasreen to a private school with high standards. Their religious community was close-knit, and her father was determined that they should not know that his wife was in prison. Sameera and Abida (case 20) were dual heritage children: their mother described herself as Black African Caribbean, and I understood that Sameera's father⁹ was from Ireland. I did not detect that the children's ethnicity impacted on their reaction to his imprisonment.

Case summaries describing the circumstances of the 22 families are included in *Appendix 1*.

⁹ Sameera's father declined to be interviewed.

Recruiting via visiting centres skewed the sample for the thesis towards children in contact with their imprisoned parents. The COPING research target to recruit children with a broad spread of Strengths and Difficulties scores was also achieved for the thesis sample. SDQ scores are available for 26 of the 28 children. Eleven were in the *normal* band; seven were *borderline*; and eight were *abnormal*. (Two children (case 17) were interviewed during piloting of the methodology; they did not complete either the initial survey or the SDQ questionnaire). I was able to include a higher proportion of children with imprisoned mothers than for the prison population overall. The two families whom I interviewed from Black or Ethnic Minority groups constituted a low proportion compared to the over-representation of people from these groups in the UK prison population (Ministry of Justice, 2013).¹⁰

The parent/carer looking after the child, and the child/ren themselves were asked whether it would be appropriate for the imprisoned parent to be interviewed, as I wished to avoid interviewing them if this could have adverse repercussions for their family. I stressed that it would be valuable where possible to find out the imprisoned parent's view about the impact of imprisonment on the child/ren. Where the family agreed, contact was made with the prison asking for the consent of the prison for interview to take place, and enclosing a consent form for the imprisoned parent to sign. Once this had been completed an appointment was made for the interview. In all except one case (case 1), where transport logistics led to the interview with the imprisoned parent taking place immediately before the visit to the family, interviews with imprisoned parents were held after family interviews. One imprisoned parent (case 8) was transferred to a prison outside the North-West of England (and

¹⁰ Ministry of Justice statistics published in 2013 recorded that in 2012 26% of residents in UK prisons were from black, Asian and other ethnic minorities, twice the proportion in the general population.

therefore outside the NOMS agreement, (see *Appendix 5*), and because of this she was interviewed at home after she had been released. In one case (20) the family agreed to the child's father being interviewed, but he refused his consent when approached by the prison. In two cases (6 and 7) it was decided not to approach the imprisoned parent as there had been serious domestic violence within the family. In another case (22) it seemed inappropriate to contact the imprisoned father because the family were distressed about his offence (child sexual assault). Other cases where the imprisoned parent was not approached were ones where parents were divorced (14 and 19); where distance was a factor (9 and 21); or where the imprisoned parent was on remand (3), or where his/her release was expected shortly (4), and where the family's priorities were either on conviction and sentencing (3); or on the family getting back together (4).

For interviews with all 22 families, these started with a general information sharing session with children and parents together. Participants agreed to all interviews being tape recorded, except for two imprisoned parents. One was Joe's father (case 1), who was reluctant to be interviewed and refused permission for tape recording. The other was Anthony's mother (case 12), who was interviewed in prison and where there was insufficient time to request authorisation to take a tape recorder into the interview. I decided to switch the tape recorder off in the interview with Caleb (case 16), whose speech was limited, and where the tape recorder seemed an unnecessary distraction (see footnote 6, p. 71). I dictated summaries of all the interviews immediately following completion, including details about the interview setting, impressions of the families' and the children's resilience and non-verbal behaviour which may not have been picked up by the tape recording.

3.3.9 *Children's consent*

Parents/carers had responsibility for exploring children's continued willingness to be interviewed following telephone contact, and I had no opportunity to observe this part of the process. Most children were prepared for the interviews and seemed to look forward to them. In Case 4, the mother decided not to tell the children about the interviews until I and my co-researcher arrived. She thought that they would not co-operate if they knew about the interview in advance, and was probably right. Both the children, Natalie and Declan, seemed to enjoy the experience. The child (Eleanor, G10/2), in one of the two families whom I had met previously in prison, was particularly well prepared. She and her father had discussed the interviews on their way home from prison and Eleanor clearly looked forward to the opportunity of being interviewed.

3.3.10 *Children interviewed alone; with siblings; or with parents/carers*

As acknowledged in the interview guide, having an adult present during the child's interview was likely to have a significant impact on the conversation. On balance, offering this choice seemed appropriate, as children could have additional support during the interview with an adult researcher whom they had not met previously. Children were asked for their preferences about this, usually with their parent present. The arrangements for the interviews are summarised in *Table 2* below.

Table 2: Children interviewed alone; with siblings; or with parents/carers

Case No.	Name of Child	Interviewed alone	Interviewed jointly with sibling	Interviewed with older sibling	Interviewed with parent/carer
1	Joe				✓
2	Eleanor	✓			
3	Luke				✓
4	Natalie		✓		
	Declan		✓		
5	Nasreen	✓			
6	Caleb	✓			
7	Jack	✓			
	Kirsty			✓	
8	Amelia	✓			
	Grant	✓			
9	Becky	✓			
10	Daniel	✓			
11	Mark	✓			
12	Anthony				✓
13	Harry				✓
14	Ethan		✓		
	Samantha		✓		
15	Piers	✓			
16	Gareth				✓
17	Oliver				✓
	Jamie				✓
18	Kyle				✓
19	Alex	✓			
20	Sameera			✓	
	Abida	✓			
21	Ben	✓			
22	Matthew	✓			
TOTAL		14	4	2	8

The children interviewed alone, aged between 8 and 16 included one boy, Caleb, with serious learning disabilities. (I checked particularly carefully with both Caleb and his mother that he was happy to be interviewed on his own). Two of them, Daniel and Mark, had met the POPS staff member who interviewed them at an earlier prison visit. All the 14 children seemed comfortable being interviewed on their own and seemed able to express their views without inhibition.

Two sibling pairs were interviewed together. Declan, aged 13, and Natalie, aged 14, (Case 4) chose to be interviewed together and supported each other. Samantha, aged 17, protected and supported her younger brother, Ethan, aged 9 (Case 14) during the interview; he was not feeling particularly well at the time. Kirsty, aged 11, (Case 7) and Sameera, aged 8, (Case 20) were both interviewed with their older sisters present to support them. This also seemed to work well.

Children interviewed with a parent/carer present mainly needed their support. The interview for Luke was at an anxious time, shortly before his father was due to be sentenced. Harry found the interview difficult and would have struggled without his mother's support. Kyle was very reluctant to be interviewed, but managed this with patient help from his father. Gareth was pleased to have his grandfather's support, and his grandfather corrected him on some matters of fact. Joe's mother was rather over-protective of her son (aged 17) who had learning disabilities, and interrupted him several times during the interview. Oliver and Jamie's mother commented after the interview that her sons had not really needed her presence, and would have been less inhibited in responses to questions about impact on the family if she had not been there.

3.3.11 *Reflections on Interviews*

I emphasised that children (and parents/carers) were in charge of deciding which questions they would answer and which they would decline. Children rarely used the option of declining questions, but on the occasions they chose to do so this was clearly important for them. Joe said that he did not wish to talk about the time when he lived with his paternal grandmother who maltreated him. Gareth did not want to re-call the night when his mother attacked his father with a knife, which was still a painful and confusing memory for him. Two boys (Grant and Gareth) asked when the

interview was due to finish several times, indicating either fatigue (Gareth), or that their motivation to take part was limited (Grant). Caleb's mother said that she was running out of time before I had completed the interview. Sameera and Abida's mother complained to Partners of Prisoners that my interview with her (one of the longest) had gone on too long, and I think she was right.

However, nearly all the children and all the adults expressed satisfaction with the interviews, and some said that they had found them beneficial. Gareth's grandparents (Case 16) said that it had been particularly helpful to talk to an independent person. Grant and Amelia's father (Case 8), in prison, said that the interview had helped him to take stock of his situation. Some participants, including Becky's mother, whose partner was expecting a very long sentence, and Matthew's mother, who was still deeply distressed by her partner's conviction (for child sexual assault), and several imprisoned mothers found talking about their circumstances upsetting. None of them said they found the process unhelpful. Some children gave short answers, not elaborating on the questions, perhaps because the subject was difficult for them, or because they did not feel comfortable. Various ways of helping them to feel more at ease were tried, such as offering to have a break during the interview for refreshments. Imprisoned parents were also mainly positive and welcomed being given the opportunity to contribute to the research.

With hindsight, it may be that a less structured format, with prompts for discussion of key themes, or framing the interviews with an invitation to participants to respond to an open question (eg *"Can you tell me how things have been for you since your mother/father was in prison? Whatever you say will be important for me to hear"*) could have worked well, perhaps better for some participants. All interviews were one to one, or with children supported by adults or siblings. This had the advantage

of keeping a clear focus on family issues and ensured privacy¹¹ and confidentiality. Some children may have welcomed discussions with peers who had had similar experiences, which was only achieved at an early pilot session at the POPS' office in Manchester.

3.4 *Developing a thematic analysis*

3.4.1 *Analysing interview data*

My first reading of the transcripts involved coding interview data preparatory to writing the Coping report in 2012. I re-read and reanalysed the transcripts twelve months later for this thesis, and I have re-read and re-analysed the data continuously since then.

My focus was initially on familiarising myself with the detail of each transcript; and on searching for and reviewing themes from the data. I began by undertaking an analysis of the 22 cases, drawing on all available interview data. To start with I hesitated to generalise beyond the boundaries of single cases. A next stage was to focus on interpretive commentaries of individual cases, and searching for themes across groups of families. I looked for patterns in the evidence, following Miles & Huberman, which would assist the development of theory and the process of drawing conclusions. I was also influenced by a narrative approach, and explored the data for dominant narrative themes from families, including children and parents.

¹¹ Children's right to privacy is protected in Article 16 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, as emphasised by Woodhead, in Percy-Smith & Thomas (Eds), 2010.

I then re-read and re-analysed the transcripts for the children; then for the parents/carers; and then for the imprisoned parents, and decided that this sequence would set the pattern for presentation of the findings for the thesis. I embarked on a thematic analysis which involved a thorough (and repeated) review of each transcript identifying key factors relevant to my central research question (the impact of parental imprisonment on children) including establishing categories and patterns within the data and between cases; and assessments of the narrative content of interviews. The analytical process and the process of discovery of theories and findings fused and were frequently indistinguishable.

3.4.2 *Triangulation*

Triangulation of data from children and young people, parents/carers and imprisoned parents was an important first stage in data analysis. Triangulation helps reduce inappropriate certainty (Robson, 1993, p290). Children's perspectives about how they had been affected by parental imprisonment were either confirmed or modified by evidence from their parents/carers. Children frequently down-played how upset they had been when their parents had been arrested or imprisoned, or preferred not to have to recall harrowing experiences. Evidence from parents/carers filled in some of these gaps.

My evidence "felt" stronger and more reliable for the 13 families where I was able to interview the imprisoned parent as well as the parent/carer and the child/ren, than for the other 11 families where this was not possible. Several parents/carers whose imprisoned partners I was unable to meet provided detailed descriptions of their partners' involvement with their children, as well as full accounts of the impact of parental imprisonment on family relationships: enough for me to have a clear impression of the level of the imprisoned parent's commitment to their children, in

some cases. This said, in these families my sense of knowing the family was more uncertain and sometimes more shadowy. I missed having the opportunity to meet them, (and also two of the divorced parents/carers), and being able to talk to them directly about their relationship with their child/ren, and how they felt their imprisonment had affected them.

3.4.3 *Interpretation of interview data*

Interpreting the data and theory building based on the dominant perspectives of children, parents/carers and imprisoned parents came next. Much of this process involved exploring participants' feelings of loss and bereavement, which children, parents/carers and imprisoned parents experienced in different ways. My focus was on dynamic change processes. Over time most children managed to make some adjustment to their loss. Family relationships changed, and parents/carers' and imprisoned parents' lives took on new dimensions. These changes are explored in the next three chapters of the thesis.

The Concise Oxford definition of interpretation refers to "expounding" or "bringing out" meaning; and also to "rendering by artistic impression" (1988, p.525).

Interpretation is analytic, subjective and artistic. My approach when analysing children's data has been to try to focus on what children said, and on what I could infer from this about their lives, and about how having a parent in prison had impacted on them and their lives; and whether they felt able to talk about their situation with family and friends. Interviews were both retrospective and prospective. I wanted to learn how children felt now, and how this compared with how they felt closer to the time their parent was imprisoned; and how they thought things would be for them in the future. I also thought about the tone of the interview, the child's level of engagement, the level of detail of the answers provided, and what the child had

omitted or chosen not to talk about; and I took into account information provided by his or her parents. In most cases I considered that I had enough information to have some understanding of how parental imprisonment had impacted on them.

The process of reflection and interpretation started with writing the interview summary straight after completing interviews. Reviewing transcripts allowed much more time to take account of what participants had actually said, and to compare this data with my impressions and recollections. A next stage involved comparing impacts of parental imprisonment amongst groups of children, and seeking to understand what accounted for differences between them.

3.4.4 *Categories and Patterns*

The sample of 22 families provided an internal reference point for confirming and comparing children's responses to parental imprisonment. Throughout, I focused on children's resilience and vulnerability, including home stability, school progress, emotional intelligence and help required, and on how children changed and adapted through their parent's sentence. I explored the level of emotional harm children experienced and their recovery processes, and considered parenting styles and how these and relationships between parents impacted on children. Gender differences provided a fertile source of analysis of difference between children's emotional adjustment and behavioural patterns. Searching for patterns included how families developed a policy for survival, how this related to the reappraisal and standing of the imprisoned parent, and how families conceptualised their need for support, either from within their extended family or from the wider community.

3.4.5 Narratives and Key Themes

Concurrently, I reviewed the main narratives emerging from families in the study. Narratives were either mainly positive or negative (following Crossley, 2000). Some of the main narrative themes identified are summarised in the box below.

Family Data Themes

Vulnerability (pessimistic)	Resilience (optimistic)
Uncertainty Being made to suffer Labelling/being labelled Disruption/confusion Submissiveness Isolation	Normalising tendency Life to be enjoyed Adaptive distancing Getting organised Assertiveness Family support and sibling support

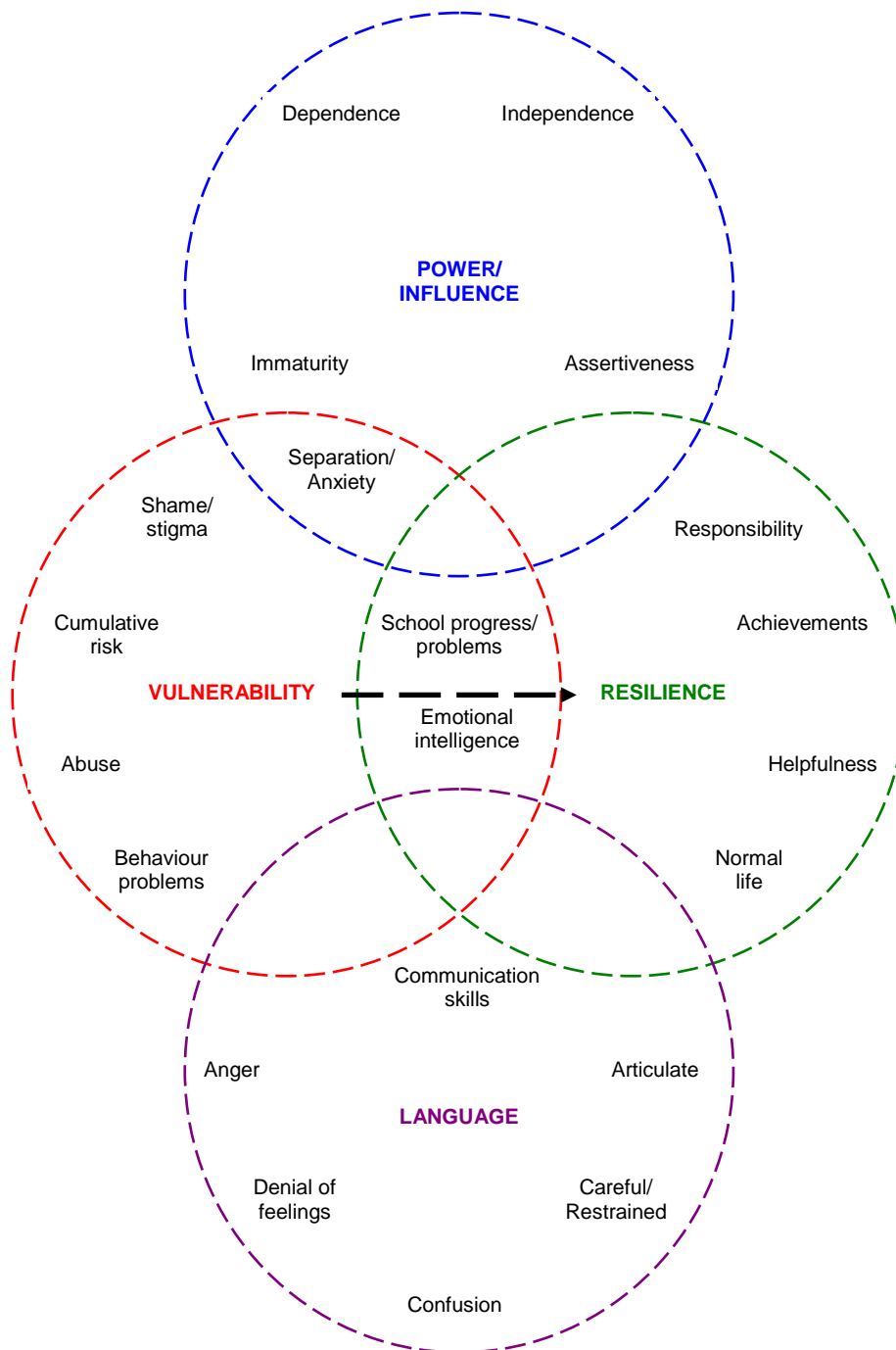
Family data themes were developed from interview transcripts. Overall, narrative tone was more optimistic than pessimistic. Participants frequently asserted the importance of normal life, and that life was to be enjoyed. An element of adaptive distancing, a concept developed by Norman (2000), appeared to be an effective mechanism by which children were able to separate themselves from problems surrounding parental imprisonment.

“Getting organised” was necessary for parents/carers and for children to keep in control of family life and prison contact. More resilient children were able to demonstrate a degree of assertiveness about aspects of their lives and relationships. By contrast, “uncertainty”, linked to disruption and confusion, was an indicator of children and families being less in control of events. “Being made to suffer” was a theme articulated by a minority of parents/carers, either insistently or more faintly, although some overcame this by demonstrating competence and by becoming more

independent. Imprisoned parents had a strong concept that their children, and often their partners, were suffering because of their imprisonment. Feelings of “submissiveness” characterised a minority of parents/carers, including those particularly loyal to their imprisoned partner. A sense of shame and of “being labelled” was widely experienced by children and their parents/carers, although most families were able to handle this with a degree of dignity. Family support and sibling support characterised more resilient families, while separation and isolation were characteristics of more vulnerable families.

The process of analysis focused on individual cases, which were then compared with the experiences of other families. For example, the concept of “getting organised” derived from the account of one 11 year old boy (Anthony, Case 12), as he described the changes he had had to make to cope with school work, housework, looking after his father and looking after his pet animals consequent on his mother’s imprisonment. His experience was then compared with that of other children who had had to make similar adaptations. The notion of mothers providing a first line of defence for their children, particularly daughters, against the risks and threats of parental imprisonment, was drawn from evidence about the situation of the two sisters, Abida and Sameera in case 20, and was then explored for other children. Reviewing the case of another child (Becky, aged 12, Case 9), led to the proposition that children need sufficient basic security to survive the impact of parental imprisonment; or, put another way, protective factors need to outweigh risk factors. Again, this was compared with the experiences of other children in the study. Themes emerging from the evidence were reviewed frequently and then, later on, summarised as illustrated in *Figure 4* below.

Figure 4: Key Themes - Children



Four key themes are included: vulnerability; resilience; power/influence; and language. School progress and problems, and emotional intelligence are included as neutral concepts: children's progress at school can be an indicator of vulnerability or resilience, and their level of emotional intelligence influenced their ability to adapt to their circumstances. The main direction of travel reflected movement from initial

vulnerability following their parents' arrest and imprisonment, towards more resilient and successful adaptations.

Children's use of language and linguistic skills had an important bearing on their well-being. Some less articulate children who suppressed feelings of grief, anger and anxiety were more likely to exhibit behaviour problems. Some children with learning disabilities demonstrated emotional intelligence and understanding of how they had been adversely affected by their parent being in prison. Careful and restrained use of language could prevent children being overwhelmed by their feelings and could be a marker for resilience. Children able to communicate and articulate their feelings seemed to have more understanding of how parental imprisonment had affected them.

Concepts of power and influence, and authority and control, emerged later in the analytical process. Some children seemed to become more powerful and more influential in their families as they began to adapt to parental imprisonment. They could be strengthened by their experience and gain the respect of their imprisoned parent (Harry, aged 14, Case 13, was one example). Children's relationships with their parent/carer could become more equal and more adult, including families where the parent/carer was physically or emotionally disabled. Parents/carers were sometimes surprised by their success in handling their enhanced responsibilities and enjoyed or even, like Gareth's (case 16) grandparents, relished the time they could spend with the children. Relationships between parents/carers and imprisoned parents were unbalanced. Imprisoned parents, no longer able to make financial provision for their families or to exercise parental authority, tended to lose power and influence. Parents like Daniel's father, Case 10, or Kyle's mother, Case 18, who retained powerful influence and control over their families from their prison cells, were unusual. Parents/carers with younger or more disabled children exercised

more control and influence. Power and influence could be shared between parents/carers and children, particularly where children were confident or more mature. A small number of children (Matthew, Case 22, was the clearest example) were very influential in their families and able to take on almost adult levels of responsibility.

3.5 *Ethical and practice issues*

3.5.1 *Ethical approval*

Research instruments for the COPING project, including the interview guides and consent forms for the in-depth interviews, were approved by the University of Huddersfield School Research Ethics Panel (SREP) in 2010. Consent forms are reproduced in *Appendix 2*. Consent forms aimed to ensure that participants understood the remit and focus of the research. The interview guide (*Appendix 3*) covered issues of confidentiality and anonymity, the rights of interviewees and reasons for tape- recording. Participants were advised that researchers might have to notify statutory authorities if information about harm to children, or threats to prison security came to light, and that in these cases confidentiality might have to be breached. They were assured that their names and identifying details would be excluded from research reports, although permission was sought for their views to be included. Participants were also provided with details about agencies which could offer support if they required follow up assistance subsequently. . Written information was provided (*Appendix 4*) explaining how the survey (questionnaires) and the in depth interviews fitted together.

I was very aware of ethical dimensions at all stages of the research: partly because of the sensitivity of the topic, and the stigmatising connotations of parental

imprisonment for many families; and partly because of the central role of children in the research. These concerns were modified by the timing of the interviews, long enough after the parent's imprisonment for participants to have recovered from the initial shock; and also by both parents/carers and children's positive responses to taking part, described below (p102).

Appendix 5 ("My role in the COPING Project") refers to the availability of shopping vouchers for children taking part, and this was described in the Information Leaflet (*Appendix 4*). Shopping vouchers provided encouragement for children to be interviewed and to give up the time required. Several of the families in the study were living in poor or reduced circumstances, and the vouchers were welcomed as an opportunity to make a special purchase for children. Their availability was a motivating factor for some of them. Although I did not detect that they influenced children's contributions in their interviews, the possibility that they felt under a degree of pressure to view the research more positively cannot be ruled out.

3.5.2 Practice issues arising from the interviews

The COPING research was well resourced and time was available for sensitive issues to be followed up. One child showed the interviewer scars on her face, allegedly from injuries caused by a relative caring for her. The scars were clearly visible, although the incidents referred to had apparently taken place some years previously. I organised a consultation with a very experienced social worker, and the merits and demerits of referral to child protection authorities were considered carefully. I decided that, after such a long delay, the upset which an investigation could cause the child and her family, and the fact that the relative against whom the allegation was made was no longer involved in her care, meant that the risks of referral to the child protection authorities outweighed possible benefits.

In another case, the mother of a child interviewed for the research agreed that I could refer his teenage sister to a specialist young people's support project which I knew well in the town where she was living, apart from her mother. Partners of Prisoners' (POPS') involvement enabled some follow up support to be offered to the child interviewed in this family after he and his parents had been interviewed.

3.5.3 *Participants' reaction to interviews*

Children's views about the impact of parental imprisonment were central to the study. Safeguards for children included: a requirement for both themselves and their parents to consent to take part; children being able to request the presence of an adult during their interviews; and the emphasis placed on their right to refuse to answer any question, or to end the interview. Most children seemed to enjoy the experience. Some may have felt under pressure to take part, and being interviewed by previously unknown researchers could be daunting. One boy (Kyle, B11/18) needed active encouragement, by his father, to meet me; he gained confidence as the interview progressed.

Parents/carers generally welcomed the opportunity to be involved in the research. They recognised its potential value for other families. Interviews provided some recognition of their crucial role supporting their child/ren. Imprisoned parents were also mainly pleased to be interviewed. Interviews recognised their continuing involvement with their children notwithstanding their convictions. One imprisoned father (case 20) refused permission to be interviewed, probably conscious that by his behaviour, as well as by his offences, he had let his children down. One other imprisoned father (case 1) was reluctant to take part, but eventually agreed to do so;

he also probably felt guilty about his past behaviour and about having lost touch with his sons.

3.6 *Researcher's Gaze: participants seen, and timing of interviews*

This section explores further the significance of decisions about which children were included and not included in the research, and of missing interviews with parents; and also explores the importance of the timing of interviews, from remand in custody through to the end of sentence.

3.6.1 Participants seen; and other children and relatives not seen

My focus was inevitably on the children who were interviewed whose stories and perspectives shaped the research. Interviews targeted children who had completed the prison based COPING survey. Had other children in the same families been interviewed I would have formed rather different impressions.

Interviews were targeted at children with a range of needs based on their SDQ scores. In some cases I learned that other children in these families had high levels of need. For example, in Case 1, Joe (B17) had an older brother, aged 18, who had a diagnosis of autism. In Case 16, Gareth (B11) had younger 8 year old twin sisters, one of whom had been severely traumatised, very probably by witnessing her father assault her mother. She was considered too vulnerable to be interviewed. Interviews provided glimpses of family life. Parents/carers and imprisoned parents talked about all their children, not just those who were interviewed. In Case 20, where girls aged 8 and 14 were interviewed, their mother had higher levels of concern about her 12 year old son who was not interviewed, and who was missing school and whose

behaviour there was worrying her. In Case 22, Matthew, aged 15, a mature and confident young man, was interviewed while his less confident younger brother, who may have been more adversely affected by their father's imprisonment, declined to take part. In Case 9, while Becky's mood when interviewed was fairly buoyant, her older brother and sister, aged 17 and 19, were both described by their mother as very angry about their father's alleged offences and remand in custody. Had these other children been interviewed, my overall impression of a predominantly resilient sample of children could have been modified

I met all the parents/carers of the children I interviewed with the exception of Ethan and Samantha's father (case 14) and Alex' father (case 19), both of whom were divorced from their children's imprisoned mothers and therefore more difficult to contact. In the nine families where interviews with the children's imprisoned parent were not achieved (8 fathers and 1 step-father) it is likely that, had the fathers been interviewed, they would have added valuable data about the impact of their imprisonment on their children and on the family. My impressions of these families would again have been different, contributing to stronger perceptions of family life in some cases, and of conflict and upheavals in others

Opportunities to meet other siblings, available in some families and not in others, provided useful additional data about the children's family life. In Case 18, I briefly interviewed Kyle's (B11) older half brother and half sister, aged 16 and 14, and they helped provide a fuller picture of the impact of Kyle's mother's imprisonment on Kyle and on the family. In Case 14, I met Ethan (B9) and Samantha's (G17) younger siblings (girls aged 5 and 6) and also their older sisters (aged 20 and 23). This provided a vivid impression of the way this family functioned with their mother in prison. In Case 7, meeting Jack (B9) and Kirsty's (G11) older adult siblings (a male

aged 20, and females aged 18 and 16) provided a glimpse of additional support available to these children.

3.6.2 Timing of interviews

The point during the prison sentence at which I interviewed children also made a difference to the kind of data obtained. The timing of interviews for the 22 families is illustrated in *Figure 5*.

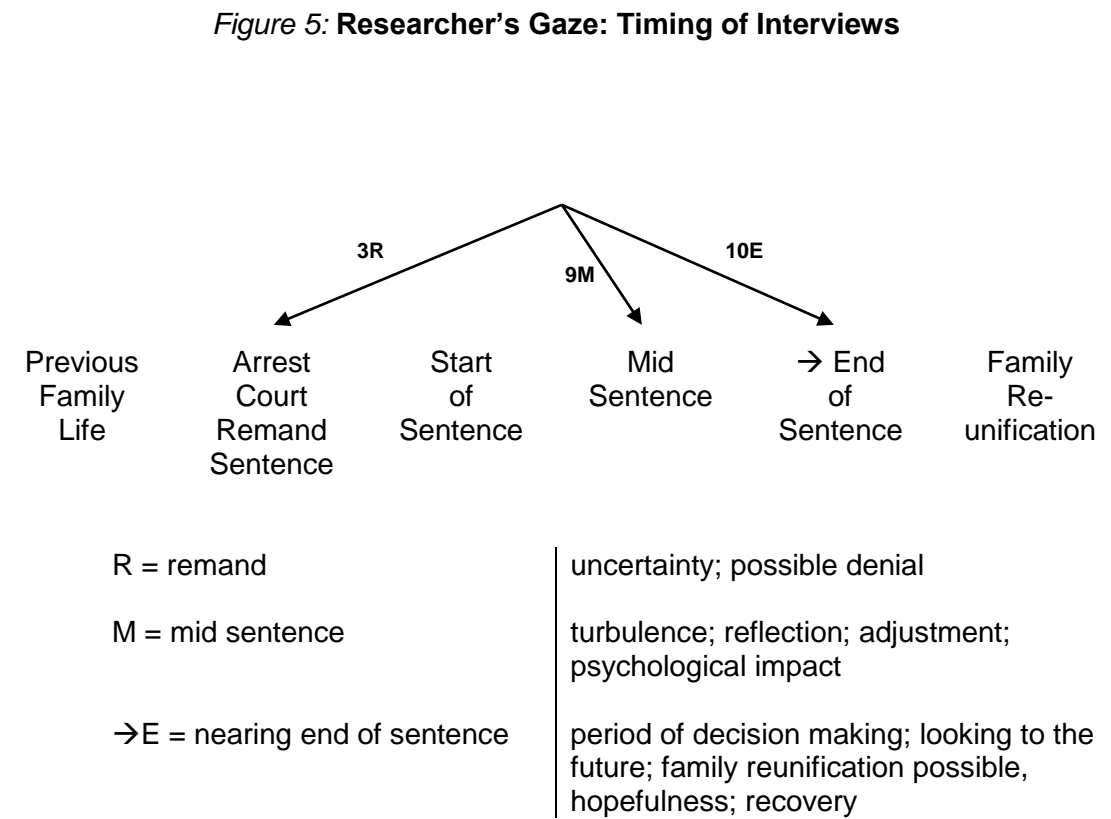


Figure 5 describes the point in the process from arrest to release at which interviews took place. Three interviews were carried out while the parent was on remand; nine in mid-sentence; and ten towards the end of the sentence. Themes characterising each phase are suggested below.

The point during the process at which interviews took place inevitably influenced the information provided, an illustration of Willig's (2008) notion of epistemological reflexivity, which encourages reflection about how the research has questioned, defined and limited what can be found, and how the design of the study and method of analysis helped to construct the data and the findings. Remand tended to be characterised by uncertainty, including in one case the probability of a long prison sentence (case 9); and in another (case 21) denial of his father's wrong doing by his son, Ben (B12). During mid-sentence it was more likely that the family had made some adjustments to the parent's imprisonment, but still had to deal with long-standing issues of loss and separation, and changed family relationships. Nearer the end of the sentence more contact and home leaves were possible. Families were looking towards the future, and decisions were needed about where the imprisoned parent would live following release from prison; this period could be characterised by mixed feelings about the release; and by a mixture of hopefulness and caution regarding the future.

The timing of interviews impacted on children in different ways. Luke (B12/3) and his mother were both noticeably anxious during their interviews, almost certainly because Luke's father was due to be sentenced the following week. Oliver (B11/17) and his younger brother Jamie's buoyancy during their interview was partly because they were looking forward to their father's release in a few weeks time.

Declan (B13) and Natalie's (G14) father was also due for release in a few weeks, but their perspective seemed to have been influenced more by the cumulative impact of their father's three consecutive prison sentences for alcohol related offences.

Eleanor (G10/2)'s interview came right in the middle of her very long (14 year) sentence: so that looking forward or back were both equally difficult. But other children whose parents were serving much shorter sentences, - Kyle (B11/18),

interviewed in the middle of the eight months his mother was in prison, was the clearest example – found it equally difficult to see an end to their difficulties.

I return to the significance of time for children in a later chapter (Chapter 7: Discussion).

3.7 Notes on pseudonyms and terms used

- (i) All the 28 children are referred to by pseudonyms. The pseudonyms are first listed in *Table 1* on p 82. Their relatives are referred to by their relationship to the child.
- (ii) Children have also been referred to by their case number: for example Joe is referred to as B17/1, i.e. a seventeen year old boy, case 1; and Eleanor is referred to as G10/2, i.e. a ten year old girl, case 2. Case numbers have been used at the start of each section. Children's ages were at the time of interviews, in 2010 and 2011. Reference to place names has been avoided to protect children's and families' anonymity.
- (iii) *Parents/carers* is the term used to describe adults looking after children while their parent was in prison, including parents, step/parents, grandparents, older siblings and other guardians. I have used *child/ren*, usually when referring to either a single child or to more than one child in the same family.
- (iv) As the sample size was small I have avoided using percentages, preferring reference to actual numbers, for example 17/28 children; or to fractions, such as two thirds, or 14/21 families. I have indicated actual numbers, for example *eight* or *8 children*, or (*n = 8*) where this is clearer.
- (v) I have focussed on children's emotional reactions, which I am more competent to comment on than their psychological responses. I have tried to avoid the use of the term "outcomes" for children in my sample, as this implies results

or measurements, and have referred instead to children's progress or wellbeing.

- (vi) Colour coding (traffic lights) has been used to identify patterns in the Tables.

Chapter Four

Children's experiences of parental imprisonment: resilience, trauma and recovery.

I attempt to define concepts of resilience and vulnerability at the start of this chapter; and then provide a preliminary sketch of how the twenty eight children in the study fared in relation to these two variables. Subsequent sections review the trauma of children's separation from their imprisoned parent; their re-call of their parent's arrest and imprisonment; the significance for them of the kind of offences their parent had committed; and their experiences of stigma, and other stress factors. Factors associated with the level of emotional harm children experienced, and with their recovery, are considered.

Remaining sections consider evidence about how children handled their feelings about their imprisoned parent, including the importance for them of privacy and caution. Some children grew stronger and matured. The quality of their contact with their imprisoned parent was an important variable. I explore differential impacts of maternal and paternal imprisonment on girls and boys; and the relevance of theories of intergenerational crime for my sample. The chapter ends with some thoughts about family structure and children's ages; and with discussion about dominant themes from children's interviews.

4.1 *Children's Resilience and Vulnerability: a preliminary overview*

Children's resilience and vulnerability are important concepts in understanding their reactions to parental imprisonment. Dictionary definitions of resilience include "springing back" (Concise Oxford, 1988 p. 886) and "returning to normal" and "recovering quickly from shock" (Collins, 1989 p.449), and these imply the capacity to bounce back after an ordeal. Signs of resilience for children whose parent has been imprisoned are likely to include adjusting to changes in family life, including changes in care givers; and resuming school life, friendships and social activities. Definitions of vulnerability include "susceptibility to injury" and "exposure to damage..." (Oxford, p.1205), while Collins (p. 581) refers to capacity for being "emotionally wounded or hurt, exposed,... open to attack". Signs of vulnerability may include disruption of relationships, activities and progress at home or school; and changes in mood, behaviour and sleep patterns.

This section refers to findings from previous research. This is followed by a preliminary analysis in tabular form of resilience and vulnerability for children in the study, and by a commentary on the table, providing an introduction to some of the main themes covered in the thesis, including differences in how boys and girls have been affected by parental imprisonment.

Rutter (1987) described vulnerability and protection as the negative and positive poles of the same concept. Resilient families are characterised by warmth, affection, cohesion and commitment (Seccombe, 2004). Many children of prisoners show resilience and function well despite disadvantages faced; and they benefit from secure relationships with sensitive and nurturing care givers (Poehlmann, 2005; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2001). Children who experience lower warmth and

acceptance from care givers display more internalising and externalising behaviours (Mackintosh et al, 2006)

Table 3 provides a preliminary overview of the resilience and vulnerability of children in the study. Variables have been grouped together. **Stability/prospects** includes Home Stability, which is the factor most closely related to children's welfare; Domestic Violence, which presents a very clear threat to children's stability; .and Future Prospects; **School progress** combines Intelligence, Progress at School, and Behaviour Problems. **Emotional Intelligence** comprises Sociability/Friends; Helps Others, and Understands Own Feelings. **Help Required** combines Needs Help; School Helpful?; and Receiving Agency Support. Colour coding has been used to highlight patterns and differences.

Table 3: Children's Resilience and Vulnerability

Case No.	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Mother or Father in prison	Stability/Prospects			School Progress			Emotional Intelligence			Help Required		
					Home Stability	Domestic Violence	Future prospects - welfare	Intelligence	Progress at School	Behaviour Problems	Sociability/ Friends	Helps Others	Understands own feelings	Needs help	School Helpful?	Receiving Agency Support
Resilience High, Vulnerability Low																
4	Natalie	G	14	F	●		●	●	●		●	●	●		●	
5	Nasreen	G	14	M	●		●	●	●		●		●		NHR	
9	Becky	G	12	F	●		●	●	●		●	●	●		NHR	
12	Anthony	B	11	M	●		●	●	●		●	●	●		●	
14	Samantha	G	17	M	●		●	●	N/A		●	●	●		N/A	
17	Oliver	B	11	F	●		●	●	●		●		●		●	
17	Jamie	B	10	F	●		●	●	●		●		●		●	
19	Alex	B	16	M	●		●	●	●		●		NK		●	
20	Abida	G	14	S/F	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●		NK	
21	Ben	B	12	F	●		●	●	●		●		●		●	
22	Matthew	B	15	F	●		●	●	●		●	●	●		●	y
n = 11		6B 5G	Mean 13.3	6F 1S/F 4M	●=9 ●=2	●=1	●=10 ●=1	●=7 ●=4	●=7 ●=3 N/A=1		●=11	●=6	●=8 ●=2 NK=1		●=6 ●=1 NHR=2 N/A=1 NK=1	y=1
Resilience and Vulnerability Medium																
2	Eleanor	G	10	M	●		●	●	●		●		●	●	●	
3	Luke	B	12	F	●		●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	y
4	Declan	B	13	F	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●		NHR	
7	Kirsty	G	11	S/F	●	●	●	●	●		●		●		NHR	Yy
8	Amelia	G	7	F	●		●	●	●		●		●		●	
13	Harry	B	14	F	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	Y
14	Ethan	B	9	M	●		●	●	●	●	●		●	●	NK	
16	Gareth	B	11	M	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	
20	Sameera	G	8	F	●	●	●	●	●		●		●		●	
n = 9		5B 4G	Mean 10.6	5F 1S/F 3M	●=7 ●=2	●=2 ●=1	●=5 ●=4	●=5 ●=4	●=6 ●=3	●=3 ●=1	●=8 ●=1	●=3	●=4 ●=4 ●=1	●=4	●=6 NHR=2 NK=1	y=2 yy=1
Resilience Lower, Vulnerability Higher																
1	Joe	B	17	F	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	Y
6	Caleb	B	13	F	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	Y
7	Jack	B	9	S/F	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	Yy
8	Grant	B	12	F	●		●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	
10	Daniel	B	8	F	●		●	●	●		●		●	●	●	
11	Mark	B	13	S/F	●		●	●	●		●		●	●	NHR	
15	Piers	B	13	M	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Y
18	Kyle	B	11	M	●		●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	Y
n = 8		8B	Mean 12.0	4F 2S/F 2M	●=2 ●=6	●=3	●=7 ●=1	●=1 ●=3 ●=4	●=3 ●=5	●=5 ●=1	●=3 ●=4 ●=1	●=1	●=1 ●=3 ●=4	●=8	●=4 ●=3 NHR=1	y=4 yy=1
<div>KEY:</div> <div><div>B = Boys</div><div>G = Girls</div><div>S/F = Stepfather</div><div>● = positive or high (intelligence)</div><div>● = concerns or medium (intelligence)</div><div>● = negative or low (intelligence)</div><div>N/A = Not Applicable</div><div>NK = Not Known</div><div>NHR = No Help Requested</div><div>y = yes</div><div>yy = yes (two agencies)</div></div>																

Colour coding indicates mainly positive findings (predominantly **green**) for the *high resilience* group; mixed results for the *medium resilience* group; and less positive findings (mainly **amber** and **red**) for the *low resilience* group.

Variables in *Table 3* are explained in the box below.

Variables: definitions and data sources

	Variable	Definition	How assessed / data source
Stability/Prospects	Home stability	Continuity of care during period of parental imprisonment by parent/carer.	Interviews with children and parents/carers.
	Domestic violence	Violence between parents; perpetrator male in these examples.	Evidence from parents/carers and children.
	Future prospects – welfare	Is child's welfare secure for future?	Researcher's tentative assessment based on interview data.
School Progress	Intelligence	Child's all round ability, including verbal and reasoning skills.	Researcher's observation and assessment based on interview data.
	Progress at school	Academic and other achievements.	Researcher's assessment, based on interviews.
	Behaviour problems	Provocative or other unwanted behaviour at school or home.	Interview data.
Emotional Intelligence	Sociability/friends	Child talks about enjoying company of friends.	Children's interviews; parent/carers' interviews.
	Helps others	Child helpful/caring to family/others.	Researcher's observation; interview data.
	Understands own feelings	Child able to talk about feelings/impact on behaviour.	Researcher's assessment; interview data.
Help Required	Needs help	Needs help managing situation, including parent's imprisonment, beyond what family can provide.	Researcher's assessment; interview data.
	School helpful?	School providing support related to parental imprisonment.	Interview data.
	Receiving agency support	Child in active contact with statutory or voluntary sector agency.	Interview data.

Note

Judgements about children's resilience and vulnerability are my own, and therefore subjective, based on interview data.

The rest of this section draws out characteristics of the children with *high, medium and low* resilience in more detail.

4.1.1 *Demographic Analysis*

The *high* resilience group comprised 11 children, 6 boys and 5 girls. More than half the girls (5/9) and less than a third of the boys (6/19) were in this group. In the *medium* resilience group there were 5 boys and 4 girls. Just over a quarter of the boys in the study (5/19) and nearly half of the girls (4/9) were in this group

Girls were over-represented and boys were under-represented in the *high* and *medium* resilience groups. Strikingly, all the children in the *high* vulnerability group were boys. Overall, boys seemed more vulnerable than girls.

The mean age of the children in the *high* resilience group was 13.3 years; for the *medium* group 10.6 years; and for the *high* vulnerability group 12 years. None of the children under 10 were in the *high* resilience group. More of the children aged 14 or over were in the *high* resilience group (n=6), than in the *medium* group (n=1) or the *high* vulnerability group (n=1). Children seemed more vulnerable between the ages of 7 and 13. Most of the older children seemed more resilient.

Children with a mother in prison were included in all three groups: 4 out of 11 in the *high* resilience group; 3 out of 9 in the *medium* group; and 2 out of 8 in the *high* vulnerability group. Children with either a mother or a father in prison could be equally exposed to heightened vulnerability.

4.1.2 *Home Stability and Domestic Violence*

Home stability was very closely linked to children being able to deal with parental imprisonment. The most resilient of them could rely on parents/carers and extended family for consistent support. By contrast, some of the most vulnerable children had experienced or witnessed abusive or violent relationships at home.

4.1.3 *Children's Welfare: Future Prospects*

Prospects for nearly all (7/8) children in the *high* resilience group seemed *positive*. They were well looked after, at least fairly intelligent, and making some progress at school. They were sociable and had some understanding of their situation and feelings. Prospects for children in the *medium* group seemed either *positive* (5/9) or *fairly positive* (4/9). In the *high* vulnerability group, two children were a *cause for concern*, while prospects for the other six were *fairly positive*.

4.1.4 *Intelligence, School Progress and Behaviour Problems*

Intelligence and positive progress at school were also linked to children being able to handle parental imprisonment; and the converse was also true. Behaviour problems signalled heightened vulnerability. All the children (n=8) with behaviour problems were boys: three in the *medium* group and five in the *high* vulnerability group. Their situation is explored further in *Table 4* below.

Table 4: Boys with behaviour problems

Age / Case No.	Pseudonym	M or F in Prison	Experienced Domestic Violence	Understands feelings	Needs help	Emotional Response
B17/1	Joe	F	●	●	●	Self-hatred/self-harm, partially recovering
B13/4	Declan	F	●	●	●	Sometimes angry; problem behaviour at school
B13/6	Caleb	F	●	●	●	Angry and thoughtful; behaviour at school needs control
B9/7	Jack	S/F	●	●	●	Problem behaviour at school
B12/8	Grant	F	●	●	●	Angry; distressed; grieving; aggressive behaviour at school
B14/13	Harry	F	●	●	●	Self-hatred/self-harm; recovering
B9/14	Ethan	M	N/K	●	●	Bewildered, perplexed
B13/15	Piers	M	N/K	●	●	Angry, grieving, bewildered
B11/18	Kyle	M	●	●	●	Bewildered, distressed, aggressive behaviour at school
TOTALS		M = 3 F = 5 S/F = 1	Yes ● = 3 No ● = 4 N/K = 2	Yes ● = 3 Partly ● = 4 No ● = 2	Yes ● = 8 No ● = 1	
KEY		B = Boy M = Mother F = Father S/F = Step-Father N/K = Not Known				

Notes on Table 4

All the boys with behaviour problems (externalising behaviour) also showed signs of emotional problems (internalising behaviour). Boys with either their mother or their father in prison had behaviour problems. Domestic violence was a factor for three of the boys. The boys' level of understanding about their feelings varied widely. With the exception of Declan (B12/4), all these boys seemed to need help from outside the family.

4.1.5 Emotional intelligence

Children's sociability seemed to be a positive indicator. Some of them just enjoyed their friends' company, while others relied on them for support. The most resilient

children had empathetic and supportive relationships with parents/carers, siblings or other children.

Most of the more resilient children had a good understanding of how they had been affected by their parents' imprisonment, including how much they missed their imprisoned parent, how this had affected them, and how they had been helped by close relatives and friends. Some children who were rather less intelligent or who had learning disabilities showed an intuitive grasp of their feelings of loss. Children with less ability to articulate feelings of loss were more likely to be perplexed and overawed by their situation.

4.1.6 *Needing and receiving help*

The needs of the most resilient and least vulnerable children were largely met by their parents/carers and other close relatives. None of the children in the *high* resilience group needed external help. About half of those in the *medium* group (4/9) needed external support. All the eight boys in the *high* vulnerability group needed some external help such as school mentoring, as well as family support.

4.1.7 *Schools and Agency Support*

Schools were described by half the families (n=11) as having provided support for children. In nine of these families parents described in detail how schools had worked positively with their children on issues related to their parent being in prison.

All the children receiving agency support were in the *medium* (n=3) or *low* (n=5) vulnerability groups, apart from Matthew (B15/22). They had had mainly positive experiences of help from health services and voluntary organisations, and more

mixed experiences of statutory social services. Children described more intrusive interventions, where they were put under pressure to answer questions or provide information, as less welcome and less helpful.

4.1.8 Main findings from Table 3

Unsurprisingly, a clear link is evident between the stability provided by parents/carers and children's well being. Children's well being was threatened by exposure to domestic violence. The needs of more resilient children were largely met within their extended families. School was a main source of support for children, and three-fifths of the children in the study found schools' responses helpful. Negative responses from school heightened children's vulnerability. Intelligence and positive engagement at school were protective factors for more resilient children, as were enjoying the company and support of friends, and having a helpful disposition.

Children's ability to understand and articulate their feelings was linked to their successful handling of issues arising from having a parent in prison. Behavioural problems were concentrated almost exclusively amongst boys who also experienced emotional problems. More vulnerable boys needed more help from outside their family.

4.2 *The trauma of separation; and survival*

Trauma is an emotional shock, or a morbid condition produced by a wound or external violence (Oxford Concise Dictionary, 1988, p1140). Parental imprisonment is deeply wounding for many children (Baunach, (1985); Kampfner (1995); Bocknek (2009)); and children may react to parental imprisonment with feelings of loneliness and embarrassment and display behaviour problems and aggression (Poehlmann,

2005). The process may start with the sudden and unexpected arrest of one or both parents at the family home with children present. Very serious offences have more adverse impacts on children, reinforced by stigma associated with involvement in the criminal justice system. Separation from the imprisoned parent is a major source of distress for children; and this may be compounded by other adverse events, including loss of income, parents splitting up and families being forced to move home.

All the children in this research were emotionally shocked by their parents' imprisonment. The level of harm they experienced varied widely. Competing themes emerged from the interviews. The first emphasised children (and parents) adjusting to having a parent in prison; trying to get on with their lives and make them as normal as possible: asserting their independence and trying not to take responsibility for their imprisoned parent's or partner's wrong doing; and finding support where they could, from family and friends, schools and elsewhere. The second was about children being shocked, confused and traumatised; some managing with support from parents or school; some already receiving counselling or psychiatric help; and some children needing emotional help or help with behaviour; and about families whose lives had been turned upside down by the imprisoned parent's offences, frequently against a background of serious drug and alcohol misuse, by their experiences of the criminal justice system, and by having to re-frame every aspect of their lives, with their extended families, schools and jobs.

These themes with their different emphases will be evident throughout the analysis, and will be reviewed at the end of this chapter. At different points during the study one or other seemed to be dominant. There is an acknowledged skew in my research towards children who had managed to survive their parent's imprisonment and who were mainly in contact with their imprisoned parent. By the time interviews took place most families had been able to re-establish some degree of stability; some

felt that they had survived the worst part of their ordeal; and some could see an end to their parent or partner being in prison. The passage of time provided a kind of lens through which children and parents recalled experiences of family life and of the crises they had endured.

4.3 *Recalling Arrest and Imprisonment*

The arrest of a parent can be a sudden, shocking and bewildering event for children for which they are usually totally unprepared. It involves invasion of the family home, violation of private space, humiliation of parents, and sudden and unexplained separation and loss. Witnessing arrest can have traumatic consequences for children (Bocknek, 2009) including sustained recall long afterwards (Kampfner, (1995). While it has been argued that witnessing the arrest of a mother may be more detrimental than that of a father (Dallaire and Wilson (2010), children in this research were hit equally hard by their father's arrest. Where children were present when their parent was arrested their memories of the event were indelible. For example, thinking back to his father's arrest eight years earlier, Joe (B17/1) said: *"I was gutted, wasn't I?"*

Parental arrest can affect children in the same family very differently. Amelia (G7/8), aged just seven, vividly recalled the morning of the police raid at her home nearly two years previously:

"I was in my mum's bed with my dad and my mum and I heard a big bang, because all the police car doors kept getting shut. So I looked out of the window and loads of police was in the garden ... they took daddy away in a big van ... It made Grant (Amelia's brother) sad as well, and my mum. ... They busted the door so Uncle (name) had to come in the morning and he

had to put the door up and loads of wooden pieces up behind the door. ... My mum didn't get any sleep. She just used to sit at the bottom of the stairs with the dog. ... I miss him (her father) still. I miss him loads and loads and loads".

Amelia knew that she was "very upset" when her father was taken away "because I knew I wouldn't be able to see him for ages". Although she was one of the youngest children she was able to re-call the impact of the event not just for its impact on herself, but on the whole family.

According to his mother, Grant (B12/8), Amelia's older brother, had never recovered from his father's arrest and imprisonment. She particularly regretted that she had not been allowed to be with the children, and that they were not allowed to speak to their father. "...The kids weren't allowed to get out of bed. The police had got in their room and I wasn't allowed to go in to comfort them. I could hear them crying and we all had to go downstairs and the police brought the kids down and that's where we sat and they took (name of husband) straight away. They didn't let him come in, just took him straight away. It was horrible for the kids. I think more so it affected Grant. He was constantly crying".

Unlike her brother, Amelia was able to talk about how much she missed her father to her mother: "I don't very often speak about it ... it upsets you". She was also able to talk about happier and more ordinary parts of her life. She had been severely damaged by her father's arrest and imprisonment, but she was also able, eventually, to recover and enjoy the normal life of a small child.

Where both parents were arrested the initial impact could be even more bewildering. No adult was available to support the children. Ben (B12/21)'s parents were both arrested early in the morning without warning. His mother decided to send Ben to

school, where senior staff comforted him until his aunt and grandmother, who were both close to him, looked after him. His insecurity, mostly concealed, was evident in his continuing to sleep with his mother throughout the six months his father was remanded in custody. Both Nasreen's (G14/5) parents were also arrested after a police raid and several hours of interrogation, and Nasreen had to be taken to her paternal grandmother's home. Although she mainly kept her feelings to herself, when her father was released a few days later, he heard her crying herself to sleep at night and was in no doubt about the psychological damage she had experienced.

Without information and explanation children could make little sense of what was happening. If their other parent was at home, s/he may have been too numbed to help much, as was the case for Mark (B13/11). He was only nine when his step-father, to whom he was very close, was arrested at his home, an event which was unexpected for him and unexplained:

"I remember seeing him with handcuffs on and I told my mum, but she said that they didn't ... I went outside ... I didn't understand it".

Mark was alone and uncomprehending and there was no adult on hand to guide him, a pattern which would continue through his step-father's imprisonment. His sudden separation from his step/father made him anxious and detached. Bowlby (1988) described how patterns of attachment (and detachment) once established, tend to persist, as happened for Mark over the four years of his step/father's imprisonment; and how free flowing communication, which was not available to Mark, between the care giver and the child, when s/he was distressed as well as when content, could aid attachment.

While children experienced the humiliation of parental arrest acutely, it was separation from their imprisoned parent which was most disturbing for them, particularly where their prior relationship had been close. The parents of four of the boys (Gareth, (B11/16), Kyle, (B11/18), Harry, (B14/13); and Piers, (B13/15)) who suffered most had been sentenced to prison after extended periods on bail, a year in the case of Harry's father, and even longer for Gareth's mother. Three of the boys (Kyle, Harry and Piers) had extremely been close to their parent. None of them had been prepared for the prison sentences. Their parents were reluctant and hesitant to speak openly and honestly to their children, perhaps hoping that the worst would not happen, and knowing how distressed their children would be.

The four boys were harmed by being unprepared for their parents' prison sentences. Having to talk about an imminent prison sentence is demanding for parents, requiring them to acknowledge their responsibility and guilt; for children, this is an imposition requiring them to confront their distress and to take part in an extremely adult conversation. Had these boys been better prepared they may well have recovered sooner.

Two other parents used their bail period to talk to their children (Becky, G12/9, and Anthony, B11/12), to good effect. Becky had a relaxed relationship with her father. He had been on bail at home for more than two years and helped to prepare her for his remand in custody. Anthony and his mother were both articulate and intelligent. She thought it was her duty while she was at home on bail to be extremely clear with her son, then aged nine, about her offences and her unavoidable prison sentence. Their conversations were detailed and required much maturity from Anthony. He was as well prepared as he could be for her long sentence and benefitted from her honesty.

4.4 *Impact of parental offences*

Sack et al (1976) found that few children wanted to know why their parent (fathers in Sack's research) was in prison and most wanted to know why they could not stay with them and when they would be coming home. This is in marked contrast to findings in this study. Their parents' offences, particularly where these were viewed as serious, mattered very much to the children. Children could be repelled by their parents' crimes where these involved violence or harming others, or violence within their family. Children whose parents had been involved in seriously violent offences were the most profoundly affected, illustrated by the examples of Eleanor (G10/2), whose mother was serving a life sentence for murder, and Daniel (B8/10), whose father had been convicted of manslaughter.

Eleanor knew why her mother was in prison serving a minimum fourteen year sentence. She had lived with her until she was 2½, and she believed that she could remember partly witnessing her mother's offence, as she described in her interview.

"I was looking out of the window and then I saw her outside and there was a man walking down the street, but I didn't see the death.... I could see these dark figures because it was really dark. It was weird. It was from like the outline of three bodies. I can't remember what was in her hand. I remember like everyone used to be scared of her in our street because she used to be in loads of fights. I reckon she must have started a fight and like pushed it too hard and ended up killing the person. I know that he was like in his teens. Then I heard police cars a couple of minutes later. Then I went to live with dad and step-mum and she got took away. That's all I remember ... (it was) 8 years ago and another 8 years to go."

Eleanor seemed sure that she could remember these events, although she was very young when they happened. Her father also believed she had witnessed the assault as a result of Eleanor jumping on him a year or so later and saying that this was how her mother had killed her victim. Her recollections were detailed. (Eleanor was later able to describe which seat she sat in, in the police car that drove her away). She could remember and did not try to disguise her mother's reputation for violence, something she must have thought about and seemed to have been able to accept. Eleanor did not make excuses for her mother's behaviour, although she kept open the possibility that she might not have been intent on murder. Her mother's sentence was very long and Eleanor had had many years living with these memories. Her father described terrifying nightmares which his daughter frequently experienced.

Eleanor was remarkable in being able to share her recollections in an interview in which she also described parts of her life which she enjoyed; including being with her aunt, who spoiled her, and her much loved grandfather, and being with her friends, and sporting activities (she was a faster runner than most of the boys in her class).

Eleanor's interview, and Amelia's (although her memories were less violent), were characterised by a combination of horrific memories, and accounts of every day, normal activities. These children's resilience seemed to stem partly from their ability to recollect and integrate their profoundly troubling experiences, with support from their carers, and still to enjoy ordinary parts of their family and social and school lives. These abilities were shared by other children, for example Anthony (B11/12), and Matthew (B15/22), who were able to make a positive adjustment following their parents' imprisonment.

Daniel (B8/10's) experience had been very different. He had learned about his father's offence about a month after it had happened when he was taken to visit him

in prison. His father was serving a five year sentence for manslaughter. Daniel recounted: *"I think I actually know a real story. He (Daniel's father) said to me that some man shouted at him and that they grabbed each other ... Then my father punched him in the face, and then he died"*. This had apparently been the only time his father had talked about the incident, about fifteen months before I met Daniel. He said that he had bad dreams sometimes: *"I just wake up in the night and I scream"*. He had slept worse since his father was in prison. His father said he did not know what was going on in Daniel's mind. There had been few if any opportunities for Daniel to talk about the incident with an adult. He had had one very brief counselling session (a missed opportunity), and no more had been arranged. His father's offence had been notorious and widely publicised in his home town, something of which Daniel must have been aware.

Daniel's feelings about his father's offence remained unresolved when he was interviewed. His father's crime was inexplicable. His mother showed little capacity to encourage him to express his confused thoughts, and he was living a long way from older siblings and grandparents who could have supported him. These factors may explain why he demonstrated none of the resilience shown by Eleanor and Amelia.

Parents' violent offences distressed children. Gareth (B11/16) had almost certainly witnessed his parents' violent relationship. What he could not understand was why his mother had retaliated by attacking his father with a knife, an offence which she admitted and for which she eventually received a twelve month prison sentence. Joe (B17/1) had not been over-concerned about his father's earlier property offences, but he was deeply troubled by the knowledge that the offences for which he had been sent to prison for eight years had involved serious violence. Caleb (B13/6), who had serious learning disabilities, had to live with the knowledge that his father had first been sent to prison for violent offences against his mother, and that his

subsequent offences involved serious violence against his mother's partner. Jack (B9/7) and Kirsty's (G11/7) step-father was serving a prison sentence for assaulting their mother. The children were only too aware of his offence. Jack had liked his step-father *"... a lot, when he weren't hurting my mum"*. The children's mother had no doubt that witnessing domestic violence had seriously affected them. *"... They've only seen it once, but they've seen me covered in bruises afterwards"*. The harm these offences caused was mitigated, in these four cases, by patient support from their parents/carers (grandparents for Gareth) and their families.

Some children had known about their parents' offences since they were imprisoned, for example Nasreen (G14/5) and Anthony (B11/12), whose mothers were both convicted of fraud and embezzlement, or Piers (B13/15), whose mother was sentenced for affray; but they were much more affected by their separation from their parents than by their offences. Alex's mother's (B16/19) conviction for murder held less potency for him more than three years after her conviction.

Other children (Luke, B12/3; Amelia, G7/8; Mark, B13/11; Harry, B14/13; Ethan, B9/14; and Kyle, B11/18) all of them seriously impacted by their parents' imprisonment, did not refer to their parents' offences in their interviews, and their concerns were mainly about trying to manage in their parents' enforced absence. These children, with the exception of Harry's father, had all been convicted of drug related offences, and it may be that these troubled children less. Altogether, half (14/28) the children's parents had been imprisoned for drug or alcohol related offences, and none of these children gave any indication of being acutely distressed about these crimes, although Becky's (G12/9)'s older brother, aged 17, was very angry and ashamed about his father's remand in custody for alleged serious drug dealing.

4.5 *Children's experience of stigma*

Morris (1965), in her survey of prisoners' families, found little evidence of families experiencing stigma, as noted above (p27), with the exception of first time offenders. She found that stigma was less of a factor in communities where prison sentences were very common. Few of the families in this study were habitual offenders, and handling stigma presented severe challenges for most of the families and children involved. Parents and children had little idea how their own extended family and community would react, and many feared the worst. Stigma has been described as "sticky", attaching itself to families as well as prisoners, and the shame of imprisonment can result in whole families being in mourning (Arditti, 2003; Arditti et al 2003). Sometimes families could blame themselves, a kind of self-stigma, (Corrigan et al, 2009) accepting negative stereotypes, and feeling that the imprisoned parents' offences may be their fault or reflect badly on them.

Even where parents/carers were not unduly troubled, children still had to handle their own feelings of shame and deal with their friends' reactions. Declan and Natalie's mother (B13 and G14, Case 4) was one parent who made light of her partner's offences. She had lived in the same community, where her family was well known and well liked, all her life and she was well supported by her own parents. Declan and Natalie were more thoughtful about their father's behaviour and needed more reassurance.

Shame and stigma could result in families limiting their contact with the outside world. Mark's mother (Case 11) cut herself off from the local community and had little support except from her father. Harry's mother (Case 13) closed down virtually all contact with previous friends, and his father's family deserted them. Oliver and Jamie's mother (Case 17) found that her father's family wanted little contact because

of her partner's imprisonment, and few friends remained loyal. Anthony's father (Case 12) felt the disgrace of his wife's conviction profoundly, although he shielded his son, emphasising that he had done nothing wrong. A sympathetic response from children's schools helped a large number of families start to adjust to the stigma of imprisonment. Where schools were hostile, as for Kyle (Case 18) and Grant (Case 8), families' feelings of stigma were strongly reinforced. Luke's mother (Case 3) felt isolated and unsupported after her partner was remanded in custody; she was helped by a consistently sympathetic response from her employer.

As well as dealing with the shock of imprisonment, children have to cope with its consequences. Natalie (G14/4) and Becky (G12/9) had both had to adjust to a steep reduction in family income, having less to spend on their social life than their peers. Becky complained that *"... we're not allowed to do half the stuff we used to be able to do, because we don't have enough money"*. She was conscious that her friends would be likely to think that her family was really *"rough"* because her father was in prison. Eleanor (G10/2) was only five when her father had to change her school after she innocently spoke in class about her mother being in prison. Nasreen's (G14/5) father was determined to keep his wife's disgrace and imprisonment a secret from acquaintances in his community. Nasreen followed his example: her school had been her life since she was three, but she told none of her friends and none of her teachers about her mother, pretending that she was working abroad. Piers (B13/15) was looked after by his mother's partner, who described him as being profoundly affected by the stigma of his mother's imprisonment.

Sack (1977) found that the boys in his study had a strong sense of shame, as though they were confessing their own wrong doing by announcing their father's confinement. Children faced *"....the bruising reality that their fathers were considered in need of punishment and as potentially dangerous"* (p172). Such stigma contributed to the

boys' aggressive anti-social identifications. Nearly two years after his father was imprisoned, Grant (B12/8) was still severely traumatised, partly by his separation from his father, and partly by the shame and stigma involved. He had only visited him a few times: *"It was nice to see my dad, but I didn't like seeing him in there"*. His distress about telling his best friend about his father was evident: *"I wasn't glad to tell him about it, because I don't think anyone would be glad to tell anyone about your dad going to prison"*: a clear example of disenfranchised grief (Doka, 1989). His mother decided to stop his visits because of Grant's wildly aggressive behaviour immediately afterwards at school. Experiencing stigma and shame was not confined to boys; about half the girls were conscious of their families feeling uncomfortably different, and were extremely circumspect about discussing parental imprisonment, although none were as seriously damaged by these experiences as were Grant and other boys, including Joe and Harry.

Adult sexual offences against children violate societal norms of acceptable behaviour, and confront children, particularly adolescents, with their parents' sexuality, needs and aggression. Matthew (B15/22) was the only child in this study whose father had been convicted of sexually assaulting another child, a fifteen year old girl in Matthew's class at school. Matthew had much to contend with: his father attempted to commit suicide before he gave himself up to the police, and his mother had long-term incapacitating physical disabilities. When the offence became public, previous friends cut themselves off from the family intensifying their feelings of shame and isolation in a remote rural location. Social workers set up a child protection investigation and the authorities' sympathies were exclusively with the victim's family. Matthew's mother was accused by social workers, unjustly in Matthew's opinion, of neglecting her children and putting her own needs first. Acute prejudice and stigma stemmed directly from the nature of Matthew's father's offence, and disrupted and hobbled the family's functioning and social life

Almost all the parents and children (Natalie and Declan's mother was an exception) felt diminished and demeaned by their involvement with prison and by the ripple effects of the imprisoned parent's offences. Prison visits took up their free time leaving less time for other pursuits, and depleting parents/carers' energy. Families were more isolated with fewer links with previous friends. Relationships with employers could be fragile. House moves were frequent. Previous contacts were severed and family life became more anonymous. Families became more reliant on their own resources, and achievements and successes were celebrated more mutely. There was evidence in two thirds (14/21) of the families of their turning in on themselves, losing confidence, and closing their face to some relatives and to former friends and acquaintances. When they took the risk of seeking help, particularly from schools, most were encouraged by the support they received.

4.6 *Multiple loss; multiple problems*

For families of children of prisoners' cumulative risks convey greater hazards (Johnson and Waldfogel, 2002; Miller, 2007). Cumulative disadvantage can lead to harsh or inconsistent parenting for children of prisoners (Arditti et al, 2011). These children are more likely to experience parental substance abuse, maltreatment or abuse (Gabel & Shindeldecker, 1993). Adversity is additive over time: more stress factors lead to maladaptive rather than resilient outcomes (Norman, 2000).

While having a parent in prison presents children with formidable challenges, these can be exacerbated by other unwelcome experiences or crises, including child abuse, family violence and the breakdown of their parents' relationship. This combination of problems heightens children's vulnerability, and in some cases such experiences can impact on children more severely than having their parent in prison.

Three children had been victims of child abuse. Jack (B9/7) had been sexually assaulted by his grandmother a few years previously. His mother was unsure whether his reported behaviour problems at school had been caused by this rather than his step-father's imprisonment. Joe (B17/1) had been abandoned by his mother as a small child and had been left to be looked after by his father and his paternal grandmother. He had been physically abused by his grandmother and his mother believed that he had also been sexually abused by an uncle. After his father was imprisoned and his mother had resumed caring for him, Joe turned his anger on himself, desperately cutting out several of his own teeth and trying to hang himself. His prolonged trauma had multiple causes. Eleanor (G10/2) fared no better when she lived with her father and her step-mother for several years after her mother was imprisoned. She had been repeatedly physically abused by her step-mother, including being pushed downstairs by her once. She drew attention to the resultant scar on her chin, which had required hospital attention, during her interview¹², and said that her step-mother was kind to her only when her father was present. Eleanor's experience of being looked after, first by her sometimes violent and unpredictable mother, and then by her step-mother, must have been doubly confusing.

In some cases parental relationships broke down acrimoniously, and this was particularly upsetting for Sameera (G8/20) and Gareth (B11/16). Sameera can have seen little of her father in the year before he was convicted (for drug offences), when he left the family and set up home with another woman and her children. He continued this relationship after he was imprisoned, putting seeing his new girlfriend and her children first and preventing Sameera from visiting him. Her maternal

¹² See p 102, above, for a review of how the interviewers responded to these allegations.

grandmother sent Sameera hostile messages that her father had abandoned her. Sameera's mother confronted her father and succeeded in reinstating Sameera's prison visits. These events are likely to have distressed Sameera equally as much as the fact of her father's imprisonment.

Gareth talked about his distress when his mother received her (unexpected) prison sentence: *".....I was crying my eyes out on that chair over there"*. His grandparents confirmed that he cried for hours. Managing access visits to see his father added to Gareth's problems: according to his grandparents his father told his children to expect their mother to receive a twenty-five year prison sentence, and his family celebrated when she was convicted. Other family members made noisy contributions at the children's school. Gareth had to deal with a family war at the same time that his mother was in prison.

Two children, Daniel (B8/10) and Piers (B13/15), were both uprooted from their home town and had to move away as a condition of their parents' licence prior to their release from prison. Daniel moved with his mother away from his adult brothers and sister and grandparents as a condition of his father's licence from his open prison. He had been particularly close to an older brother (and his dog) who had spent much time with him, and he also had to make a new start at a new school, upheavals which he found confusing and upsetting. Piers had been well looked after by his mother's partner, his full-time carer, following her imprisonment, and with his support had made some progress at school. Then he too was required to move away so that his mother could begin home leaves. Piers had a cheerful disposition and did not want to dwell on his problems. However, his feelings had been clear when he phoned his mother and asked: *"Why are they keeping you, we've moved? We shouldn't have moved house. I've lost everything – I've lost my mum, my brother and all my friends"*.

For Daniel and Piers, these upheavals must have been equally as upsetting as their parent's imprisonment.

Six of these seven children seemed to have withstood the multiple challenges they faced, with determined support from their parents and carers. The exception was Daniel whose parents' commitment to him was more doubtful.

4.7 *Impact of separation on children*

The impact of imprisonment of a parent has been described as similar to loss for children as a result of death or divorce (Bocknek, 2009), but also as conveying greater ambiguity, and with no prospect of closure (Boss, 2010). Attachment figures need to be physically and also psychologically present for children (Howe et al, 1999), and this can be impossible for imprisoned parents. Children with close relationships to fathers prior to imprisonment are particularly likely to experience attachment disturbance (Fahmy & Berman, 2012).

With the partial exception of Jack and Kirsty (Case 7), who seemed to be relieved when their violent step-father was imprisoned, all the other children missed their imprisoned parents, and most of them missed them very much. These included children who had been dismayed or repelled by the offences their parent committed; and also those who had been most conscious of stigma attaching to imprisonment. While most of the children missed their parent as much as when they had first been imprisoned, some, mainly older, children changed their attitude over time, and as they matured. Anthony (B11/12) said that his mother had been in prison for so long that he had adjusted to his situation, although he very much looked forward to her eventual release. Joe (B17/1) had had very little contact with his father in recent years and did not want to resume a relationship with him now he was due for release.

Samantha (G17/14) had developed a new life for herself. Alex (B16/19) had grown apart from his mother as the years passed; and Matthew (B15/22) had decided to put his relationship with his father on hold while he concentrated on his school work and supporting his mother.

Three boys (Harry, B14/13; Grant, B12/8; and Kyle, B11/18) were particularly severely damaged as a direct result of their parent's imprisonment. All three of them had been particularly close to their parent prior to their imprisonment. The depth of the boys' anger and distress was vividly described by their parents. Harry and his father had been inseparable. When he was sent to prison his mother described Harry's anger and agoraphobia, and his fear that he would lose his mother as well. He was: *"... full of hatred. His dad wasn't there so he wanted to kill himself. ... And he had a go at slitting his wrists. He was very angry. ... I have got a few holes in my door and the wall where he has kicked and punched the door. ... He didn't want to go to school. He didn't want to leave the house in case something happened to me"*. Grant was devastated, according to his mother, and unable to handle his aggression when his father was arrested: *"I think he is angry with me as well. I couldn't tell you why, but he is angry with both of us"*. He was unable to manage the transition to high school. It was: *"...terrible for him. He just couldn't take to the high school, so he is forever in trouble"*. Grant was excluded and then suspended from school after assaulting a teacher. Kyle was completely lost when his mother was sent to prison; they had been everywhere and done everything together previously and, like Grant, he was quite unable to manage moving to high school at the same time that his mother was imprisoned. His distress was apparent on his first visits to see her. He was: *"... heartbroken when they were going home and they literally had to drag him off me. It was horrible, there was nothing I could do"*. Kyle had hardly attended school at all for the two school terms his mother was in prison, and his behaviour had changed for the worse.

None of these boys appeared to be curious about their parent's crimes, although contact with prison could be terrifying. Each of them had committed support from their parent looking after them at home. These parents could do little initially to assuage their children's grief. Sack et al (1976) aptly described the isolation of children of prisoners with "*....no means of rationalising or justifying their loss, no honourable way out*". (p623).

The degree of emotional harm experienced by children as a result of separation varied widely (see *Summary* in *Table 5* below). Length of sentence was clearly an important, but not necessarily a crucial, factor. Kyle's mother was in prison for just eight months, but this could not have come at a worse time for him. Two or three years could be an interminable sentence for younger children. Where the imprisoned parent was nearing the end of their sentence, children could start to look forward to their homecoming, like Oliver (B11/17) and his brother, Jamie (aged 10), who were marking off the days on the calendar as their father approached the end of his six months in jail.

The mothers of three of the children, Natalie (G14/4), Becky (G12/9), and Ben (B12/21), all commented that these children had not been too adversely affected by their father's imprisonment. They provide a contrast to the three boys most badly affected. Natalie, Becky and Ben all missed their fathers; Ben, particularly, as he had been very close to his father and spent much time with him. The three of them derived much security from their strong relationships with their mother, all of whom had jobs, which may have contributed to the children feeling that normal life was still possible. They were all sociable, fully engaged with their life at school, and each of them had experienced some success: Natalie in sports and performing arts; Becky in dance and gymnastics; and Ben in sporting activities. All of them were in good

contact with their parent in prison, although Becky prioritised her social life over prison visits. Although family income had fallen for all of them, the children had experienced continuity in their lives as well as disruption. Parts of their lives were able to progress as normal. The expected length of their fathers' imprisonment varied. Natalie's father was serving a shorter sentence (7½ months, half of his fifteen month sentence); Ben's father had been remanded in custody for six months; while Becky's father, still on remand, was expecting a long term of imprisonment.

4.8 *Factors linked to emotional harm experienced by children*

In this section I try to assess the level of emotional harm experienced by children in the study. The emotional impact of parental imprisonment on children is central to the focus of my thesis. This kind of assessment may be hazardous and has obvious limitations. I am able to draw on interview data from children and their parents which goes some way to indicating their emotional reactions: inevitably the quality of the data is variable, detailed and compelling for some children, and less so for others. The process of assessment depends on my reading, assimilating and reviewing the data for each child. As such it differs from assessments undertaken by professionals (for example social workers) in various respects; notably no other professional contributed, and I had no access to advice from other professional disciplines, such as clinical psychology or education. No standardised psychological measures were used.

What I mean by emotional harm covers negative impacts of parental imprisonment, including lack of confidence and self-esteem, frequently linked to feelings of embarrassment, shame and stigma; and sometimes a tendency towards introspection. Emotional harm may be manifested in children not being able to talk about their feelings, or evident from angry or unpredictable behaviour; or in reduced

capacity to be aware of the needs of others, or being pre-occupied with their feelings about their imprisoned parent, and less able to enjoy their family, school or social life. Emotional harm may also be linked to children's lack of capacity to learn from experience, to move on, and to distance themselves from turmoil.

I approach this with a mixture of trepidation and confidence. External validation about children's well being, for example from teachers, would undoubtedly have been valuable. However, many children were able to convey how they felt, and their behaviour during interviews gave further important clues. Most parents/carers (they rather more than imprisoned parents who had less contact with their children) were able to assess their children's state of mind. Both transcribed and summarised interview data provided a source of detailed information.

My attempt to make this assessment is summarised in *Table 5* below.

Table 5: Level of emotional harm experienced by children

Most emotionally harmed	Medium level of emotional harm	Least emotionally harmed	Not harmed (by parental imprisonment)
Joe B17/1 (F) Daniel B8/10 (F) Ethan B9/14 (M) Eleanor G10/2 (M) Kyle B11/18 (M) Grant B12/8 (F) Mark B13/11 (S/F) Piers B13/15 (M) Harry B14/13 (F)	Amelia G7/8 (F) Sameera G8/20 (F) Gareth B11/16 (M) Luke B12/3 (F) Caleb B13/6 (F) Nasreen G14/5 (M)	Oliver B11/17 & Jamie B10/17 (F) Anthony B11/12 (M) Becky G12/9 (F) Ben B12/21 (F) Declan B13/4 & Natalie B14/4 (F) Abida G14/20 (S/F) Matthew B15/22 (F) Alex B16/19 (M) Samantha G17/14 (M)	Jack B9/7 & Kirsty G11/7 (S/F)
4 (M) 4 (F) 1 (S/F)	2 (M) 4 (F)	3 (M) 7 (F) 1 (S/F)	2 (S/F)
KEY: M = Mother in prison F = Father in prison S/F = Step-father in prison			

Jack and Kirsty (Case 7) were not directly harmed by their step-parent being in prison, although Jack had clearly been troubled by his step/father's violence towards his mother, and possibly by his experience of abuse within his family.

A first point to note from *Table 5* is the lack of evidence that the gender of the imprisoned parent was a significant factor impacting on the level of emotional harm they experienced. Out of the eight most damaged children about half (4/9) had their mother in prison, and about half (5/9) their father or step/father. Whilst children with their mother in prison can be seen as over-represented in this group, my view is that the level of damage experienced was equally severe for children with either their mother or their father in prison. In the *medium* and *least damaged* groups the numbers of children with their father or mother in prison was roughly proportionate to numbers in the full sample, and no link with levels of damage experienced is apparent.

Of the nine *most emotionally harmed* children all but one were boys. Eleanor was a resilient child, but her memories of her mother's horrific crime, and her very long prison sentence, presented her with formidable challenges. Three factors stand out as being particularly characteristic of these children.

The first is the intensity of their relationship with the imprisoned parent. Five of the boys, Kyle, Grant, Mark, Piers and Harry, had all been extremely close to their imprisoned parent, and Joe had also, much earlier, been close to his father. Kyle and his mother and Harry and his father had been inseparable. Grant had been particularly close to his father, and Mark's relationship with his step-father had also been very close. Piers' mother had been close to all her three sons. Eleanor had not lived with her mother for more than seven years, but she reciprocated her mother's intense relationship with her.

A second factor contributing to the children's problems was the lack of adequate explanation provided about their imprisoned parents' situation. Daniel's father had talked to his son once about his conviction for manslaughter sixteen months before, at the start of his sentence, and he had rather vague intentions to re-open the subject following his release from prison. His mother had made some comparison between the family's situation and a story-line in a well known television drama series as a partial explanation for Daniel, but there was no sense that either of his parents were available to help Daniel, an intelligent boy, to reason out and understand what had happened in his family, and how it had affected him. Daniel was disappointed that his father spent little time with him when he was on home leave. Eleanor's father was nervous about opening discussions about her mother's situation, as he feared this would distress her. Harry had been totally unprepared for the impact which his father's prison sentence would have on him, and he was numbed with grief and

anxiety about his father until his eventual and delayed first visit to prison. Mark's mother was disinclined to discuss her partner's imprisonment with anyone outside the family, and she conveyed this cautious and closed attitude to her son. Ethan seemed bewildered about his situation, and opportunities to visit his mother were very restricted after her move to an open prison.

Lack of explanation and lack of understanding about their parents' situation caused these boys anger and frustration (Grant and Piers, for example). Kyle was equally dismayed, but he was at least able to articulate clearly how much he had missed his mother while she had been in prison, and how this had affected his behaviour and his school attendance.

The third factor was the extent to which these children felt uprooted and displaced from their families and communities. This was most evident for Daniel and Piers, who had been forced to move with their carer away from their home town, as already noted. This meant loss of extended family, school and friends, compounding the loss of their imprisoned parent, and stripping away such security as they had left. Being uprooted was an experience shared by other children. Eleanor had been shunted between different carers. Kyle, Grant and Ethan had all had to move home and had had changes of school. The family life which all the children had known had changed dramatically, requiring adjustments which they found difficult to manage.

These three factors account for much of the emotional harm experienced by these children, and although they were mainly well cared for, support from their carers could only partially redress the harm they had experienced.

The children assessed as having experienced a *medium level* of emotional harm had all also previously been close to their imprisoned parent. All of them had been

shocked and upset by the imprisonment. A number of factors limited the harm to which they were exposed. The clearest of these was unconditional positive support from their carers. For example, Sameera's mother was a determined advocate for her daughter, successfully reinstating her in her father's affections so that she could visit him in prison. Gareth's grandparents' consistent and sensitive care enabled him to ride out the trauma of his parents' violent relationship and his mother's imprisonment. Joe's mother was now doing all she could to safeguard her son, although she had left him to be cared for by his father and his family for several years when he was younger. These children seemed more in control of events, with more understanding of what had happened. They were more able to understand their feelings, demonstrating emotional intelligence; this included both Joe and Caleb, both with severe learning difficulties, but with some ability to appreciate the impact of the loss of their fathers on themselves, and the added complications of their fathers' violent criminal tendencies. The children were helped by being able to share their feelings with their carers. Nasreen was a private person, but she had frequent opportunities to talk to her mother in prison, as well as to her father looking after her.

While all the children in the *least harmed* group missed their parent in prison, they were less seriously affected. Relevant factors again included committed support from their carers. This was clearly the case for the first eight of the children listed, and the quality of carer support for them was unmistakeable. The other three children (Matthew, B15/22; Alex, B16/19; and Samantha, G17/14), were older and more independent. Anthony's father was very clear about the importance of his son knowing that he was loved. Matthew had been close to both his parents, and his relationship with his mother was still strong. Open communications were encouraged in these families. Becky's mother, for example, said that her daughter knew that she could ask anything she wanted to about the family's situation. Several of the children, including Oliver and Jamie, Becky, Ben, Declan and Natalie, and Abida and

Samantha, had a happy disposition. As well, most of the children demonstrated a degree of maturity, and most of them were able to speak clearly about their lives at home and at school (although Alex was a young man of few words). Oliver and Jamie were two of the younger children, but they were articulate about family life since their father had been in prison.

There was a clear sense for these children that although parental imprisonment had been unwelcome, their lives had not been altogether destabilised. Alex had moved on from the initial shock of his mother's imprisonment for murder. Matthew had shown unusual independence of judgement in deciding to discontinue contact with his father after his conviction for child sexual assault, and to concentrate on improving his school grades. Most of these children had been able to focus on their own lives and to separate themselves to some degree from the complications caused by their parents' imprisonment, somewhat akin to the 'adaptive distancing' described by Norman (2000) as a feature of resilience.

4.9 *Children's recovery from the impact of parental imprisonment*

Trauma symptoms abate over time. Supportive families are associated with better recovery (Masten et al, 1990). There is compelling evidence for the power of the family environment for improving individual resilience (Masten & Obradovic, 2006). For children of prisoners, continuing contact with the imprisoned parent is the most significant factor related to successful family reunion post release (Gabel & Johnston, 1995).

"Recovery", like emotional harm, is challenging to assess. The caveats and limitations described in relation to assessing emotional harm apply with similar force

to trying to gauge the process of children's recovery. The extent to which the children had recovered from their parent's imprisonment is assessed in *Table 6* below.

Table 6: Process of Recovery

Minimal Recovery	Medium Recovery	Maximum Recovery	Less Impacted
Joe B17/1 (F) Grant B12/8 (F) Daniel B8/10 (F) Mark B13/11 (S/F) Ethan B9/14 (M)	Eleanor G10/2 (M) Luke B12/3 (F) Caleb B13/6 (F) Harry B14/13 (F) Piers B13/15 (M) Gareth B11/16 (M) Kyle B11/18 (M) Sameera G8/20 (F) Matthew B15/22 (F) Declan B13/4 (F)	Oliver B11/17 (F) Jamie B10/17 (F) Nasreen G14/5 (M) Amelia G7/8 (F) Anthony B11/12 (M) Samantha G17/14 (M) Alex B16/19 (M) Ben B12/21 (F)	Natalie B14/4 (F) Jack B9/7 (S/F) Kirsty G11/7 (S/F) Abida G14/20 (S/F) Becky G12/9 (F)

With the passage of time, for all the children, except the five boys whom I have assessed as having made a minimal recovery from their trauma, their symptoms had receded. All of them except Matthew, (and Jack and Kirsty) were in close contact with their imprisoned parent.

The situation of the five boys who had recovered least from their parents' imprisonment is described in the box below.

Joe	<p>The most damaged young person, educationally, socially and psychologically; and also the least independent. His attachment to his mother had been disrupted early in life. He had, however, received effective psychiatric intervention and medication.</p> <p>Achievements:</p> <p>Caring for animals.</p>
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Daniel	<p>Daniel had been uprooted from his older siblings and grandparents; his attachment bonds were not strong towards either parent. Daniel seemed emotionally detached; he experienced sleep disturbance and night terrors and his imagination was peopled by monsters. He seemed to be in a world of his own at school.</p> <p>Achievements:</p> <p>Creative imagination.</p>
Ethan	<p>Ethan's attachment bond to his mother had been disrupted and he had few opportunities for contact and visits.</p> <p>Hope for the future:</p> <p>Ethan's mother had started having home leaves.</p>
Grant	<p>Grant was deeply traumatised; he had low feelings of self-worth and was scarred by the stigma of his father's imprisonment. His anger seemed to be directed towards his mother, while he idealised his father. His behaviour at school was aggressive and provocative.</p> <p>Achievements:</p> <p>Obsessed with football.</p> <p>Hope for the future:</p> <p>Support from both parents, and his father's release was less than a year away.</p>
Mark	<p>Mark seemed depressed after his step-father's four years in prison and he had low feelings of self-worth. His mother looked after him well but did not appear to engage closely with him. His progress at school had been delayed. Mark seemed under-stimulated and emotionally detached</p> <p>Hope for the future</p> <p>His father had started home leaves and his release was fairly imminent.</p>

These five boys showed the least signs of recovery. They lacked a secure base (Bowlby, 1988), and attachment bonds with their imprisoned parent had been severed. Three of them (Daniel, Grant and Mark) had been buffeted by moves to unfamiliar environments. None of them seemed to be in control of events.

The children who had made a *medium level of recovery* still demonstrated considerable trauma (Eleanor, Harry, Piers, Gareth and Kyle); or anxiety (Luke); or anger and behaviour problems (Caleb, Kyle and Declan). Sameera had made some positive adjustment following the shock of being abandoned by her father. Matthew was resigned, and somewhat bitter, about the desertion of previous friends.

Positive family support was helping all the children in this group to make a positive adjustment to parental imprisonment. Most of them (although not Kyle and not Matthew) had had some positive school experiences or support from school. Counselling had been effective for Luke and Harry. Emotional intelligence, humour, sports and other achievements were positive characteristics for several children (Eleanor, Luke, Caleb, Matthew and Declan). Harry had experienced exemplary mentoring support from school. Kyle's mother had returned home, improving his prospects.

All the children who had made a *maximum recovery* continued to miss their imprisoned parent. Four of the five had had positive support from both their parents; the fifth, Samantha, now 17, was independent and mature. These children were able to enjoy their lives and achievements; and their social lives and friends had played an important part in their recovery.

4.10 *Children's emotional intelligence : and handling feelings about imprisonment*

4.10.1 *Children trying to handle their feelings*

Children displayed much ambivalence about their parent's imprisonment. Feelings of shame were particularly prevalent amongst boys and some (Joe and Grant were

examples) had kept their emotions bottled down. Other boys with learning disabilities showed much self-awareness. Some children had too little help with understanding their situation and their reactions. Others had more open and more helpful relationships with their parents/carers. Children commonly used guarded or restrained language to express their feelings, and almost all exercised considerable caution, or even secrecy, in talking about their situation to friends and acquaintances.

Grant's (B12/8) observation that nobody would like telling a friend about their father being in prison highlights the difficulty faced by all children of prisoners in handling and sharing their feelings about their situation, about which most of them experienced feelings of shame. Children needed information appropriate to their age about what had happened, and help with understanding how the family would adjust. Having lost one parent, children would worry (like Harry, B14/13) that their parent/carer might not be reliable, and that further losses could follow. Findings from this study are that most children had made some progress towards understanding and handling their feelings by the time they were interviewed, although a small number, all of them boys, were still in a state of confusion. All these children needed help from their carers and close families; and some needed help from outside the family as well. Children were more successful handling their feelings where they were encouraged to be open and enquiring by their carers.

4.10.2 The significance of parents' example for children's adjustment

Children learned from their parents' example. If their parents avoided talking about prison, their children would be reluctant or fearful to ask questions or to request help. Parents' reluctance to talk openly could be harmful. Kyle's (B11/18) mother was on bail at her home for several months before her conviction. She told Kyle that she expected to be going away, but could not bring herself to say that she was going to

prison, leaving Kyle to work this out for himself. Her reticence compounded the impact of her separation for her son, who had no idea how to manage without her. Harry's (B14/13) father was on bail for a year before his sentence, but he seemed not to have been able to help his son consider the possibility of losing him. Four years later, his Christmas presents for the years since his father was imprisoned had been stowed away, unopened, where they would remain until his father was released: a telling image of the emotional distress which his son experienced. None of the parents were closer to their children than Kyle's mother and Harry's father. They knew exactly how badly their sons would be affected. Had they tried to prepare them better, they could hardly have made things worse. Children needed patient explanations and the opportunity to ask any questions whenever they needed to.

Grant's (B12/8) father downplayed the impact of his imprisonment on his son: *"I got remanded straight into custody so I don't know how the kids took it"*. According to Grant's mother, his father was the only person who could have helped him, and from within prison he felt powerless to support his son. His mother described how Grant bottled down his feelings: *"Grant doesn't speak to anybody. He doesn't open up ... and tell you what's wrong with him ... that's what he used to do with his dad. ... I can't get anything out of him ... I think he is angry with me as well. ... He is angry with both of us"*. Grant had very few words to express his feelings about his father being in prison, not able to get beyond describing prison visits, school and family life as *"... rubbish ... boring ... crap"*.

Two other children seemed not to have started to be able to handle their feelings. One was Mark (B13/11), whose emotional development seemed to have been stunted in the four years his step-father had been in prison. His lack of self-confidence seemed to mirror his mother's depression, and there had been no opportunities for him to seek the support of a teacher or other helpful adult. Daniel

(B8/10) seemed the most insecure of all the children. He had a vivid imagination and his sleep was disturbed. He knew something about his father's offence (manslaughter), but had had no opportunities to explore his feelings about this.

4.10.3 *Children's ambivalent responses*

When children began to explore their feelings, intense ambivalence was a likely reaction. Piers (B13/15) had the security of a developing and supportive relationship with his mother's partner. He was able to acknowledge that his mother being sent to prison was *"....quite upsetting ... everything bad has happened this year"*. Talking did not come easily to him: *"I don't really talk to my mum, not like if I need something. I wouldn't go talk to no-one"*. His friends had seen news reports about his mother's offence: *"I wouldn't want to talk to them about it. I just don't like talking. I didn't even talk to any of my old teachers"*. Piers revealed himself as a boy who wanted to keep his feelings firmly pushed down and out of reach, preferring not to put the loss he had experienced into words. His talk was rich in contradictions. He said that his mother was the person closest to him, but that he would not talk to her, perhaps meaning that he could not talk to her because she was not there. His response to a social worker's visits was *"... I don't need any help. I say "no, no, no" and she just goes"*, thereby powerfully repelling such professional concern. He acknowledged that he easily became angry at school: it only took a little to make him explode. His advice to other young people in a similar situation - *"Don't worry ... I don't worry"* - , was at odds with his blast of feelings about losing his mother, his family and his friends. Nonetheless, his ambivalence could have been a starting point: his carer was looking after him well, and his mother was determined to rebuild her relationship with him.

4.10.4 *Learning disabilities and emotional intelligence*

Three of the boys with learning disabilities demonstrated considerable emotional intelligence. Caleb (B13/6) was described by his mother as having complex learning difficulties and his speech capacity was limited. He had received much help from his special school and recalled a lesson in which children had talked about loss. He had spoken about his grandmother dying and he seemed to understand that his father being in prison was a kind of loss, which seemed a remarkable insight. He had chosen not to talk about his father being in prison in this lesson, as he did not want to seem different from other young people. He conveyed much meaning and feeling in his single word answers to interview questions. Life had been “*hard*”, because his father had been away. Prison visiting was “*scary*”. He would be “*happy*” when his father came home. Crucially, his mother recognised that both she and her son needed help, and a voluntary agency had organised visits to his father for Caleb and helped him talk about his feelings. His mother’s assessment about the impact of his father’s imprisonment seemed credible. She thought it “*....hasn’t affected him too badly. It could have affected him worse by him going more withdrawn ... but he seems to have handled ... the visits and the prison situation ... quite well. He comes away obviously happy that he has been*”.

Joe’s (B17/1) learning difficulties and psychological problems were equally profound. His disrupted childhood, overshadowed by his father’s offences and long term of imprisonment and a long period of separation from his mother, had seriously harmed him. He had been ill-treated by his grandmother, a subject he did not wish to talk about. But there were signs of Joe beginning to understand what had happened. Asked about his father being in prison Joe said (with understatement): “*I wasn’t too happy about it then, but I’ve grown up and got used to it now, really*”. He recognised that “*...it’s been worse while he (his father) has been away. ... I really don’t know*

what it would be like if he was out of prison ... It has obviously made a big difference because I haven't got my mum and my dad". His father, when interviewed, thought that Joe would have little to say about him, as he had been in prison for so long. He was wrong. Joe said: *"I never forgot about him"*. His mother added: *"There wouldn't have been a week gone by when he (Joe's father) wasn't talked about"*. His mother was strenuously and tirelessly committed to looking after him, and Joe's understanding of his situation had improved.

Kyle (B11/18) was interviewed four months after his mother was imprisoned. He had fallen behind at school. He also conveyed understanding and insight into his situation in his interview. He knew that his problems at school were caused by *"... my mum being away"*.

Interviewer: Has it got better?

Kyle: It's still a bit upsetting.

He recognised how much he had been affected by his mother's absence, and he was able to be honest that the effects were continuing. His advice to other young people coping with a similar situation was: *"... Talk to someone about it"*. He said that the most helpful thing for himself was to *"....talk to my mum"*. He described how his friends were *"...like helping me, cheering me up and stuff like that"*. This was *"...a good thing – they did help me"*, confirming previous findings that younger children prefer informal support from friends to more structured interventions or counselling (Wade & Smart, 2002). Kyle had been reluctant to be interviewed and was eventually persuaded to by his quietly supportive father. He knew that he needed time to talk to his mother, and he was able to recognise helpfulness in his friends. These were hopeful signs.

4.10.5 *Holding feelings in check; and the use of understatement.*

Kyle was one of a number of children who used understatement to describe difficult experiences. He acknowledged that prison visits were *“upsetting, the first couple of times, but after (that), ok”*. His mother confirmed that Kyle eventually started to enjoy prison routines; after the first few visits *“...he was bouncing”*. Joe’s (B17/1) mother had graphically described her son’s self-harming after his return to live with her. By contrast, when Joe was asked about his reaction to his father being in prison, his response was: *“I wasn’t too happy about it then, but I have grown up and I have got used to it now, really”*. The passage of time was a significant factor, but like Kyle, Joe understated his distress. Nasreen (G14/5) described how she went upstairs when the police arrived to interview her parents: *“...And then I came down a bit later because I was a little bit curious”*. Her mother being sent to prison was: *“... hard in the beginning, but I got distracted by school”*. Nasreen seemed deliberately to choose language which played down the intensity of her feelings.

The three children’s decision to use restrained language to describe some of their hardest experiences was a deliberate choice. Kyle and Joe may have experienced highly charged and very emotional encounters and exchanges with adults, and may have wanted to avoid any repetition. Nasreen’s father avoided strong statements about his own emotions during his interview, and Nasreen seems to have decided to follow his example. Understatement may have served other useful purposes.

Revisiting painful experiences was avoided. Feelings can be powerful and frightening, and, if understated, may be easier to control. Also, use of restrained language could be dignified. The children may also have been indicating, quite properly, that their feelings were private and not too much on display to an unknown researcher; that they could deal with them, and did not need help at that time.

4.10.6 *Importance of privacy and caution in handling parental imprisonment*

An important finding from previous research is that more secure children with imprisoned mothers exercised caution about sharing information about imprisonment; and most children kept maternal imprisonment a secret sometimes (Hagan & Myers, 2003). Children interviewed in this study had worked out for themselves that there was good reason to exercise caution about sharing information about imprisonment. Several of them had talked to their best friends, but not more widely. Jack (B/7) was concerned that he might fall out with children in whom he had confided, and that they might break confidences. Children were fearful about being the subject of gossip. Harry (B14/13), grievously affected by his father's imprisonment, talked to trusted staff at school, but to none of his friends. Ben (B12/21) confided only in his best friend; his father's imprisonment was not discussed with his wider circle of acquaintances, at weekend football for example, although his mother was heartened by other families' concerned and sensitive support for her son.

Ben's mother wanted family life to be as normal as possible: theirs was *"...a normal family, dealing with an abnormal situation"*. Caution about sharing their situation and dignified privacy helped the family cope. Samantha (G17/14) said that hers was *"... just a normal family, really, still. Well, not normal, but ... We just get on with things ... and we cope with these lot (her younger siblings and nephew), just about"*.

Privacy had not been possible for Samantha's family, because there had been much local publicity about her mother's offences initially. Eventually the level of curiosity reduced *"... It's just like faded out ... it's not top of (the) talking list any more"*. She provided information about her mother when asked, but did nothing to encourage such interest.

Children could be required to keep their parents' imprisonment as a private matter, or a secret, which could be stressful. Nasreen's mother (Case 5) warned her daughter about talking to people at her school: *"....Girls can be very vicious at that age"*.

Nasreen may have preferred this approach. Her mother described her as *"... a very private girl ... she doesn't open up easily... Maybe she is embarrassed; maybe she is ashamed"*. Nasreen must also have been strongly influenced by her father who was determined that none of his extended family or his religious community should learn about his wife's fall from grace; in his view, it was *".....absolutely none of their business."* Even though Nasreen had attended her much loved school all her life, she confided in neither teachers nor friends, maintaining the fiction that her mother was working abroad.

Other children found this more difficult. Eleanor (G10/2) eventually talked to her friends on a bad day at school (she had just learned that a planned visit to see her mother had been cancelled); they were sympathetic and supportive. Becky (G12/9), also feeling under strain, eventually told a wider group of her friends about her father's imprisonment than she had intended. Kirsty (G11/7) desperately wanted to talk to her school friends about her situation, but thought this would be wrong.

4.10.7 *More open approaches to handling parental imprisonment*

A majority of the children were close enough to their parent/carer to be able to discuss their concerns about their imprisoned parents with them. In eleven families this relationship was with the children's mother (Cases 1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22); in three cases with the children's father or step-father (Cases 12, 15 and 18); and for Gareth, B11/16, with his grandparents. These relationships provided opportunities for children to talk with their parents/carers when, and as much as they needed to. Becky (G12/9) had a very open relationship with her mother; and she

could also talk to her father. Amongst the younger children, Amelia (G7/8), and Oliver (B11/17) and Jamie (B10/17), enjoyed warm and open relationships with their mothers.

Ten of the parents/carers had taken the important step of talking to the children's schools and had thereby opened up opportunities for further support from them (Cases 3, 4, 6, B9/7, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17). Luke (B12/3) described the benefits of support from a school counsellor "... *It's easier to like let out your feelings. It's just like sometimes it's upsetting when I think about it* (his father being in prison) ... (It's) *upsetting when you are going there, (to see the counsellor) but it's fine when you are speaking to him*". Luke was one of the few children to talk about the value of openly sharing his feelings with a supportive adult.

4.11 The "steeling effect"; and adaptive distancing

4.11.1 The steeling effect

The resilience literature includes descriptions of the capacity demonstrated by some children to emerge stronger from challenging and traumatic experiences, described as the "steeling" or inoculation effect by Rutter (1987). Several children reflected on how their relationships with their imprisoned parents had affected them. Declan (B13/4) said that his relationship to his father had been close and that his anger problems had much to do with his father's absence. His sister, Natalie, (G14/4) regretted that her father was not able to share in some of her recent sporting successes and that her family had been, to some extent, fractured. Samantha (G17/14) had worked out her own way of absorbing and integrating the impact of her mother's imprisonment. She would advise other young people in a similar situation to "... *Just take it on the chin. Just get on with it really. I have a cry every once in a*

while. I am a practical person. It's happened, we can't change it, so we just get on with it. Just plod along". Samantha briefly acknowledged the emotional impact of her mother's imprisonment, but refused to dwell on it. She would have preferred things to be different, but was making the best of her life.

The clearest example of the steeling effect was provided by Nasreen (G14/5). She was single minded in her determination that her mother's imprisonment should not damage her education. She made sure she did not miss a day at school when her mother was arrested: *"They said you can have a day off, but I said "no"*". She thought the experience had made her stronger: *"....I think I can withstand a lot more now"*. *"Things"* (her mother's imprisonment and her father's redundancy) had been *"hard"*. Nasreen thought she was harder and stronger because of experiences which her peers had not had to face. She thought hard about the emotional impact of her mother's imprisonment when she was interviewed, not finding the question intrusive. *"I can cope with more harder things ... harder as in emotionally harder ... I can cope better"*. Nasreen could still be hurt, and this was evident from her mother's account of her daughter's distress when she had to return to prison after a weekend on home leave (something for which Nasreen could see neither justification nor logic). If she was angry with her mother she did not say so. Overall, Nasreen felt she had benefitted from her harsh experiences. She took responsibility in an adult way for moving her life forward, and seemed not to blame her parents or anyone else for her situation.

4.11.2 Adaptive distancing

There is some overlap between the steeling effect and the concept of '*adaptive distancing*' described by Norman (2000). Norman describes adaptive distancing as part of a repertoire of coping skills. "Steeling" implies strengthening; while "adaptive

distancing” indicates the capacity to move away from and beyond harmful experiences to a new phase. An ability to distance themselves from their parents’ problems was clearly demonstrated by a quarter (8/28) of the children (Natalie, G14/4; Nasreen, G14/5; Becky G12/9; Anthony, B11/12; Samantha, G17/14; Alex, B16/19; Abida, G14/20; and Matthew, B15/22), all of them in the *high* resilience group (see p111 above). This was in most cases combined with concern for, and continued involvement with, their imprisoned parent. Five out of the eight were girls and six were teenagers. They were some of the most mature young people in the study.

Adaptive distancing in this study was possible only where children were no longer overwhelmed by the impact of parental imprisonment. The next step was for children to be able to focus on other areas of their lives which provided opportunities for success and enhanced self-esteem and self-confidence. This was out of the reach of children still struggling to adjust to parental imprisonment. Children like Anthony (B11/12), Natalie, (G14/4), to a lesser extent her brother Declan (B13/4), and Becky (G12/9) had successfully moved on and adapted to their parent being in prison. Anthony was demonstrating responsibility beyond his years caring for his father.

Some of the older children had made most progress in distancing themselves from the impact of parental imprisonment. Nasreen (G14/5) and Samantha (G17/14), although still preoccupied with adjusting to their mothers’ imprisonment, had the ability to focus clearly on their education and career prospects and their social lives. Abida (G14/20) had adjusted to her step-father’s imprisonment and had determined on her career pathway as a dance teacher.

The clearest examples of adaptive distancing were provided by two of the older boys. For Alex (B16/19), whose relationship with his mother had reached a more

dispassionate phase, this seemed to be a result of both his increasing physical maturity and independence, and of the passage of time. For Matthew (B15/22), his decision to disentangle himself from involvement with his father had been a more deliberate decision. His own assessment was that despite his feelings for his father, he could not allow himself to be distracted by the turmoil of further involvement with him, and he was focusing instead on achievable targets: improving his school performance, and supporting his mother.

While most of the other children showed some signs of being able to distance themselves from the problems caused by parental imprisonment, a smaller number of boys including Joe(B17/1); Grant (B12/8), Daniel(B8/10); and Mark (B13/11), remained enmeshed in these problems, and had not been able to move on to a more independent developmental stage.

4.12 *Children's contact with their imprisoned parent*

Bowlby (1988) recognised that free flowing communication when children are distressed as well as content aids secure attachment. For most children, contact with their imprisoned parent was essential for their peace of mind and well-being and gave them the opportunity to keep their imprisoned parent informed about daily activities at home and at school. Parents/carers felt strongly that they had a duty and responsibility to ensure that their children had regular opportunities to see their imprisoned parent. They were gatekeepers with the power to facilitate or to discourage contact, as Arditti (2005) had noted. Visits were the nearest to ordinary family life possible for families of prisoners, often eagerly anticipated but leaving a sense of feeling fatigued and deflated afterwards. Visits needed planning and organisation and included strong elements of ritual, including transport arrangements

and search procedures. Visits are symbols of family connectedness, undertaken with a mixture of cheerfulness, optimism, loyalty, stoicism and resentment.

Prompt contact with their imprisoned parent was particularly important following their imprisonment. For Harry (B14/13), completely devastated when his father was sent to prison, the recovery process began nine weeks later when he made his first visit to see his father in prison. Children have understandable fears about prison being a dangerous place where their parent may be harmed, as emphasised by Roy (2005). Children were re-assured to see that their parent was safe and in good health, and in some cases (for example Ben's father (case 21)), actually benefitting from the prison diet and regime. Most children adapted fairly quickly to prison security requirements, and some were intrigued by them (Declan (B12/4), for example). Anthony (B11/12) described how he had become inured to prison regimes, about which he became knowledgeable, for example about procedures to detect illicit transfers of harmful substances between visitors and prisoners

The process of adapting to the prison regime is best illustrated by Kyle (Case 18). He initially found visits to see his mother in prison unbearable; but both he and his mother remarked on how quickly he adapted. However, terminating visits and contacts was gravely upsetting for several children. Kyle could not bear to be separated from his mother when the time came for her to return to prison after a day long town visit. Nasreen (Case 5) and Piers (Case 15) also found parting from their mothers after they had been on home leaves unbearable; and these children's experiences called into question whether the benefits of home leaves outweighed the children's distress.

Prison visits were essential for most families. Declan and Natalie (Case 4) had almost as much face to face contact time with their father when he was in prison as when he was at home but working away for most of the week. For Amelia (G7/8)

and Sameera (G8/20), the two youngest children, very frequent prison visits were still special occasions, and gave them the time they needed with their fathers. Mark (B13/11) needed the physical contact and time to cling on to his step/father which regular visits provided. Prison visits became part of family life for Oliver and Jamie (Case 17) in the six months their father was in prison, although organising them was burdensome for their mother, with responsibility as well for her two very young children. Ethan's mother (Case 14) was in prison on remand near enough the family's home for Ethan to be taken to see her very frequently, several times a week. She served the latter part of her sentence in an open prison several hours' journey away from the family home and visits became infrequent. A cancelled visit proved extremely upsetting for Ethan who could not understand why he was not able to see his mother, and his behaviour at school suffered as a result.

Distance, and the associated higher costs of organising visits, was a serious factor for many families as noted in previous research (Arditti et al, 2003; Codd, 2007). Nasreen's father (Case 5) resented the additional cost and time involved in visiting his wife after she had been transferred away from a local prison. Daniel's mother (Case 10) had organised weekly visits to three prisons spanning the north of England for about a year, demanding for Daniel as well as for herself. Anthony's father (B11/12) campaigned vigorously and eventually successfully after his wife was transferred to a prison several hours journey away, and after six weeks she was returned to a local prison where visiting was much more manageable. Ben's mother (B12/ 21) was able to visit the local prison where her husband was initially remanded several times each week. She was exceptional in still managing fortnightly visits by car with her son when her husband was transferred to a prison at the other end of the country. Distance and cost were prohibitive factors for Harry and his mother (Case 13), and they were only able to visit Harry's father once each month, a barely adequate lifeline for Harry. Both Harry's and Grant and Amelia's (Case 8) fathers

achieved Category D (minimum security) status, and eligibility for transfer to an open prison. With their families' welfare in mind, both of them refused these transfers so that their families did not have to undertake much longer journeys and incur increased costs to see them.

For some children, visits mattered less. Joe (B17/1) had had little contact with his father for years and resisted his father's requests to rebuild their relationship. Matthew (B15/22) decided that for the time being at least he would not take on visiting his father in prison; distance was one factor, but Matthew also was not prepared for face to face contact with his father, whose offence had damaged his family's reputation. Visits to see her father in prison were a low priority for Becky (Case 9); her younger brothers monopolised his attention, and Becky had a busy social life which filled her free time. For Alex (Case 19) occasional visits to see his mother, serving a life sentence, were a compassionate duty; he recognised that these were an important reminder of family life for her.

One of the closest contacts between an imprisoned parent and their child was Nasreen's mother's (Case 5) who made very frequent telephone calls, three times each day, planning and reviewing Nasreen's day at school, and then talking to her again in the evening. Daily or very frequent telephone contact was managed by Grant and Amelia's father (Case 8), Becky's father (Case 9), and Gareth's mother (Case 16); and there were several others.

While these contacts provided considerable reassurance for children, their relationships with their imprisoned parent mainly remained "on hold" during the sentence. Neither telephone contact nor visits necessarily provided opportunities for depth and continuity of communication between children and their imprisoned parent. The prison environment was generally not conducive to relaxed and meaningful

conversation. Important exchanges such as Daniel's father's description of the fight which led to his conviction for manslaughter left his son with unanswered questions.

There were some exceptions. Nasreen's mother (Case 5) found an opportunity to apologise to her daughter for her conviction early in her sentence. Family days provided bonding opportunities for Eleanor (Case 2) with her mother; her father had stopped booking ordinary visits where opportunities for closer contact were not available. Caleb (Case 6) was pleased that his father had told him that he often looked at Caleb's photograph, keeping his memory of his son alive. Just seeing their parent in prison was sometimes enough for children, like Piers (B13/15) and Gareth (B11/16), both of whom visibly brightened when they talked about visiting their mother and finding her well.

4.13 *Parental imprisonment and the significance of gender*

From the preliminary overview at the start of this chapter (pp 108–113) analysing vulnerability and resilience amongst children of prisoners, girls showed more signs of resilience, and fewer of them seemed distressed by their parent's imprisonment when interviewed. Boys' progress was more varied: some adapted well, while others showed clear signs of either externalising (acting out or delinquent) or internalising (acting in, for example anxiety, depression or self-harm) behaviours. Some trends stand out. All the children in the high vulnerability group (n=8) were boys; as were all the children with behaviour problems. Most of the children who had needed external help were boys. In the four families (Cases 4; 7; 8; and 14) where a brother and sister were both interviewed, the boys were struggling more than the girls.

The purpose of this section is to explore how far these differences are attributable to the gender of the children or the gender of the imprisoned parent; and how far other

factors, including the quality of care provided by parents/carers, cumulative risks, length of sentence, seriousness of offences, or children's individual characteristics, account for them. Relevant research findings include evidence of children adjusting over time to parental imprisonment (Miller, 2007; Jones & Wainaina-Wozna, 2013); children with closer prior relationships with fathers experiencing greater attachment disturbance post imprisonment (Fahmy & Berman, 2012); and strong arguments that maternal imprisonment is linked to internalising behaviour patterns and paternal imprisonment to externalising behaviour patterns by children (Fritsch and Burkhead, 1981). Girls have been found to have the edge over boys in relation to resilience (Rutter, 1987).

The section will review evidence from this study for the three girls with their mother in prison; for girls with their father in prison (n = 6); for boys with their mother in prison (n = 6); and then for the larger group of boys with their father in prison (n = 13). The relevance of research about inter-generational crime (*Like father, like son?*) for my sample is then reviewed¹³.

4.13.1 *Girls with their mother in prison*

Three girls had their mother in prison: Eleanor, G10/2; Nasreen G14/5; and Samantha G17/14, serving long (for Eleanor and Samantha's mothers) or fairly long (3 years for Nasreen's mother) sentences. These had been life changing experiences for them. The effects had been most profound for Eleanor, linked to the nature of her

¹³ Tables summarising the situation of the four groups of children covered below (girls with their mother, and their father, and boys with their mother, and their father, in prison), are in Appendix 7

mother's offence (gang murder) seven and a half years previously, the length of her sentence (minimum 14 years) and her enforced moves to live with her father and her step-mother, and then just with her father. Nasreen's family life had been disrupted and she had had to cope with perceived antagonism from her ethnic and religious community. Like Nasreen, Samantha had had to adjust to losing her mother, and she also shared responsibility for looking after her three much younger siblings, with her two older sisters. For all of them it had been a long time since their mother was imprisoned; and all of them had adjusted to their new lives. Each of them had parts of their lives which they could enjoy, including their friends and school (work for Samantha). Eleanor was having to cope with the emotional impact of her renewed relationship with her mother; and she had been the most scarred by her mother's imprisonment as a result of her (almost certainly) having witnessed part of her mother's assault on her victim. Nasreen had dealt well with the punishing impact of her mother's sudden arrest and imprisonment, as was evident from her outstanding academic success at school. Samantha had matured over the two years her mother had been imprisoned and was now a confident young adult with her own independent work and social life.

These three young people did not display the level of vulnerability suggested in previous research. None of them showed signs of depression. One reason for this may be that they had all experienced a degree of stability from their families (Eleanor in the period since she moved back to live with her father) and extended families in the care they had received since their mother was imprisoned. They were all intelligent in different ways (as were their mothers), with a strong sense of self, able to determine their own priorities and to exert a positive influence on those around them. All of them had achieved respect from their family and peers. Each of them had worked out a strategy for dealing with the stigma of imprisonment which had worked for them. Eleanor needed support from her friends. Nasreen handled the

issue privately and secretively, taking none of her friends into her confidence and pretending that her mother was working abroad. Samantha dealt with questions about her mother's imprisonment when need be and waited until interest tailed off.

The girls had not been overwhelmed by the challenges they had experienced. They demonstrated strength of character; they also drew on the support of grandparents, and the two younger girls had reliable support from aunts and support from friends and school. The idea of life carrying on as normally as possible was important to all of them. Samantha had been successful, and Nasreen partially successful, in distancing herself from their mothers' problems; while Eleanor remained involved in handling a new and more intense phase of her relationship with her mother with support from her father, her family and her friends.

There is a clear sense from the girls' interviews of their making the best of the hand that fate had dealt them; and not dwelling too much on past events which they could not change. Each of them drew on support from their families and from their own internal resources; and each of them had had time to adjust to their mother's imprisonment. Their gender appeared to be an important factor contributing towards their resilience: in the way they handled their issues as young women; in their level of emotional intelligence; and in the supportive relationships which they developed with their female friends and relations.

4.13.2 Girls with their father in prison

Overall the challenges faced by the six girls in this group (Amelia, G7/8; Sameera, G8/20 and Abida, her 14 year old sister; Kirsty, G11/7; Becky, G12/9; and Natalie, G14/4) appear to have been somewhat less demanding than for the girls with their mother in prison, due particularly to the support available to them from their mothers.

Amelia and Sameera, the two youngest children, had initially been severely affected by their fathers' imprisonment. Their situation improved when they were able to establish regular contact with them, including frequent visits. All the girls had been close to their fathers (step-father for Abida) prior to their imprisonment (with the exception of Kirsty who had lost sympathy for her step-father following his violence towards her mother), and they maintained close contact with them in prison. The length of their fathers' prison sentence did not appear to be a decisive factor (as it was for boys with their father in prison: see below, p168): the four girls (Amelia, Sameera and Abida, and Becky) whose fathers were serving or expecting longer sentences seemed to have adjusted fairly well. Their school lives were not adversely affected. Kirsty was making a successful transition to a large secondary school. School and friends were important for all of them. Abida, Becky and Natalie enjoyed success in demanding and disciplined physical activities from which they gained much self-confidence. A clear finding from this research is that girls with a father in prison (compared to girls with their mother in prison or either group of boys) were the least impacted by parental imprisonment. This is partly explained by their individual circumstances in their families.

All the girls lived with and were well supported by their mothers. Their relationships with them were close. They had experienced continuity of care and no disruption in their primary attachment relationships with them. The mothers enjoyed their daughters' company and were their feminine role models. They spent time with their daughters and, importantly, were available to provide information and explanations about their fathers' behaviour. With the partial exception of Kirsty's mother, herself a victim of domestic violence, their mothers had borne the brunt of their partner's imprisonment, provided the first line of defence for their daughters, and afforded them considerable protection. This was particularly vital for the two youngest girls

(Sameera and Amelia). All the mothers had facilitated as much contact between their daughters and their fathers as they wished for. Their mother's support, in my view, was the key protective factor for these girls.

Although they mainly missed their fathers, by the time of their interviews none of these girls showed signs of acute psychological distress. All of them had siblings who had shared their experiences; this appears to have been particularly important for Kirsty, who had two supportive older sisters, as her mother was still recovering from her partner's assaults. There were two other important factors. For four of the families (not for Amelia), the girls had had a good deal of experience of their fathers' problems before they were imprisoned, giving them time to adjust. All of them had also had clear and honest explanations from their mothers about what had happened. These factors contributed to the girls' position within their family being less affected by their fathers' imprisonment than some other participants.

This group included three of the girls who had been able to put some distance between themselves and their imprisoned parent (Natalie, Becky and Abida); and Kirsty had started to do so as well. Intelligence and sociability were also protective factors for these young people.

4.13.3 *Boys with their mother in prison*

Care arrangements for the six boys with their mother in prison (Ethan, B9/14; Anthony, B11/12; Gareth, B11/16; Kyle, B11/18; Piers, B13/15; and Alex, B16/19) were diverse. Three of them were looked after by their father (Anthony and Kyle) or their mother's partner (Piers); one was supported by his father and his older sister (Alex); one by his grandparents (Gareth); and one mainly by his older sisters (Ethan). Five of them had experienced reliable and consistent support from their families,

although Piers had been uprooted from his home town and extended family. Three of them, Ethan, Kyle and Piers, were bewildered and distressed by their separation from their mothers, Kyle being perhaps the most grievously affected. Kyle and Piers had been particularly close to their mothers before their imprisonment. Anthony and Gareth, the two most intelligent of these boys, were mature for their years; they were more resilient and both handled their transition to secondary school successfully. Alex had grown up and become less close to his mother since her imprisonment.

Alex and Anthony had had much longer than the other boys to adjust, and they had been able to put some distance between themselves and their mothers' imprisonment. Sentence length appears to have had less impact on this group than for boys with their father in prison (see below, p169). Ethan was certainly very seriously impacted by his mother's long absence, although his young age (only 7 or 8 when his mother was imprisoned) may have accounted for more of the damage he experienced. Piers, Gareth and Kyle were all very seriously affected by their mothers' shorter sentences.

Maternal imprisonment exerted a profound psychological impact on this group of boys. Except for Alex, the boys were bereaved by their loss: which was unexplained for Ethan; particularly grievous for Kyle who had been inseparable from his mother, and only a little less so for Piers, who was two years older. Gareth and Anthony also missed their mothers very much, although they had had more time to prepare during their mothers' period on bail and were well supported after they were sent to prison. (Piers' and Kyle's mothers had been much less pro-active while on bail in preparing their sons for their imprisonment). There is more evidence of attachment disruption and separation anxiety for these boys than for the smaller group of girls (with their mother in prison). Gender was clearly a significant factor in relation to the boys' difficulties in adjusting to their mothers' imprisonment, although age, their prior

relationships with their mother, how well they had been prepared for their mothers' prison sentences, and their diverse care arrangements, were also important.

4.13.4 *Boys with their father in prison*

This was much the largest group (n=13), comprising nearly half the children interviewed (see *Appendix 7*). All the boys were being looked after by their mothers when interviewed, and all of them, with the partial exception of Daniel, had good relationships with them. Their basic needs were being well met. The two youngest boys, Daniel (B8/10) and Jack (B9/7), were particularly vulnerable. Of the two eldest, Matthew (B15/22), was exceptionally mature, while Joe (17/1) was the most damaged.

The length of their fathers' sentence and the seriousness of their offences were the clearest factors impacting on outcomes for these boys. Sentence impact was much more serious and imposed a much heavier burden for the seven boys whose fathers were serving longer sentences, between 16 months and 8 years. For these boys their mothers' support was only a partial protective factor. Shorter sentences, or periods in custody, were generally more manageable and the boys were able to survive these with the high quality support they received from their mothers.

Nine of the boys exhibited behaviour problems at some level. Six of them demonstrated externalising behaviour (Jack; Luke; Grant; Declan; Caleb and Mark). Daniel and Harry showed clear evidence of internalising behaviour, while Grant and Joe displayed both internalising and externalising behaviour. Four of the boys' behaviour was especially troubling: Joe's and Harry's (self-harming); Grant's (aggressive and out of control); and Daniel's (seriously distracted and failure of concentration).

The degree of risk experienced and the quality of the relationship between the boys and their fathers were two other key variables. Following Rutter's findings (1987), the boys exposed to the single risk of paternal imprisonment mainly managed fairly well (Luke; Declan; Jamie and Oliver; Ben; and Matthew). Boys facing multiple or cumulative risks (Joe; Caleb; Jack; Daniel; Grant; Mark and Harry) had faced more serious challenges and their prospects for the future were more uncertain. The closeness of the boys' relationships to their fathers before their imprisonment was clearly linked to the level of distress they experienced. The clearest examples are Grant, Mark and Harry, all of whom had been particularly close to their fathers (step-father for Mark), and found it extremely difficult or impossible to manage without them. Several other boys had also been close to their fathers and felt their loss keenly, although for them the harm was mitigated by their families' support.

The boys whose fathers were in prison were a vulnerable group. Several of the boys' progress at school was impaired, including Luke's (B12/3), Declan's (B13/4), Jack's (B9/7), Grant's (B12/8), Daniel's (B9/10) and Mark's (B13/11). The boys had lost their role model, and several of them their mentor and close companion, and they missed their fathers' example of how to behave appropriately during their absence.

Age and increasing maturity were protective factors, as was intelligence. However, hardly any of the boys, with the exception of Matthew ((B15/22), had the ability or the maturity to distance themselves from their fathers' imprisonment. Effective school support contributed to the boys' successful adjustment; while negative school experiences compounded their problems.

4.13.5 *Main themes emerging about gender*

This study has confirmed Sack's observation (1976) about children experiencing sadness and separation anxiety related to their fathers' imprisonment; and Fahmy & Berman's comment (2012) that children with close relationships with fathers before imprisonment can experience subsequent attachment disturbance. Juby & Farrington's (2001) conclusion that paternal loss is less damaging than maternal loss for children of prisoners is tantalising. This study has found that maternal loss does have profound psychological consequences for children of prisoners, for both boys and girls. The boys seemed to experience their loss more acutely. This included boys whose mothers were serving shorter prison sentences. Sentence length emerges as a key factor for boys with their father in prison; but seemed to count for less for girls in the same situation.

Some evidence was found to support the link asserted by Fritsch & Burkhead (1981) between maternal imprisonment and internalising behaviour consequent on lack of nurturing, and between paternal imprisonment and externalising behaviour consequent on lack of control and discipline. However, the children most severely impacted by parental imprisonment showed clear signs of psychological distress as well as behavioural problems, regardless of whether it was their mother or father who was in prison.

My evidence indicates differential impacts of paternal imprisonment on boys and girls. The link between paternal imprisonment and boys' behaviour problems is well borne out. Continuity of support by their mothers as care givers is crucial for their children. My findings are that their mothers' support can provide girls with the level of protection they need to limit damage caused by paternal imprisonment. For boys who

have been close to their fathers, the loss of their role model and authority figure can have severe consequences.

Overall, gender has emerged as one of the key factors impacting on children of prisoners in this study alongside: effective parental care and family support, sentence length, cumulative risk, and children's individual personality traits. Girls tended to adapt better than boys. Boys were more prone to display externalising or internalising behaviours. For girls with their father in prison, support from their mothers, who provided their role models, appeared to be the crucial factor in their successful adaptation. For boys with a father in prison, the stability and support they experienced from their mothers was frequently not sufficient to compensate for their fathers' absence, and to enable them to deal with the impacts of their imprisonment.

4.13.6 *Like father, like son?*

The Cambridge Study of Delinquent Development (CSDD) established a link between paternal imprisonment and their sons' subsequent convictions (Murray, 2006). The authors have carefully analysed how far other factors, for example social deprivation, may account for this finding. Research in Australia and the USA has concluded that other factors such as parental substance misuse and maternal mental health are more closely related to delinquency and anti-social behaviour than parental imprisonment (Phillips et al, 2006; Kinner et al, 2007). One way for children to hold on to a lost parent (in prison) is to take on some of their characteristics, even if these are anti-social (Sack et al, 1976). Young men can blame themselves for their parents' imprisonment (Miller, 2007).

Evidence that boys tried to emulate their father's criminal behaviour is limited to two cases in this study, perhaps less than might have been expected. This may be a

reflection of the sample of families involved in the study. In five (Cases 3, 4, 8, 11 and 17) of the twelve families where sons had a father in prison, the fathers' offences were drug or alcohol related and sons may not have wished to emulate these. One boy (Ben B12/20) firmly believed in his father's innocence. Jack (B9/7) was repelled by his step-father's violence. As has been noted, children in the study were mainly well cared for, and in contact with their imprisoned father, both of which are recognised protective factors. Had the sample included more children in local authority care system, or who had been subject to higher levels of risk, the pattern is likely to have been different.

The two cases (Jo, B17/1 and Grant, B12/8) where there was some reference to sons wishing to emulate their father's criminal behaviour were both complex, and the boys' reactions to their fathers' criminal behaviour ambivalent. Joe's mother was very clear in her interview that Joe had modelled his provocative behaviour, for example at school, on his father, and that he did so in order to gain his father's approval. (Notwithstanding this, Joe, in his interview, stated his objection to the violent element in his father's crimes). Joe's aggression was *"... because he wanted to be like (his father)"*. He had got into a lot of fights: *"... nobody would have said anything to his dad, and he wanted to be like that. ... He thought he had to be hard and he thought fighting all these people, then his dad would love him more"*. She was clear that Joe craved his father's attention, although he had had little contact with him in recent years.

Reports about Grant's showing off to his friends about his father being a *"gangster"*, if true, were further evidence of his confusion, as he was also ashamed of his father being in prison. Grant's father was concerned about his son's attitude *"... He thinks it's great (his father being in prison), when it's not. ... I don't want him to think "my dad's a criminal" "*. He would have preferred his son to think of him as an ordinary

tradesman. His father saw it as his responsibility to rein his son in: *"I'm hoping that I can get him back on the straight and narrow a bit when I get out"*.

Their imprisoned father was still a powerful role model for several boys, including Luke (B12/3); Declan (B13/4); Mark (B13/11); Harry (B14/13); Oliver (B11/17) and Jamie (B10/17); and Ben (B12/21). These boys had little to say about their father's crimes and appeared to look up to them in spite of, not because of, their offences. All of them wanted their fathers back at home, and wanted to spend time with them. Only Declan expressed hesitant disapproval of his father's drinking.

Other boys with a father in prison were either puzzled or bewildered by their father's behaviour, or clearly disapproved of what they had done. Their fathers' example was seriously flawed. Caleb (B13/6) must have had conflicted feelings about his father, who had assaulted both his mother and her partner. Daniel (B8/10) appeared to be troubled about having a father who had killed another man. Becky (G12/9)'s brother, aged 17, was angry about his father's drug dealing and refused to speak to him or to visit him in prison. His mother commented: *"I don't think he likes to see him less of a man than he was here"*, and he would not listen to his father admonishing him: *"... He has lost respect for him, definitely"*. Matthew (B15/22) had taken a considered decision to distance himself from his father's criminal sexually abusive behaviour.

The clearest conclusion here is that there is nothing inevitable about the CSDD finding that: *"...offending runs in families.....Criminal parents tend to have criminal children"* (Farrington et al, 2009). Children of prisoners are at risk of being labelled. More generally, boys in my study found having their father in prison confusing and troubling; they were vulnerable and they were damaged by losing their role model; but their cause was far from hopeless. Many were effectively supported by their

parents/carers; some were successfully counselled and mentored at school; and a few were strengthened by their experiences.

4.14 *Family Structure: implications for children of prisoners*

4.14.1 *Findings from previous research*

The few differences which have been found between 'only' children and children with siblings are concentrated in academic areas, where 'only' children have the advantage and attain higher levels of education (Poston & Falbo, 1990; Gee, 1992; Falbo & Poston, 1993). They have been found to score significantly better than other groups on achievement motivation and personal adjustment (Polit & Falbo, 1987). Chinese research has found that 'only' children were more egocentric, whereas sibling children possessed qualities of persistence, co-operation and peer prestige (Shulan et al, 1986). Children from larger families have the advantage of growing up developing a wider range of relationships with siblings, which can make establishing friendships and relationships outside the family easier (Winnicott, 1964).

4.14.2 *Experiences of 'only' children*

There were six 'only' children in the sample: Eleanor (G10/2); Anthony (B11/12); Ben (B12/21); Caleb (B13/6); Nasreen (G14/5) and Harry (B14/13). Their circumstances and abilities varied widely. For example, Nasreen was gifted, intellectually and musically, while Caleb had learning disabilities. (Caleb had a younger cousin, a girl aged 8, living with him). These children had the potential disadvantage of not having siblings with whom they could share issues associated with having a parent in prison. This seems to have been outweighed by having the focused and undiluted attention of the parent looking after them. Three of these children, Anthony, Ben and

Caleb, seemed to have benefitted from their parent/carer's focused commitment and support. Eleanor expressed some doubts about her father's commitment to maintaining contact with her mother. Nonetheless, as a single parent he was committed to looking after her, and he had additional support from his sister and father. Nasreen also had consistent support from her father, looking after her, and also from her paternal aunt and grandmother, and she remained in close contact with her mother in prison. Harry had been deeply upset when his father was imprisoned. His mother, in spite of her disabilities, gave him her full attention and ensured access to specialist mental health support; and his father in prison was equally committed to supporting his son. 'Only' children when visiting their parent in prison had their full and undivided attention which did not have to be shared with siblings.

4.14.3 *Experiences of siblings*

Siblings could be a source of support, there to talk to when needed and sharing the experience of parental imprisonment. Becky (G12/9) could talk to her older sisters when she needed to. Jack and Kirsty (Case 7) both said in their interviews that they were close to older same sex siblings. Natalie and Declan (Case 4) looked out for each other when they were interviewed together, and had an older brother available as well. Oliver and Jamie (Case 17), with only a year separating them, had shared the experience of their father's imprisonment. Being part of a large family seemed to have given Sameera and Abida (Case 20) some protection and support. Ethan's (Case 14) older sisters had been his substitute carers since his mother's imprisonment.

Having younger sisters had given Gareth (Case 16) added responsibility. His grandparents had had to contrive opportunities for him to spend time with his mother on prison visits when his younger sisters monopolised her attention. Becky's (Case

9) enthusiasm for visiting her father diminished as her much younger brothers took up most of his attention; and Ethan, with two younger sisters, may have had less of his mother's attention than he needed. Amelia (Case 8), aged only 7, was conscious of how much visiting his father had upset her older brother. Grant (Amelia's brother), Mark (Case 11), and Kyle (Case 18), all damaged by their parent's imprisonment, were more oblivious of their siblings' feelings.

4.14.4 Relationship between children's age and their vulnerability

From a slightly different perspective, a review of family structure indicates that children of prisoners in this sample seemed more vulnerable between the ages of 7 and 13. Children at different points within this age band appeared equally likely to be vulnerable. In four families, children participating had much younger siblings who seemed less vulnerable, and less affected by having a parent in prison. Becky (G12/9) had younger brothers aged 4 and 5, and according to their mother they were cheerfully unperturbed about their father's imprisonment and enjoyed their time visiting him in prison. Ethan's (B9/14) two younger sisters aged 5 and 6, appeared lively and happy children, seemingly not too much affected by their mother being in prison, and happy to be looked after by their three adult sisters. Jamie (B10) and Oliver (B11) had two siblings aged 1 and 2, and although one of them had fairly serious health problems, they were too young to be much aware of their father being in prison (although all the children visited him). Mark (B13/11) had a younger brother aged 4 who seemed much less troubled than Mark by his father being in prison and enthusiastic about opportunities for visiting him. Gareth's (B11/16) situation was slightly different. One of his younger twin sisters, aged 8, was probably the most perturbed of the three children in the family, probably as a result of witnessing their father assaulting their mother.

Out of the four 14 year olds in the sample, the three girls (Natalie, Nasreen and Abida) were all resilient; Harry was much more vulnerable, but starting to recover. Of the three older children, Samantha and Matthew were mature, while Joe had been very troubled, but thought he was now more grown-up.

There are some indications that older siblings of children interviewed had been less severely impacted by parental imprisonment. Declan and Natalie (Case 4) had an older brother aged 16 (not interviewed) who they said was now focusing on his education and career plans. Jack and Kirsty (Case 7) and Daniel (Case 10) both had older, adult siblings sufficiently mature to be able to handle their parent's imprisonment (step/father for Case 7). Mark (B13/11) had an older sister aged 16, more adult, completing her GCSEs and planning further training. Kyle (B11/18) had an older (half) brother (16) and (half) sister (14); and although neither of them had prospered at school, they seemed less traumatised by Kyle's mother's imprisonment than he was. According to Piers' mother (case 15) his older brothers, one of them in prison, missed her a lot, although Piers seemed particularly distraught.

Becky's (Case 9) situation was again rather different. As the middle child in her family (the fourth out of six children), Becky derived much security from her close relationship with her mother. Her older brother aged 17, and her 19 year old sister now at University, were both reportedly much more angry with their father than Becky, and her older brother's progress and behaviour at school had been a cause for concern: as young adults they sounded much less tolerant of their father's criminal behaviour than their younger sister.

4.14.5 *Themes emerging relating to Family Structure*

In summary, only children benefited from being the exclusive focus of parental attention, and also from the full time attention of grandparents and other close relatives. Although some children from larger families had less focused support from parents/carers than they needed, other children derived valuable support from older siblings. Children aged between 7 and 13 were the most vulnerable group; older children were protected by their enhanced maturity; participants' older (teenage) siblings were mostly less severely impacted by parental imprisonment. Some much younger siblings of children in the study seemed less affected by their parent's imprisonment.

4.15 *Dominant themes in this chapter*

I have suggested (see p118 above) that children's interviews produced competing themes about the traumatic impact of parental imprisonment, and about children trying hard to make sense of their lives, enjoying them where possible and emphasising normal aspects of their experience. There is an ebb and flow between these two accounts, or stories. Most children's interviews contained elements of hurt and trauma, and also accounts of ordinary family, school and social life. "*Now*" tended to be better than "*before*". Narratives emerge from the social and time-bound context in which they are produced, as Crossley (2000) observed. What children said was partly determined by the timing of interviews. Nearly all of them would have been too distraught to be interviewed at the point where their parents were sentenced. Things usually seemed better looking back, months or years later, and after they had had time to adjust.

In perhaps twelve interviews hurt or trauma is the more dominant theme (Cases 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 18), from the children's point of view. The normalising theme is more evident in the other ten cases (4, 5, 6, 9, 12, 17, 19, 20, 21, and 22). The theme of trauma and tragedy is particularly marked for Joe (B17/1), Daniel (B9/10) and Grant (B12/8). At the other end of the spectrum, the emphasis on life carrying on as normal is particularly clear for Amelia (G7/8), Becky (G12/9) and Samantha (G17/14). Perhaps it would be more accurate to have an in-between category for Cases 7, 8 and 14, in each of which the boys' experiences were more troubled, and their sisters' more positive.

I suggested at the start of this chapter that the passage of time had been significant in enabling families to re-establish some degree of stability. For several of the children whose accounts reflected their harsh experiences there were signs of recovery, notably for Joe (B17/1); and Eleanor (G10/2), whose fluent account dipped between tragedy and enjoyment of normal life. Mark's (B13/11) prospects were brightening as his father's release date drew nearer, and Harry (B14/13) was being helped by consistent support from his school. Gareth's (B11/16) mother's release was imminent and Kyle's (B11/18) mother was back at home by the time she was interviewed, hopeful indicators for both of them. In the "normal" group, Caleb (B13/6) was just beginning to gain some insight into the impact of his father's imprisonment; while Matthew (B15/22) was determined not to be submerged by his family's recent traumatic experiences.

Crossley asserts that language is crucial in the framing of narratives, and that narrative tone can be optimistic or pessimistic (2000, pp 10 and 89). Analysing the children's interviews according to their pessimistic or optimistic tone produces a slightly more positive picture, with about three fifths (17/28) displaying hopefulness. The rest (11/28) are more uncertain and pessimistic in tone. In Case 8, Amelia is

engagingly optimistic and Grant hopelessly pessimistic; while in Case 13, Harry is on the brink, starting to emerge from a deeply wounding experience.

Other themes to emerge included *“life being there to be enjoyed”*, in spite of the unwelcome implications of parental imprisonment; this is unmistakable for Amelia (G7/8), Kirsty (G11/7); Oliver (B11/17) and Jamie (B10/17); Becky (G12/9); Ben (B12/21); and Declan and Natalie (B13 & G14/4). A narrative about children’s strong sense of responsibility for themselves and their parents/carers is strongly evident for another group of mainly older children: Anthony (B11/12), Gareth (B11/16), Nasreen (G14/5), Harry (B14/13), Abida (G14/20) and Matthew (B15/22). By contrast narrative accounts from seven of the boys reveal their confused state of mind: Daniel B8/10; Ethan, B9/14; Jack, B9/7; Grant, B12/8; Mark B13/11; Piers B13/15; and Joe, B17/1.

Children’s experiences were also individual and not easily categorised. Nasreen’s (G14/5) interview was about being toughened by experiences not shared by her peers. Declan (B12/4) empathetically and un-intrusively connected with a girl in his class who was in care, and whose parents were in prison. Sameera (G8/20) made sure she guarded her privacy: her father being in prison was a private and a family matter. Gareth (B11/16) took charge of his interview, declining to answer questions which he would find upsetting, as he had taken charge of his sisters while his mother was in prison. Matthew (B15/22) combined controlled anger, determination, and sensitivity to his mother’s predicament. Anthony (B11/12)’s interview was about learning from experience, adjustment, responsibility, thoughtfulness and assertiveness; while Daniel’s reflected isolation, confusion, disturbance and ambivalence. Ben’s (B12/21) interview was driven by his conviction that his father had done nothing wrong. Samantha’s (G17) was about the growing up with her mother in prison: things were just normal; ...but not quite. Children shared the

experience of parental imprisonment, but they reacted in uniquely different ways, as Mullender et al (2002) had observed in their research into the impact of domestic violence.

Chapter Five

Care giving parents: roles, support and family policy.

This chapter starts by considering the experiences of parents and carers interviewed, and then reviews how parenting styles and parents' relationships, whether conflictual or co-operative, impact on children. Evidence of dynamic changes in family relationships and children's responsibilities are discussed. Family processes, including re-appraisal of the role and status of imprisoned parents, and the emergence of different kinds of family policy for dealing with parental imprisonment are examined. Finally, the meaning of Family Support and the accessibility of external help for participants, including from schools, is explored.

5.1 *Experiences of Parenting: parents/carers*

A number of findings from previous research have been confirmed in this study. For example: relationships between imprisoned parents and parents/carers are characterised by a lack of reciprocity; and parents/carers have less opportunity to develop other social networks (Christian et al, 2006). Prison visiting is psychologically and physically demanding for both children and adults (Arditti, 2003). Parents/carers have to meet high costs of supporting imprisoned parents. Stigma may be experienced particularly by mothers whose partners are imprisoned for the first time (Morris, 1965). Shame and stigma distinguish parental imprisonment from parental absence caused by other factors such as divorce, leading to hostility and ostracism (Kinner et al, 2007).

Most parents/carers in this research lived busy, action filled lives while their partners were in prison. Without exception, all of them took on the role of home-maker for their children. This included Matthew's (B15/22) mother, who was physically disabled, and emotionally disabled by her husband's offence and its consequences; and Jack (B9/7) and Kirsty's (G11/7) mother, still recovering from the effects of domestic violence. Ten of them (Cases 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 14, 15, 18, 19 and 21) combined their caring responsibilities with full-time or part-time work. Their role included advocacy for their child/ren. For most (n=16) parents/carers this involved active liaison with their children's school relating to issues arising from their partner's imprisonment (Cases 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21 and 22). Some parents/carers were aware of, and in some cases had to actively intervene to deal with, bullying (Cases 3, 12 and 17). Joe's (B17/1) and Harry's (B14/13) mothers both had to obtain specialist healthcare to help address their sons' psychological problems and self-harming behaviour.

Almost all the parents/carers also had responsibility for ensuring regular visits for their children, and for themselves, to see their partner in prison. The exceptions were Matthew's (B15/22) mother - neither she nor her sons were visiting their father at the time they were interviewed - ; and Caleb's (B13/6) mother, who had entrusted organising prison visits for her son to see his father, from whom she was divorced, to a charitable organisation. Parents had to overcome their own anxieties and practical problems associated with prison visits. This could be no easy task, especially where there were several children to transport, including cases 9, 14, 17 and 20. Visits involved strain. Oliver (B11/17) and Jamie's (B10/17) mother described "... *just waiting at the gates, and the little one starts crying, and Oliver will grab her. I just want to get in them gates and go through and see him. You are fine then. It's hard, but I've got to do it*". Parents/carers described how they became accustomed to

security and search procedures whilst visiting prisons, and their children learned from their example.

Some parents/carers took on particularly heavy visiting commitments: these included the mother of Sameera (G8/20) and Abida (G14/20), who visited her partner both days at the weekend with her children; and Daniel's (B8/10) mother visiting her former husband every weekend for over a year. Many parents/carers sent money to their partners in prison to fund their telephone calls home and other expenses; and they had to find time to respond to their partners' phone calls, some of them several times each day, for example, Grant (B12/8) and Amelia's (G7/8) father, Becky's (G12/9) father and Gareth's (B11/16) mother.

Parents/carers and imprisoned parents were better able to maintain relationships where distances were manageable. Several (10) imprisoned parents were in local prisons (Cases 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 17 and 20). Transfers to prisons further afield put extra strain on family's resources, for example for Anthony's (B11/12) disabled father, and for Ethan's (B9/14)'s older sisters. Kyle's (B11/18) family found it more difficult to maintain contact after his mother's transfer away from a local to a more distant prison. Nasreen's (G14/5) father found visits unaffordably expensive and harder to keep up following his wife's transfer to a more distant open prison. Matthew's (B15/22) mother regarded visits to her husband impossible after his transfer to a prison in the South Midlands, with no opportunities for face-to-face meetings to resolve their relationship difficulties

There was much evidence in my sample of parents/carers, for example Gareth's (B11/16) grandparents, thriving on their additional responsibilities and, for some, achieving more independence. Ethan (B9/14) and Samantha's (G17/14) oldest sister managed to combine a responsible job with organising the care of her mother's three

younger children (Ethan and his two younger sisters), with help from her next oldest sister who was 20, and Samantha, while also looking after her own 3 year old son. Caleb's (B13/6) mother was no longer emotionally involved with her ex-husband, but seemed to have gained confidence as a parent with help from family support organisations and from social services. The mothers of Jack and Kirsty (Case 7) and of Abida and Sameera (Case 20), the first of whom had been physically and emotionally abused, and the second of whom had had to put up with a very jealous partner, both enjoyed greater freedom with their partners in prison. Ben's (B12/21) mother managed to enjoy being with her son even during her husband's remand in custody. Several parents/carers said that they felt stronger as a result of their experiences (Cases 5, 8, 17, 20 and 21).

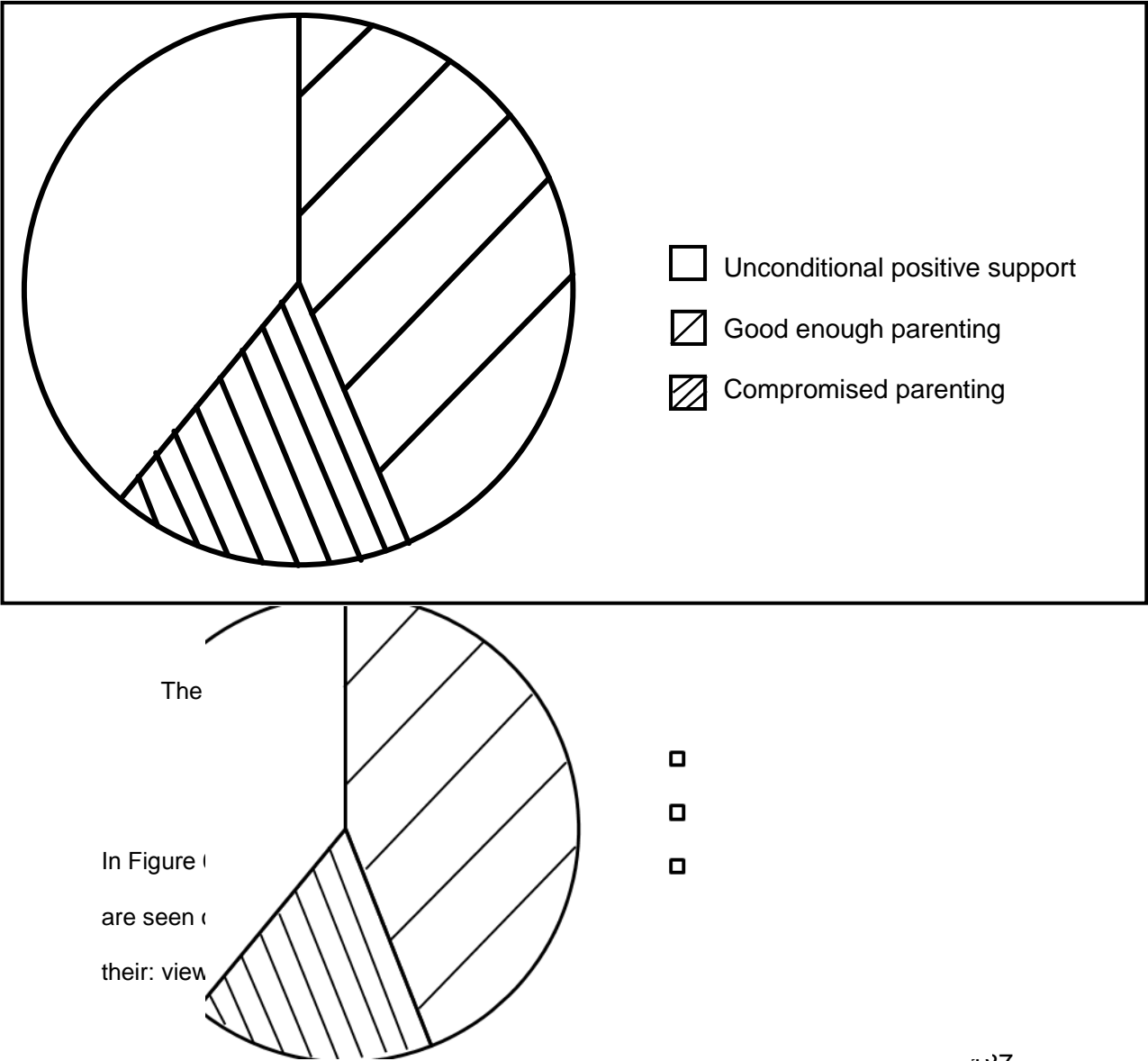
As well as managing their busy lives, parents/carers had to contend with upheavals, and with their own emotional and mental health issues. Daniel's mother (Case 10) and Piers' mother's partner (Case 15) both had to move some distance away from their home town, as a condition of their partner's release from prison, and attempt to settle in a new community. Grant and Amelia's mother (Case 8), and Mark's mother (Case 11) both had to cope with moving house with their children without their partner's support. Anthony's (B11/12) father and his son had to move to social housing as the family could no longer afford their previous mortgage. Mothers in six of the families (Cases 3, 7, 8, 10, 20 and 21) spoke about needing medical advice and mental health support after their partners had been imprisoned. Eleanor's (G10/2) father and Nasreen's (G14/5) father both described their very restricted social lives while their daughters' mother was in prison: and Becky's (G12/9) mother felt that she was "... *just existing*", and being punished for her partner's wrong-doing. Matthew's (B15/22) mother could not contemplate a future in which her husband would not be allowed to return home while his sons were there. Joe's (B17/1)

mother’s life was dominated by the care needs of her two sons, Joe and his 18 year old brother, one with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and the other with autism.

5.2 Parenting styles

Parenting style is a crucial determinant impacting on children’s well being. Reviewing the characteristics of parents/carers taking part, I have identified three distinct parenting styles: ‘unconditional positive support’; ‘good enough’ parenting; and ‘compromised’ parenting, all of them adaptations of earlier concepts.

Figure 6: Parents: Focusing on children’s needs



characterised by “*compromised parenting*”, parents’ view of children’s needs is likely to be clouded or distorted.

Unconditional positive support is a term adapted from Rogerian counselling (Hough, 2006). Carl Rogers identified “unconditional positive regard” (p 122) towards clients as the foundation of the counsellor’s relationship with those s/he was trying to help. Rogers combined optimism, - that individuals have sufficient innate resources to deal with life’s issues and challenges -, with a belief that individuals strive to develop to their maximum potential, described by Rogers as the “actualising tendency” (p 121).

Unconditional positive support, as a characteristic of parenting, combines optimism and a belief in children’s ability to achieve their potential, with a taken for granted position that children’s needs will always come first, regardless of parents’ other pre-occupations and commitments; and that children’s needs will be prioritised above those of the parent/carer and those of the imprisoned parent. This concept implies parents/carers intervening forcefully where necessary to protect their children’s interests, and adopting a position of determined advocacy on their behalf. Equally, unconditional positive support requires parents to set appropriate boundaries for their children so that they understand the limits of acceptable behaviour.

Table 7 below categorises parents/carers according to their dominant parenting style. Only parents interviewed are included in the Table, with the exception of Sameera’s and Alex’ fathers: these are included as I considered that I had enough information about them to form a view about their parenting styles. The parents not included in the Table were all fathers (one step-father) of children whom I did not interview: Declan and Natalie (case 4); Caleb (6); Jack and Kirsty, step father (7); Becky (9); Gareth (16); Oliver and Jamie (17); Ben (21); and Matthew (22).

Table 7: Parenting Styles

Unconditional positive support	'Good enough' parenting	'Compromised' parenting
Parents/Carers		
Declan & Natalie (M) Amelia & Grant (M) Becky (M) Piers (M's partner) Gareth (grandparents) Oliver & Jamie (M) Anthony (F) Sameera & Abida (M) Ben (M)	Joe (M) Luke (M) Eleanor (F) Nasreen (F) Caleb (M) Jack & Kirsty (M) Mark (M) Harry (M) Ethan & Samantha (older sisters) Kyle (F) Alex (F)* Matthew (M)	Daniel (M)
Imprisoned Parents		
Nasreen (M) Harry (F) Anthony (M) Mark (S/F) Kyle (M)	Amelia & Grant (F) Piers (M) Gareth (M) Ethan & Samantha (M)	Daniel (F) Eleanor (M) Joe (F) Alex (M) Sameera (F)*
Key: M= mother; F=father; S/F= step-father * Not interviewed		

Their determination to put their children's needs first was clearly evident from all the parents/carers who demonstrated unconditional positive support. Declan and Natalie's mother was equivocal about her relationship with her partner, and unsentimental about the impact of his imprisonment on Declan and Natalie. But she was in no doubt that the children needed to see their father every week and she made sure that this happened. In spite of her partner's frailties (*"when he is drunk he's a plank"*) she recognised that he was a good father, a good provider and a good worker, and both parents put their children's needs first. Sameera and Abida's mother combined determined advocacy for her children with setting clear boundaries,

with clearly visible written instructions in their home about required behaviour. She confronted her partner in prison when he put his partner's children's needs before his daughter's (Sameera). Oliver and Jamie's mother challenged and faced down older boys who were bullying her sons. (The boys were apologetic when they learned that the children's father was in prison).

These parents were pro-active in liaising with their children's schools so that staff could support them when they were upset. Gareth's grandparents gave him and his sisters the security they required. Piers' mother's partner dealt effectively with Piers' initial aggression and testing of boundaries, and helped him improve his school work: he wanted Piers to have "*a lovely life*" after all he had been through, including exposure to his father's involvement with drugs and police raids. Mainly, these children thrived, including Amelia, who eventually adjusted to her father's imprisonment. Her brother, Grant, however, was unable to do so, in spite of his mother's determined and patient support. Ben's mother had focused on steering her son through the crisis of his father's remand in custody, dealing with his insecurities without fuss; and her assessment that Ben had not been too badly affected by recent events carried conviction.

'Good enough' parenting, as noted above (p.37) is a concept attributed to Winnicott (1964) to describe mothers who were able to look after children properly and provide them with a secure base. Winnicott's view was that mothers were their children's primary carer, My concept of "good enough" parenting recognises that parents have frailties and needs of their own and that these may dim the clarity of their perception of their children's needs. There was evidence of turmoil, anxiety or depression amongst this group of parents in my study, and also anger directed towards their partner in prison. They had to contend with multiple problems and were frequently

under considerable strain. Most of them recognised their limitations and turned either to their families or to external agencies where more help was needed.

Three parents, Anthony's father and Harry's and Matthew's mothers, also struggled with physical disabilities, and relied to varying degrees on their children for day to day support. (This led to a kind of inversion of the parent-child relationship, a process observed by Bowlby (1988)). Their commitment to their children was not, however, impaired. Anthony's father put his son first and was a determined advocate for him. Harry's mother was immobilised by the shock of her former partner's imprisonment; but she realised the extent of her son's despair and successfully liaised with her GP to obtain the mental health counselling which he needed. Matthew's mother was completely distraught when she was interviewed, but her sons could still rely on her commitment and support.

Other parents were able to support their children in spite of being under severe strain themselves. Joe's mother was severely stretched by the demands of caring for her two sons, both of whom had complex learning disabilities, and whose behaviour was often violent; but she succeeded in securing effective psychiatric intervention for Joe, and her commitment to him was unwavering. Caleb's mother only told her son as much as she thought he needed to know about his father's violent past; but she also made sure that both she and Caleb were able to access the support they needed from school and other agencies. Nasreen's and Eleanor's fathers were both angry about the demands placed on them as a result of their partners' offences and imprisonment. They both recognised their limitations as fathers looking after their daughters. Both of them were aware of the psychological damage their daughters had experienced; and, crucially, both of them were able to provide security for their daughters who, with support from grandparents and other close relatives, were managing their lives successfully.

Jack and Kirsty (aged 9 and 11)'s mother had not fully recovered from her divorced husband's violence when interviewed. Her children were totally on her side. The family struggled, but managed to function well enough with support from the children's older siblings. Kyle's father found taking responsibility for his family and dealing with his son's school's punitive approach daunting; he succeeded through his own industry and by being able to rely heavily on his mother's help. Mark's mother managed to care for her three children on her own during the four years her partner had been in prison; this was a considerable achievement, although her own loss of confidence made it difficult for her to give Mark the stimulation and support he needed. Ethan had been well cared for by his older sisters, who made light work of their responsibilities although he needed more individual support than they were able to provide.

'Compromised parenting' is a concept derived from child protection literature. (See, for example Beeber et al, 2014). Here, parents' own needs take precedence, obscuring their children's needs for security and support. Daniel's mother put her loyalty to her former partner before her children's needs after his conviction, and her decision to move nearer to her partner's prison and uproot Daniel from other close members of his family disorientated and confused him. Daniel's father's priority was serving out his prison sentence. Daniel needed more help than his father gave him during his sentence to make sense of his father's fatal assault on his victim; and his son doubted his commitment to him. Eleanor's mother had been deprived of maternal love and care herself, and her intense feelings for her daughter reflected her own needs more than her daughter's. Sameera's and Joe's fathers abandoned them when they started new relationships with women with children of their own. Alex' mother was overwhelmed by ill health, guilt and grief following her conviction and could not relate to her children for a long time afterwards.

5.3 *Parents' relationships and children's well-being*

Parenting style was of crucial importance for the well-being of children in this study.

The purpose of this section is to explore the impact of parents' relationships on children, including evidence about the stability of parents' relationships with them prior to imprisonment, and children's experience of conflict or significant tension.

Further analysis covers how parents' relationships changed and sometimes improved during parental imprisonment; changes in children's relationships with parents/carers; and increases in the level of responsibility taken on by children for family members.

A preliminary analysis of parents' relationships and children's well-being is in *Table 8* below. Children's positive progress, parents co-operating, and absence of conflict are signalled in green (●); children's progress being impaired, their parents not co-operating and conflict between parents, are signalled in red (●). Amber (●) is a warning light in all columns.

Children making clearest progress are listed first, and those whose progress was most impaired, last, in *Table 6*. The Table indicates that children usually progressed well where their parents were co-operating and there was an absence of conflict between them; and also that children could still make progress where there was more evidence of parental conflict.

Table 8: Parents Relationships and Children's Well-Being

Case	Relationship		Child's Well-being			Evidence of prior stable relationship between parents and children	Parents co-operating for children at time of interview	Conflict at time of interview
			Gender/Age	Pseudonym	Progress			
3	T	RR	B12	Luke	●	M	●	●
4	S	LTR	B13	Declan	●	Both	●	●
4	S	LTR	G14	Natalie	●	Both	●	●
8	T	LTR	G7	Amelia	●	Both	●	●
9	T	LTR	G12	Becky	●	Both	●	●
17	T	LTR	B10	Jamie	●	Both	●	●
17	T	LTR	B11	Oliver	●	Both	●	●
20	T	LTR	G14	Abida	●	M	●	●
21	T	LTR	B12	Ben	●	Both	●	●
5	T	LTR	G14	Nasreen	●	Both	●	●
12	T	LTR	B11	Anthony	●	Both	●	●
19	S	LTS/D	B16	Alex	●	F	●	●
6	S	REDV	B13	Caleb	●	M	●	●
14	S	LTS/D	G17	Samantha	●	M	●	●
22	N/C	N/C	B15	Matthew	●	Both	●	●
7	S	REDV	G11	Kirsty	●	M	●	●
16	S	REDV	B11	Gareth	●	M(+mgps)	●	●
2	S	LTS/D	G10	Eleanor	●	F (for 7yrs)	●	●
11	T	LTR	B13	Mark	●	M	●	●
13	S	LTS/D	B14	Harry	●	Both	●	●
15	T	RR	B13	Piers	●	M(+p)	●	●
18	T	LTR	B11	Kyle	●	Both	●	●
20	T	LTR	G8	Sameera	●	M	●	●
7	S	REDV	B9	Jack	●	M	●	●
14	S	LTS/D	B9	Ethan	●	M	●	●
8	T	LTR	B12	Grant	●	Both	●	●
10	T	O/O/R	B8	Daniel	●	M	●	●
1	S	LTS/D	B17	Joe	●	M (for 5yrs)	●	●
TOTAL	S = 12 T = 15 N/C =1	LTS/D = 6 RR = 2 LTR =14 REDV = 4 O/O/R = 1 N/C =1	N = 28 ● = 17 ● = 8 ● = 3			M = 13 F = 2 Both = 13	● = 19 ● =1 ● = 8	● = 16 ● = 8 ● = 4
KEY	S = Separated T = Together N/C = Not Clear		● = positive progress ● = fairly positive progress ● = cause for concern				● =Yes ● =No	● = no conflict ● = tension ● = conflict
	LTS/D = long term separated or divorced RR = recent relationship LTR = long term relationship REDV = relationship ended by domestic violence O/O/R = on/off relationship N/C = not clear					M = Mother F = Father B = Both p = partner mgps = maternal grandparents pgm = paternal grandmother		

Notes on Table 8

- (i) Children's well-being is described as either *positive* (●); *fairly positive* (●) or as a *cause for concern* (●). I assessed this; as *positive* where children had been able to adjust as well as possible to the upheavals associated with parental imprisonment; and as *fairly positive* where they had been able to make some adjustment to their situation, but where there were some issues of concern; and as a *cause for concern* where they had not been able to adjust to the upheavals of parental imprisonment, and where this was reflected in their behaviour or their attitudes.

These assessments are, again, subjective. They are based on interviews with children and young people and on interview transcripts, supplemented by data from interviews with parents/carers and imprisoned parents.

- (ii) Parents in 12 families were *together*; they were *separated* in 9 families; and the position was *not clear* in 1 family. (Matthew's mother (Case 22) doubted that her husband would be allowed to live at home with their children after his release from prison). Parents are described as being in a *long term relationship*; in a more *recent relationship* (about 2 years for these 2 families); as *long term separated or divorced*; in a *relationship ended by domestic violence*; or in an *on-off relationship*.

5.3.1 Stability of parent/child relationships prior to imprisonment

Table 6 records evidence about the stability of parent/child relationships prior to imprisonment. In most families (20/22) children had experienced continuity of care for most of their lives from one or both parents.

Two children had experienced far more disruption and discontinuity. These were Joe (B17/1) and Eleanor (G10/2). Joe's mother had looked after him for the past 5 years. Eleanor's father had looked after her for 7 years. In all the other cases the children had been cared for by one or both of their parents from birth up until the point where their parent was arrested or imprisoned; and all these children had had some experience of a stable parental relationship. None of them had needed extra - familial care.

Joe (B17/1) had been looked after by his paternal grandmother for much of his early life, a period which he recalled as being unhappy. Eleanor (G10/2) had been mainly looked after by her father, and for some years jointly by her father and her step-mother, since her mother had been arrested and imprisoned when she was two. Eleanor had disliked being looked after by her step mother and she also described this as an unhappy time. There is evidence that both Joe and Eleanor were physically abused, Joe by his grand-mother and Eleanor by her step mother; and that Joe may have been sexually abused by an uncle. These two children experienced significantly more serious disruption in their early years than other children in the study; and the psychological problems they faced were amongst the most challenging of any of the children.

As regards the other (26) children, their progress may have been better slightly more often for those looked after by both parents (10/13 *positive*) than for those looked after by their mother (6/11 *positive*). However, for the whole group of children, whether their parents were single (6/11 *positive*) or together (9/14 *positive*) did not make much difference.

5.3.2 *Parents co-operating for their children*

Table 6 includes information about whether or not parents/carers and imprisoned parents were co-operating to support their children. This support involved the parent/carer and the imprisoned parent ensuring that contact arrangements worked as well as possible; and also included parents discussing their children's progress together. Parents were co-operating in this way in two-thirds of the families (15/22); and this was not evident in the other third (7/22). In the fifteen cases where parents were co-operating this proved beneficial for most children. Even in those families where their children faced serious challenges (Eleanor's (G10/2), Grant's (B12/8) and Daniel's (B8/10), a degree of co-operation between their parents was overall helpful to them. Out of the seven cases where parents were not co-operating, this was most damaging for Joe (B17/1); and for Gareth (B11/16), where serious family conflict was continuing.

However, children could still make positive progress where their parents were not co-operating. Some parents/carers were managing well enough on their own, for example, Kirsty and Jack's mother (Case 7) with support from her older children; or Caleb's mother with the help of her new partner (Case 6); or Ethan's three older sisters, whose parents were divorced (Case 14). The parents of Alex (Case 19) and Matthew (Case 22) were not actively co-operating at the point of interview, but had done so in the past.

Parents did not need to be together (in a continuing relationship) to safeguard their children's welfare. There were three cases (Eleanor, Case 2; Declan and Natalie, Case 4; and Harry, Case 13) where parents were *working together* for their children and where they had already separated. In Case 13, Harry's (B14) mother and his imprisoned father had co-operated throughout his father's four years in prison to

make sure that Harry had regular contact with his father, including planning a possible future together. The two parents had separated two years before the father's imprisonment. However, Harry's father had maintained daily contact, and had taken full financial responsibility for his family. In Case 4, (Declan, B12 and Natalie, G14) the two parents, whether or not they were together, would both put their children's needs first, and would work together to ensure their well-being.

5.3.3 Impact of parental conflict on children

In four families where the parents' relationship had been ended by domestic violence, the children had directly witnessed their mother being assaulted (Joe, B17/1; Caleb, B13/6; and Jack, B9/7 and Kirsty, G11/7), or had lived with parents whose relationship was very strained (Gareth, B11/16). Gareth (B11/16) had been steadfastly supported by his grandparents. These children had been harmed by these conflicts as much as by their parents' subsequent imprisonment. For Caleb (13/6), and Jack (B9/7) and Kirsty (G11/7), the violence was no longer current, although witnessing his step-father assaulting his mother may have partly accounted for Jack's behavioural problems. Joe (B17/1) had partially recovered from his unstable upbringing, but he remained a troubled young man. Sameera's (G8/20) and Abida's (G14/20) mother had been emotionally abused by her partner before his imprisonment. The most damaging aspect for Sameera had been her father's rejecting her in favour of his new girl-friend and her two children.

5.3.4 Significant tensions in parents' relationships

There were significant tensions in the relationship between parents in five families. In three of them the children had been aware of long-standing arguments between their parents before their imprisonment: about money in Case 5 (Nasreen (G14));

about Anthony's (B11/12) mother's fraudulent activities; and about the revelations of Matthew's (M15/22) father's assaulting a teenage girl. These three young people succeeded in distancing themselves from their parents' arguments.

However, tensions in their parents' relationship could impact much more severely on children, as for Eleanor and Daniel. Eleanor's (G10/2) father's relationship with his former partner in prison remained tense and he resented having to deal with the upset which Eleanor often experienced after contact with her mother. Eleanor was aware of her parents' uneasy relationship and was caught between them, wanting to be as close to her mother as possible, but knowing that her father could barely tolerate this. Her mother was desperate for contact with Eleanor and for their relationship to survive into the future. Eleanor's father was extremely ambivalent about her mother's continuing contact:

"Bluntly, I don't care about (her) but, again, she is her mother so ... Eleanor is clinging on to the hope that when she (her mother) does get out she has got a chance to become part of the family again. Which, if I told her that she hasn't,.... she is on suicide watch as it is. I don't want to be guilty of topping her off. ... There is lot of hatred there as well, though....obviously I keep that behind closed doors ... because of what's happened".

Eleanor's father still had residual positive feelings for her mother as well as suppressed anger and hatred. Eleanor's mother's feelings were concentrated on her daughter "... Even if I'm only friends, it will take hell freezing over for me to ever stop being in contact". She knew that Eleanor's father's family had little time for her. Her father acknowledged how Eleanor felt: ".....I know it's hard for her not being with her mam ... but she has got a better lifestyle now than she would have had with her. Don't get me wrong, her mother loves her to bits, but she hasn't got the support of

her family". Eleanor's mother respected her father for having provided Eleanor with a home and preventing her from having to go into the care system. Eleanor was caught up in a triangle of emotions between herself and her parents. Remarkably, she had managed to remain buoyant and poised, and seemed to have learnt how to manage complicated relationships.

The tension between Daniel's (B8/10) parents was less openly acknowledged. Daniel had lived through his parents' *on-off relationship* for several years. His mother referred to his father going back to his mother's, then "*back together, not together, back together, not together; then divorced*". Her feelings combined conflicted loyalty and resentment. She was doing all she could to support Daniel's father in prison, but had been upset that she had been required to leave all her family and move with Daniel to a new home, closer to Daniel's father's prison.. Daniel had experienced much instability caused by the ups and downs in his parents' relationship, and by his father's imprisonment.

Other children were harmed less by tensions in their parents' relationships. Alex's parents (Case 19) had divorced before his mother was convicted; her husband had been supportive during her trial and they had remained on friendly terms. Becky's mother (Case 9) described serious conflict with her partner during the two years of police investigations while he was on bail. The rift between them had been healed: "*.....Now he is in there I feel sorry for him. Before I was angry, really, really angry. ... I can't imagine living without him*". Becky seemed to have no concerns about their relationship. In Case 4, Declan and Natalie's parents had had an earlier period of separation; the children had disliked but had to live with their arguing; Declan in particular found this upsetting and unhelpful.

Absence of conflict between parents of children in the study seemed positively helpful to children. There were eleven families where the parents were working together to support their children and where there was no evidence of conflict at the time of the interviews: Cases 3, 4, 8, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 18, 20 and 21. All of the children in these families were faring well, or fairly well, with the exception of Grant (B12/8). In this case his parents hoped that Grant's father's return home would help to mitigate his son's distress.

This group of parents were still coping with significant issues with their children. For example, Kyle (B11/18) had been devastated by his mother's imprisonment, but may have been over the worst by the time she was interviewed, following her release from prison. Both his parents wanted and were trying to achieve the best outcome for him. Piers (B13/15) remained troubled by his mother's imprisonment, but had received valuable guidance from his mother's partner, who was co-operating positively with her town leaves and plans for rehabilitation. Oliver (B11/17) and Jamie (B10/17), and Ben (B12/21), clearly loved their fathers, and their mothers had both been unstinting in supporting their partners and facilitating regular contact.

5.3.5 *Trends*

Parental imprisonment removed a key adult from the children's families. Changes in the immediate aftermath were damaging for them; but in the longer term these were not necessarily wholly negative. The parent's imprisonment and absence significantly altered family dynamics. There was space for relationships to find a new level, and opportunities for more resilient family members to take on new responsibilities.

5.3.6 *Improvements in parents' relationships*

An unexpected and positive finding was that parents' relationships could improve while one of them was in prison. Parents' relationships are bound to change when one of them is imprisoned and the other has to take on new responsibilities. Where the imprisoned parent had been the stronger partner, changes were inevitable. Nasreen's mother (Case 5) and Kyle's mother (Case 18) had both been the dominant partner prior to their imprisonment, taking full responsibility for running their families. Nasreen's father was pleased that he had the chance to wrest back responsibility for money matters to ensure bankruptcy was avoided. Kyle's mother was impressed by how well her partner had taken responsibility for running the family, looking after the house and dealing with finances. These parents' relationships now seemed more equal, and the parents expected these arrangements to continue following the imprisoned parents return home. Nasreen's mother was also impressed by how her husband had risen to the challenge of being the sole carer for his daughter, displaying a talent for organisation and fitting in housework and caring for his daughter, with the demands of his busy job. She knew that things had been hard for him: *".....Not only has he had to have a full time job, but he has had to be a mother and a father and cope with all the financial pressures on his own, and then cope with having to visit me now and again. ... He is very organised"*.

In some cases requirements for parents/carers to take more responsibility and become more independent strengthened the parents' relationship and increased respect between them. Three mothers (Cases 8, 17 and 21) described their growing confidence. Grant and Amelia's mother (Case 8) felt: *"It's just made me a stronger person"*. She seemed stoically independent: *"They've asked me to see counsellors and stuff at the doctor's, but I can't sit there and talk to people. Well, not tell them all my problems ... I just deal with it myself"*. Oliver and Jamie's mother (Case 17) felt

proud of her achievements “... *A lot of people thought I was going to break down, but I have proved them wrong*”. Her husband had told her: “.....*I can't believe how strong you've been*”. Ben's mother (Case 21) had told his father: “*Well you don't have to worry about us because we cope quite well. ... It just seems normal. ... At the end of the day we've just got to get on with it*”. All three fathers were impressed with their partner's competence and independence. Anthony's father (Case 12) had shown similar determination and had earned his wife's respect: “... *I have coped because it's either sink or swim; you have to keep managing*”.

5.3.7 Improvements in children's relationships with parents/carers

Children's relationships with their parents/carers frequently improved during their parent's imprisonment. Harry (B14/13)'s relationship with his mother is a clear example. Their initial reaction to his father's imprisonment had been to lock themselves in the house together, closing down outside contacts. Their relationship became almost symbiotic. Harry seemed terrified of losing his mother as well as his father. His mother commented: “*He didn't want to leave the house in case something happened to me. ... It just felt like everything was closing in*”. Harry matured, dealing with his grief and anger, and started to help his mother with her personal care needs and taking responsibility for practical household tasks and finances. With some justification, his mother called Harry her “... *second husband. ... He makes sure I'm on top of everything*”. His parents had divorced but this had had no long term adverse consequences for him. Harry said that things had improved “... *'cos me and my mum got a bit more closer*”. His father thought that his imprisonment had made Harry “... *a bit tougher. He has realised that he has got to toughen up a little bit and accept life as it is*”. His parents' relationship and their commitment to Harry remained strong.

Other children's relationships with their parent/carer looking after them were also strengthened. Piers' relationship with his mother's partner (Case 15) was a case in point. His mother's partner said that living with Piers had *".....brought us a lot, lot closer, more than if (name of Piers' mother) hadn't been inside. We do pretty much everything together"*. Nasreen (Case 5) had grown closer to her father, and Anthony's relationship with his father (Case 12) had also been strengthened. Kyle (Case 18) had previously been extremely close to his mother, but during her imprisonment he had become closer to his father. In other cases children became more independent, and there is evidence of their increasing maturity while their parents were in prison, for example Anthony (Case 12), Gareth (Case 16), Alex (Case 19), and Matthew (Case 21).

5.3.8 *The impact of increased responsibility on children*

Children matured and several took on more responsibility while their parent was in prison. Samantha (G17/14) had been at school when her mother was first imprisoned: she had asserted her independence, moved out of her home, been to college, dropped out, and obtained a job and a boyfriend, while still taking much responsibility in helping to care for her younger siblings. She had become an independent, family minded and responsible young adult. Abida (G14/20) and Nasreen (G14/5) had both developed poise and maturity during their parents' imprisonment, and Nasreen had become self-reliant in the two years her mother had been away.

Changes in relationships with their parents were most marked for two of the boys who had previously been part of close family units (Anthony (B11/12) and Matthew (B15/22)), and for Gareth (B11/16) who had had to adapt to the breakdown in his parents' relationship.

Both Anthony's parents had fully involved him in church and missionary and cultural activities. He was well supported by his father, but was now his unofficial carer. His relationship with his mother had changed subtly during her long term of imprisonment. He had to manage without her support during his transition to secondary school. Anthony missed his mother, but over time had adjusted to his new life, combining caring for his father with his successful school life. He had talked to his mother about starting a business with her, and had stressed to her that "...*you would be working for me*". This assured comment suggests that the power balance in their relationship had shifted; he was no longer dependent on her and seemed to be gaining the upper hand.

Matthew (B15/22) also took on much responsibility for his mother, who was sufficiently disabled to need full time carers. His was the voice of reason and calm when his mother became hysterical about criticisms from external agencies about her parenting abilities. Like Alex (B16/19), Matthew was physically mature, a brown belt in karate "...*so I'm not one to mess with*". He had taken on the adult role in the absence of his disgraced father, while maintaining a respectful and supportive relationship with his mother. He could handle her paranoid psychological distress, and the benefits from their relationship were two-way. Although his mother was going through such a difficult time, he could still talk to her: "*I can talk out with her. She feels how I feel, so it's a lot easier*".

Gareth (B11/16) took on an almost adult level of responsibility for himself and his younger twin sisters (aged 8), at some strain to himself, while looked after by his maternal grandparents. His mother had been convicted of assaulting his father, the latest episode in their violent relationship. She had been criticised by her solicitor for telling Gareth that he would have to take on the role of "*man of the family*". He took

her request to heart. Most demanding for Gareth was supporting one of his sisters during access visits to their father. He said: *“Granddad, I’m in charge, I will sort it out”*. He could be assertive with his father. He confronted him when his father complained about failed contact arrangements, threatening to *“... phone the police and go and see the judge, and tell him I want all contact stopped”*. His father had walked away. His grandparents described Gareth as *“... very much his own man, with an old head on his shoulders”*, hard for an eleven year old boy to live up to. Like Anthony (B11/12), Gareth’s position in his family had become more powerful as his parents’ frailties were revealed. His mother had let him down, but he would be delighted when she came home. His father had failed him, but Gareth avoided voicing anger or lack of respect towards him. Much had been demanded of him, and so far he had met the expectations placed on him.

The maturity displayed by these children included taking responsibility for other family members as well as for themselves. Their exposure to crisis strengthened them (Aguilera, 1998; Rutter, 1987.) Their personalities developed; they became more influential within their families and they took on adult characteristics. While they had been severely shocked initially by their parent’s imprisonment, they had also been strengthened by their experience.

5.3.9 Impact of relationships between parents on families: main themes emerging

The status of parents’ relationships - whether they were together or separated or divorced - was not closely linked to children’s well-being. Children benefitted where their parents co-operated to secure their best interests. Violence between parents was harmful for children and conflict between them was difficult for children to manage. Some parents’ relationships improved during the prison sentence.

Parent/carers' confidence increased with their increased responsibilities, and they gained enhanced respect from their imprisoned partners. Children could become closer to the parent/carer looking after them; several provided them with more support; and about a quarter of them (7/28) matured and took on increased responsibility for family members and siblings.

5.4 *Reappraisal of the Imprisoned Parent, and the Emergence of Family Policy*

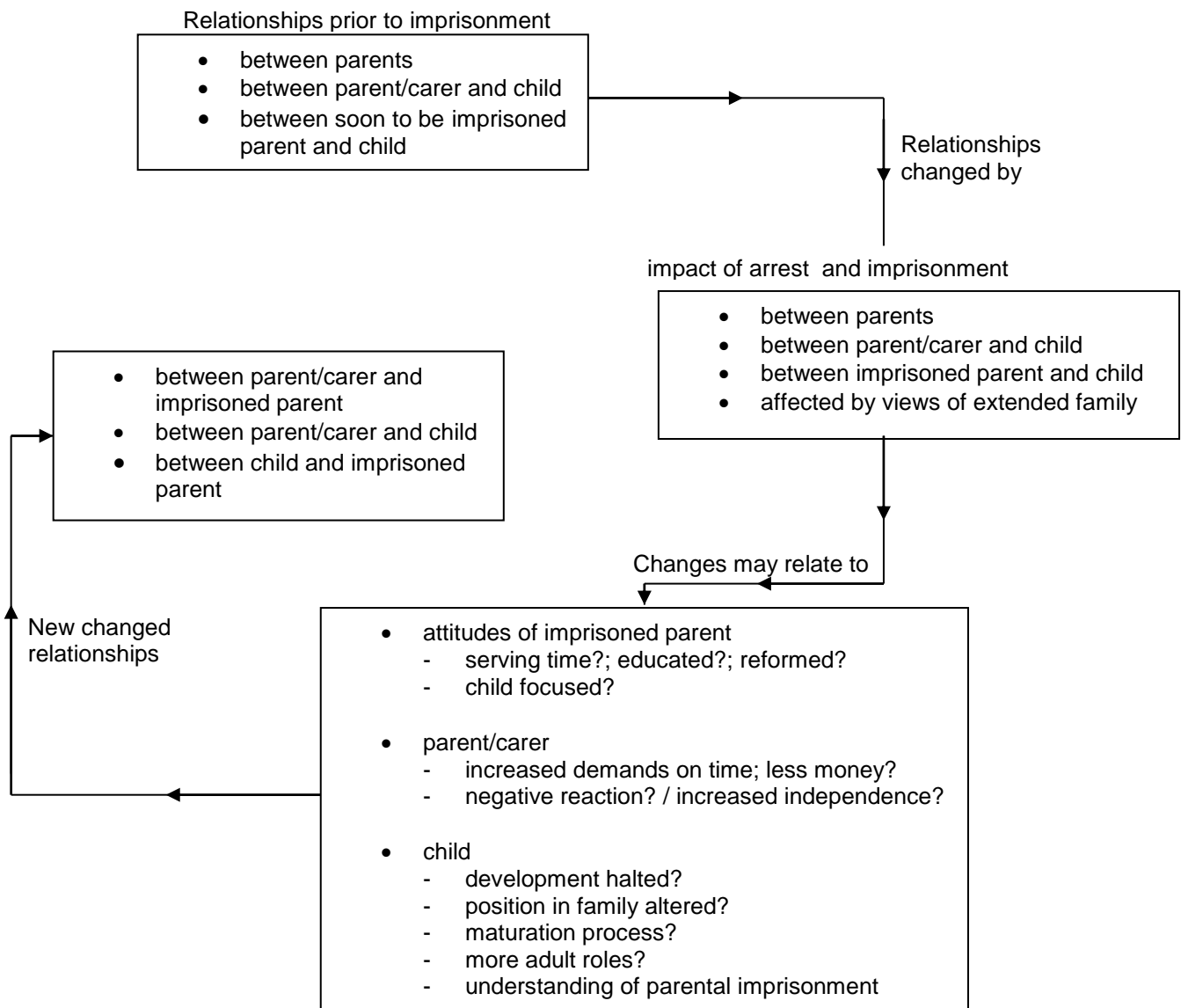
This section further explores changes in family relationships change consequent on parental imprisonment. Families reappraise the status of the imprisoned parent. In tandem with this, families develop a policy for handling the impact of parental imprisonment. Families may have sufficient resources to handle these issues and changes themselves; or they may need to look to external agencies for additional support or intervention.

5.4.1 *Reappraisal*

Reappraisal of the imprisoned parent has emerged in this study as a key process which takes part in the context of changes in family relationships following parental imprisonment. All aspects of family relationships, between parents, and also between both parents/carers and imprisoned parents and children, are bound to change when a parent is in prison. The only likely exceptions are where the imprisoned parent had been absent for long periods prior to his/her imprisonment; or where the parent had been imprisoned repeatedly and the family had adjusted to this pattern. (This was not the case in my sample, with the exception of Joe (B17/1), whose father had been in prison for much of his life).

The changing pattern of family relationships is illustrated in *Figure 7* below.

Figure 7: Parental Imprisonment: Changing relationships within families



Prior to imprisonment, family relationships are affected by the strength of the family unit, including support from the extended family, and whether parents have remained together. Children, parents/carers and imprisoned parents will all be affected by the crisis of parental imprisonment. All of them have to adjust: the child to the loss of the

parent, and managing feelings of abandonment and the stigma involved; the parent/carer to the loss of their partner, possible loss of income, their changed position in the family, and stigma; and the imprisoned parent to the loss of family, loss of freedom, and to the prison regime. These are major life changes.

Parental imprisonment invariably imposed strains on relationships between parents. Relationships between parents changed, and some ended. Other relationships changed as parents/carers took on enhanced responsibilities. In a small number of families, relationships between parents improved; and in others they remained uncertain. Relationships between parents/carers and children tended to strengthen. Although most children were also close to their imprisoned parent, these relationships also changed as children adjusted to their new lives. Approaching half of the children managed to retain or develop good relationships with their imprisoned parent through the contacts available for them. Other children's relationships with their imprisoned parent seemed to be on hold: contact was maintained, but there was little opportunity for relationships to develop.

An important element impacting on these changing relationships was the standing of the imprisoned parent in the eyes of his/her family. When a parent is arrested and eventually sentenced to prison his/her family has to reappraise the regard in which the imprisoned parent is held. This process seems invariably to take place. The family cannot continue to regard the imprisoned parent in the same light as previously. He or she may retain his/her prior status more or less intact; or they may be downgraded or demoted in the eyes of their family, involving a loss of moral or familial authority. Parents/carers usually take the lead role in this process. Children's contribution is more limited, but they are likely to feel the consequences of this reappraisal, which may impact on their well-being.

Previous research has identified factors associated with this reappraisal process. Prison visiting is demanding (Arditti, 2003), and costly (Codd, 2007). Families frequently experience hardship and poverty (Phillips et al, 2006); and the health of partners of prisoners can be adversely affected (Arditti, 2003). Parents with a partner in prison may have less time and less money for their children (Foster & Hagan, 2007). Relationships between imprisoned parents and their partners are unbalanced. Parents/carers make greater contributions, providing financial support to their imprisoned partner, looking after children and organising visits. (Christian et al, 2006). Children of prisoners and their carers experience secondary stigma (Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999; Condry, 2007). Shame and stigma are hallmarks of parental imprisonment and can lead to hostility and ostracism (Kinner et al, 2007).

The pressures on families identified in previous research were keenly experienced by families in this study. The key factor was the impossibility of relationships between parents/carers and imprisoned parents being reciprocal. Parents/carers who had done nothing wrong themselves had to turn their lives upside-down to fit in with demanding prison requirements. Funds were in scarce supply; families struggled to make ends meet. Parents/carers and children bore the brunt of stigma and hostility targeted towards prisoners' families. Parents/carers' and their children's psychological and physical health was threatened. Imprisoned parents frequently needed financial support from their families; and their capacity to contribute to their families' well-being was limited. While most parents/carers generously supported their imprisoned partner (or other relative) with little complaint, most of them also showed a degree of resentment about the extra responsibilities which they had to sustain.

The status of the imprisoned parents following the reappraisal process is summarised in *Table 9* below.

Table 9: Summary of Reappraisal Process for Imprisoned Parents

Case No.		Reappraisal of Imprisoned Parent Status	
		Same	Lower
1	Joe		✓
2	Eleanor		✓
3	Luke	✓	
4	Declan & Natalie		✓
5	Nasreen		✓
6	Caleb		✓
7	Jack & Kirsty		✓
8	Grant & Amelia	✓	
9	Becky		✓
10	Daniel	✓	
11	Mark	✓	
12	Anthony		✓
13	Harry	✓	
14	Ethan & Samantha		✓
15	Piers		✓
16	Gareth		✓
17	Oliver & Jamie		✓
18	Kyle	✓	
19	Alex		✓
20	Sameera & Abida		✓
21	Ben	✓	
22	Matthew		✓
TOTAL		7	15

Table 9 indicates that in a third of the families (n=7) the status of the imprisoned parent remained about the same as before the conviction. In the other two-thirds of families (n=15) the status of the imprisoned parent was reduced, in some cases slightly, and in others more clearly.

5.4.1.1 Imprisoned parents' status unaltered

In the families where the status of the imprisoned parent stayed much the same as before the conviction this may have been related to the nature of the offence not

being perceived by the parent/carer as very serious, in some cases. Examples include families where the imprisoned parent had been convicted for drug dealing (Cases 3, 8, 11 and 18). In Case 8, Grant and Amelia's mother acknowledged that she had been aware of her partner's involvement in drug dealing, did not challenge it, and pushed it to the back of her mind; she was aware that income from drug dealing was essential for the family. In Case 3, Luke's mother was preoccupied with surviving the period during which her partner was remanded in custody. In Case 11, Mark's mother was aware of her partner's problems, including rejection by his own family and recent bereavements, and her view seemed to be that these explained his addictions and involvement with drugs.

In families where imprisoned parents retained their previous status, their partners showed a high degree of loyalty towards them, and they (the imprisoned parents) seemed to retain a kind of protected status as the head of their family: Harry's (B14/13) father and Kyle's (B11/18) mother are examples, seeming to be exempt from criticism. Daniel's mother gave his father unquestioning loyalty after his arrest and conviction for manslaughter.

In five of the six of these families where the father was in prison, the families experienced loss of paternal authority over their sons (Cases 3, 8, 10, 11, and 13). The boys lost ground at school (Cases 3, 8, 10 and 11), and their mothers were less well placed to supervise their behaviour. In these families, even though the assessment of the imprisoned parent remained about the same, some reduction in their authority was evident, because of their absence from home in prison.

5.4.1.2 Imprisoned parents' status reduced

Reduction in the status of the imprisoned parent was clearly evidenced where partners had been abused by the imprisoned parent, and was usually the case where offences had involved violence or been particularly serious. Three partners had been physically abused (Cases 1, 6 and 7); their relationships with the imprisoned parent had ended; and these fathers had neither deserved nor been shown loyalty by their partners, even though Joe's mother had resumed visiting his father during the latter part of his sentence. Sameera and Abida's mother (Case 20) had been emotionally abused (and her daughter had been abandoned) by her partner; she was more forgiving and their relationship had been partially restored when she was interviewed. Parents whose offences had involved violence lost respect and status, with the exception of Daniel's mother (Case 10), who seemed to regard her partner's conviction for manslaughter as almost accidental and not particularly blameworthy. (He had been involved in a fight and killed his opponent with a single blow). Offences involving violence (Cases 1, 2, 16 and 19, or sexual assault (Case 22)) were seen as blameworthy and incompatible with appropriate parental behaviour.

Other imprisoned parents' (Cases 4, 5, 9, 12, 14 and 17) status was reduced and their authority as parents came into question. None of their partners or family had been involved in criminal activities; they were shocked by their wrong-doing and their loyalty was not unconditional. These families were seriously troubled by the crimes the imprisoned parents had committed, which diminished their status and authority as parents. Families' trust had been betrayed and their reputation had been damaged within their wider families and communities. Families felt abandoned and struggled to regain self respect and esteem.

5.4.1.3 *Revised status: permanent or changeable?*

Where families regarded the status of the imprisoned parent as unchanged, there was little sign that this assessment altered during the period of imprisonment. Where families accorded lower status to the imprisoned parent, this did not change for the two imprisoned parents serving life sentences. Three imprisoned parents seemed to be out of view for their families: Alex (19)'s mother, where contact with her children had become less frequent; Matthew (22)'s father, for whom family visits were not authorised; and, to a lesser extent Ethan and Samantha (14)'s mother, where contact was more difficult after her transfer to a more distant open prison. Piers' (15) mother's status had reduced, and seems to have lowered slightly further, as her partner realised that she had become institutionalised and lost confidence during her period of imprisonment.

However, the standing of imprisoned parents in the eyes of their family could recover. For five imprisoned parents, whose status had been reduced in the perception of their families, some modification or improvement was evident where they were making the best of their situation. Nasreen (5)'s mother had found employment, and was starting to contribute to the family's income. Becky (9)'s father's partner acknowledged that he had obtained one of the best jobs in the prison during his period on remand, a mark of status. Anthony (12)'s mother made positive use of her time in prison, and managed contact visits carefully, including follow up telephone calls, to reduce tensions in her family. Oliver and Jamie (17)'s mother was optimistic about her partner's release as long as he did not re-offend. Sameera and Abida (20)'s mother took a more positive view of her partner in prison once visits for the children had been reinstated.

5.4.1.4 Children's views about their imprisoned parent

Parents/carers set the tone and usually took the lead in reappraising the role and status of the imprisoned parent. In most families a consensus emerged between the views of parents/carers and children. For example, Natalie and Declan (Case 4) agreed with their mother that their father provided well for his family, but was a liability under the influence of alcohol. Harry (Case 13) shared his mother's view that his father remained authoritative and influential throughout his long prison sentence. Children's level of maturity (being able to form a reasoned view) and independence in their assessment of their imprisoned parent is summarised in *Table 10* below.

Table 10: Children's level of maturity and independence

More mature /more independent	Fairly mature / fairly independent	More conflicted and confused
Eleanor G10/2 Declan B13/4 Natalie G14/4 Nasreen G14/5 Becky G12/9 Anthony B11/12 Samantha G17/14 Gareth B11/16 Alex B16/19 Abida G14/20 Matthew B15/22	Joe B17/1 Luke B12/3 Jack B9/7 Kirsty G11/7 Amelia G7/8 Mark B13/11 Harry B14/13 Jamie B10/17 Oliver B11/17 Sameera G8/20 Ben B12/21	Caleb B13/6 Grant B12/8 Daniel B8/10 Ethan B9/14 Piers B13/15 Kyle B11/18
n=11	n=11	n=6

Table 10 shows that the *more mature* group comprised both girls (6) and boys (5), with an age spread from 10 to 17. The *fairly mature* group comprised more boys (8) than girls (3) of differing ages (8 – 17). The *more conflicted and confused* group (n = 6) were all boys, aged between 8 and 13.

Younger and mainly less mature children were happy to follow their parent/carers' lead in reassessing their imprisoned parent. Their views were mainly indistinguishable from their parent/carers'. This was the case for Joe (B17/1), an older boy, who had learning disabilities; for the children of primary school age, (although Oliver and Jamie, Case 17, were more indulgent towards their father than was their mother); for the children in their first year at secondary school, and also for Mark, aged 13, but not mature for his age.

These children's dispositions also frequently reflected those of their parents/carers. Luke's (B12/3) anxiety mirrored his mother's, awaiting his father's sentence. Mark, like his mother who described herself as "*not a very talking person*", kept his feelings to himself. Harry (B14/13) and his mother both reacted to his father's imprisonment by closing off contact with the outside world. Influence between children and parents went both ways. Amelia's (G7/8) mother's positive approach was strongly reinforced by her daughter's sunny disposition. Ben (B12/21) cheerfully went along with all day trips to see his father on the south coast, providing company for his mother.

More mature children, while respecting their parent/carers' views, were more independent in their judgements. These included most of the older children, but also Eleanor, aged 10; and Anthony (Case 12) and Gareth (Case 16), both aged 11, but mature for their years. These children were thoughtful about their relationships with their imprisoned parent and about how their separation had affected them. They were less resentful than their parents/carers about their imprisoned parents' behaviour, more detached and more able to exert influence within their families. These children benefitted from the security provided by their parents/carers. All of them knew about their imprisoned parents' offences and formed their own opinions about this. This knowledge helped them develop their own point of view. None of

them idolised their imprisoned parent. Accurate information provided a step towards adulthood and they gained respect from their parents/carers and imprisoned parents.

Eleanor (G10/2) and Caleb (B13/6) experienced more conflict about their relationship with their imprisoned parent. Eleanor's family recognised her right to be in contact with her mother, whose crime they condemned. Eleanor had to withstand her father's ambivalence and her family's hostility towards her mother. Caleb, who had learning disabilities, was in a somewhat similar predicament. He needed contact with his father, notwithstanding his convictions for violence towards his mother and her partner. Both these children knew that their imprisoned parents were important for them. They were unusually self-aware. Both chose to be interviewed alone and were able to talk about their feelings independently of their parents/carers.

Out of the more conflicted and confused group, while Kyle (B11/18) had some understanding of how much he had been affected by his mother's imprisonment, Daniel (B8/10), Ethan (B9/14), Grant (B12/8) and Piers (B13/15) found discussing and understanding their feelings more difficult. While they were conscious of stigma attaching to parental imprisonment, they had less understanding of their conflicted emotions.

5.4.2 *Emergence of Family Policy and strategies*

Parental imprisonment presents families with a crisis: an upset to a steady state (Aguilera, 1998 p123), which marks a clear and adverse change in families' circumstances. This was the case for all the families in this study. Most parents/carers had vivid memories of their partner's arrest, usually sudden and always requiring significant adjustments. Arrest and imprisonment had immediate and distressing consequences for children, often requiring immediate help from

relatives. Parents/carers needed information and explanations, and decisions had to be made about what to tell children, how this should be done, and by whom, and what should be said to other family members. Responsibility for making decisions was likely to fall on the parent/carer if the other parent had been remanded in custody. If the parent was remanded on bail, there could be more opportunity to consider together what should be done. Decisions had to be taken about whether or not to inform schools. Parents/carers could have their own feelings of dismay or revulsion about the offence; and about how they would survive on their own.

The argument in this section is that most families, having reappraised the status of the imprisoned parent, develop a policy for how to handle this in their dealings with the outside world. Once established, family policy tends to remain fixed, or may only change slowly over time

5.4.2.1 Definitions

A family policy implies a settled approach to dealing with parental imprisonment, understood by family members. Having a policy requires a degree of organisation about how to handle the issues, including planning ahead, and how to deal with friends and the wider community. This may be characterised by openness, based on honesty about the family's circumstances, and clear communications within the family and with the outside world. Or it may be based on discretion, implying a considered, reflective position, which may combine elements of openness, privacy or secrecy, but which is thoughtful about how much information should be shared, with whom, and what the probable consequences may be. A more closed position is likely to emphasise privacy or secrecy and awareness of the dangers of sharing information widely; this approach is likely to be influenced by feelings of shame and stigma. Children are likely to be strongly influenced by the approach taken by

parents/carers, and also by their imprisoned parent where their relations with him/her have been close. They are likely to experience tension where their wishes are in conflict with those of their family; for example where they wish to share information with friends in order to gain support, but where they may have been told not to do so, or they sense that their family would prefer them not to.

5.4.2.2 Overview of Family Policy

Overall, nineteen of the families developed a clear position about how they would relate to the outside world on this issue. At least half of all the families developed a more open approach, both within the family and with their community. Most of them chose to inform their children's school about the imprisoned parent. Most of them recognised that they needed additional support beyond that available from their immediate or extended family.

Other families developed a more closed approach emphasising privacy, or in a few cases secrecy. These families were more likely to emphasise self-reliance, and to expect that whatever issues arose would be dealt with within the family. Three other families (cases 1, 10 and 22) were much less clear about how they would manage with a parent in prison. Their stance was based more on surviving difficult or chaotic circumstances, with less clarity about whether they could seek support from either family, schools or outside agencies. These families seemed less in control and more buffeted by events.

While the prevailing ideology amongst organisations supporting families of prisoners such as Partners of Prisoners, and some research findings (Kampfner, 1995; Poehlmann, 2005) have emphasised the value of openness and honesty with children, Hagen & Myers (2003) found that secrecy was neutral and made no

difference to problem scores of children with their mother in prison; they found that all children were secretive sometimes about maternal imprisonment. Children with low levels of social support, who often lacked parental guidance, tended to talk indiscriminately about their mothers in prison; while children with higher levels of social support exercised more discretion and made more considered judgements about with whom to share this information.

These are important findings. While openness and honesty between parents/carers and children within their families is likely to be beneficial, my study has found that more mature children are likely to exercise discretion about sharing this information more widely.

5.4.2.3 Case Illustration

Anthony's (B11/12) mother considered that it was her duty, as a practicing Christian, to be open and honest with her son about her offences (accountancy fraud). She provided Anthony with a detailed explanation while she was on bail, and she attempted to set up a network of contacts from her local church to support him and his father during her anticipated lengthy prison sentence. Anthony's father visited his son's new secondary school before his transfer from junior school. Anthony saw the logic for this, so that the school was aware of his mother being in prison: "*in case I get stressed about it and end up doing something wrong ... so they don't shout at me and find out that way*". While he told his close friends about his mother, he told other acquaintances that she had had to move away because of her work. Anthony's advice to other children in similar circumstances was that they would need to "*get organised*" so that they could fit in homework, work at home (Anthony was his disabled father's carer), and visiting and contact arrangements. The family policy of openness was not without tensions. Anthony's father was angry and frustrated by

the demands made on him, and he felt betrayed by his wife's criminal activities. Members of their family criticised her for providing Anthony with so much detail about her offences. Nonetheless, family policy was clear and sufficiently robust to withstand challenges and upheavals.

Along with openness, "*getting organised*" was the hallmark of Anthony's family's policy and this was also the case for the other families with an open approach (11/22). These parents/carers were mainly positive, energetic and forward looking, and their approach rubbed off on their children. They were making the best of their situation, successfully adjusting to new demands and managing to keep in control of events. Parents/carers whose approach was more closed (7/22) were under more pressure, less able to plan ahead, and were less in control of events.

5.4.2.4 Differing reactions of sibling pairs

While children's views were strongly influenced by their parents (particularly parents looking after them), their approaches sometimes differed from their parents, as illustrated by the different ways that sibling pairs reacted. Declan (aged 13) and Natalie's (aged 14) (Case 4) mother was the most open about her family's situation of any of the families in this study, having been raised and lived in the same community all her life. She was open and honest with her children; and also with her family and friends, on whose support she knew she could rely. Like her, her children knew their father's strengths and his frailties (alcohol dependence). Natalie's relationships with her teachers and her friends reflected this approach, while Declan was more circumspect, not looking for support, and not discussing his situation with his peers. Oliver (aged 11) and Jamie's (aged 10) mother was also open and honest with her children. Oliver spoke openly and not very discriminatingly about his father being in prison to his friends, while his younger brother Jamie was more cautious,

preferring to keep this private for fear of gossip. Amelia (aged 7) and Grant's (aged 12) mother's approach strongly emphasised discretion. She had no wish to discuss her situation with the partners of other prisoners. Amelia was open and unguarded, while Grant's more closed approach was closely related to his feelings of shame and stigma. While Abida (8) and Sameera (14)'s mother insisted on openness and honesty, her daughters were more discreet and viewed Sameera's father's imprisonment as a private matter, not for discussion with their friends.

5.4.2.5 Openness / Honesty

Parent/carers and some imprisoned parents in thirteen families (Cases 3; 4; 6; 7; 8; 9; 12; 14; 15; 16; 17; 18; and 20) all spoke about the importance of speaking openly and honestly with their children about their family's circumstances. Luke (B12/3), whose mother had explained to him about his father's remand in custody, said "*I wouldn't want to be lied to*". Declan (B13/4) and Natalie's (G14/4) mother had explained clearly what had happened to the children the first time their father had been imprisoned, and they had been kept fully informed since then. Becky (G12/9) appreciated that information was shared openly in her family. Jack (B9/7) and Kirsty's (G11/7) mother said "*... I always tell my children what's going on, what's going to happen; because if I don't they..... just get scared*". This kind of clarity enabled children to understand what was happening and to develop coping strategies.

Sameera's (aged 8)'s mother believed in using very clear language in explaining to her daughter about her partner's offences.

"Yes we had to be honest. We explained everything ... (Her) dad had got to go because he has been naughty, so he has to go to prison. People say he

has gone to work. He has not gone to work. He is going to the jail house because he has done something wrong”.

Her language was clear enough for an 8 year old child to understand. Sameera knew exactly why her father was in prison, and why her weekends were given over to prison visits.

Ethan (aged 9) and Samantha's (aged 17) mother in prison also had a clear view about the importance of being honest. She had a large family. The best way of handling the situation was:

“.....just to be truthful with the children. Tell them how it was, what could happen, how it can be and just be straight down the line with them. It's the only way. Sometimes it's a little bit harsh and they look at you and think “oh my god”, but it's the only way to do it. You have to be straight with your children”.

She said that some other women in prison had chosen not to tell their children the truth.

“To me that is something that can come back and bite them ... when they get home. The kids could look at them and say: “Well, why have you lied to me?” ... and then you will have your children sat back thinking: “.....Hang on a minute, I never knew my mum was in prison, my mum told me she was off working doing such and such a thing”. Me personally, I think the truthful approach is the best approach”.

Ethan's mother's policy probably worked well with her grown up children. It appeared to have been less helpful for Ethan, only seven when his mother was first bailed, and with too little contact with her in prison to understand her prolonged absence.

Being honest with children did not always work out well. Amelia and Grant's mother eventually had to tell her children about their father's imprisonment on her own. The children were inconsolable; and their mother thought that they blamed her for their father's imprisonment. She had had to be honest, but the consequences could not have been more difficult.

5.4.2.6 Privacy and secrecy

Families who mainly adopted a policy of openness and honesty could combine this with still preferring that their affairs remained private, and with exercising discretion about how far information about parental imprisonment should be shared. Examples include Luke's, Becky's, and Oliver and Jamie's mothers (Cases 3, 9 and 17). While parent/carers frequently chose to share information openly within their families, they could decide that privacy and discretion were needed about which of their friends should be taken into their confidence. A degree of privacy could help to ensure the family's dignity. Children were familiar with these dilemmas. Jack (B9/7) and Jamie (B10/17) both preferred to keep their family affairs private, judging that if they told friends about their step-father/father being in prison the information would spread quickly round their school

Other families' policy was based firmly on privacy or secrecy (Cases 2, 5, 8, 11, 13 and 21). In Case 2, Eleanor (G10)'s father was not prepared to have photographs of her mother on view in the house, not being willing to answer questions about her. Eleanor's aunt also strongly advised that she kept information about her mother to

herself. Nasreen (G14/5) and her mother and father stuck firmly to a policy of secrecy. Grant and Amelia's mother (case 8) kept her opinions to herself: *"....I don't speak to anyone ... (Other parents) seem to like the fact that their boyfriends are in jail, and I don't. I think it's wrong. They are there for a reason.... I like to keep myself to myself. I just deal with it myself"*. These three families experienced their situation as shameful. They were not willing to share their experiences and were forced to be self-reliant.

Ben (B12/21)'s mother's experience had been more positive. Outside the family she had shared information with just one close friend, preferring to keep matters private. Other acquaintances had respected the family's privacy but had still been extremely supportive while Ben's father was in custody. His mother had also been in close touch with her son's school since her husband's arrest and had benefitted from their consistent and thoughtful support.

Mark (aged 13) and Harry (aged 14)'s mothers were the only ones who had re-thought their policy. Both had initially been secretive about their partner (former partner for Harry's mother) being in prison, but had changed their view by the time they were interviewed. Mark (B13/11)'s mother was one of the few parent/carers who had shared no information with her son's school. Her distress and feelings of depression had largely been contained within her immediate family. She seemed to recognise that this approach had its limitations, and was more open, when interviewed, about the need for her to access family support and counselling for herself. She said: *"....I'm a lot more open now than I was then (when her partner was arrested). I tried to hide it more at first, whereas now if people ask me I just tell them"*. Harry (B14/13)'s mother, whose initial response had been to hide away with her son at home, had then had very positive experience of support for her son, from various sources.

Children required to keep information private or secret could find this stressful. Maintaining the fiction that her mother was working abroad was difficult when it came to Nasreen (G14/5)'s birthday party with her friends and having to explain her mother's absence. Kirsty (G11/7) badly wanted to talk to her friends at school, but thought she was not allowed to. Eleanor (G10/2) and Becky (G12/9) had tried to keep their situation private, but were eventually overwhelmed by events and told their friends what had happened. Mark (B13/11) believed he was not allowed to talk about his step-father's imprisonment at school, where his teachers knew nothing about his situation, and he seemed to have little vocabulary to describe his feelings.

5.4.2.7 How children adapt to Family Policy

How the children adapted to family policy is summarised in *Table 11* below. The Table shows how children, while aware of their parents/carers' position, mainly reached their own decisions about their preferred stance. Parents/carers' policies are shown, in brackets by initial(s) and in red, for each child.

Table 11: Family Policy: how children adapted to parents/carers' policy

More open Stance	Discretion	Closed Stance	Tension
Oliver B11 (O;H;D) Becky G12 (H) Natalie G14 (O;H)	Amelia G7 (H) Sameera G8 (O;H) Jack B9/7 (O;D) Jamie B10 (O;H;D) Kirsty G11 (O;D) Kyle B11 (O;D;P) Anthony B11 (O;H) Gareth B11 (O;D) Luke B12/3 (H) Declan B13 (O;H) Caleb B13 (H;D) Piers B13 (O;H) Harry B14 (O;D;P) Abida G14 (O;H) Matthew B15 (NCP) Alex B16 (NCP) Samantha G17 (O;H)	Grant B12/ (H) Ben B12/21 (D;P) Mark B13 (D;P) Nasreen G14 (P;S) Joe B17 (NCP)	Daniel B8 (NCP) Ethan B9/14 (O;H) Eleanor G10 (P;S)
n=3	n=17	n=5	n=4
KEY: The letters in brackets after the children's names refer to their parents /carers' preferred policies ie: O = Openness; H = Honesty; D = Discretion; P = Privacy; S = Secrecy; and NCP = No Clear Policy n = number			

Table 11 indicates how children adapted to their parents/carers' policies by generally adopting a more cautious position. The parents/carers for 12 out of the 17 children who preferred *discretion* had policies characterised by *openness*. Two of the 3 children (Becky and Natalie) who were *more open* were still fairly careful about whom they spoke to. Three out of the four sibling pairs adopted different stances. There was rather more synchronisation between the views of the children with a more *closed stance* and those of their parents/carers.

Children exercising discretion were thoughtful about with whom they shared information, speaking selectively to friends, and sometimes accepting help from trusted adults. Children with a closed stance guarded their privacy; parental

imprisonment was not open for discussion because of its shaming connotations.

Where children experienced tension, they were unsure how to handle their situation, and received less guidance and help with this than they needed.

Well over half the children exercised discretion about whom they talked to and about discussing parental imprisonment. An important finding is that while most of their parents/carers had been open and honest with them, the children tended to be cautious about sharing information. These included Sameera (aged 8) and Abida (aged 14), who thought their father being in prison should be kept private; Samantha, who did nothing to encourage interest from her peers in her family's problems; and Harry (also 14), who decided not to talk about his father to any of his friends, although he was very well supported by school staff. The seventeen children whose policy favoured discretion were mainly well supported by their parents/carers and most received sound guidance from them about how to handle their situation. Hagen and Myers' (2003) observation that well supported children exercise discretion when talking about parental imprisonment is borne out by these findings.

The three children with a more open stance were also very well supported at home, by their mothers. Becky and Natalie were very sociable children who welcomed their friends' support; but they were also thoughtful about their families' reputation and about their relationships. Oliver (aged 11) was more impulsive and less careful about whom he talked to, certainly by comparison with his more cautious and thoughtful younger brother (Jamie, aged 10).

Children within all four groups were able to adapt well. Anthony, as noted above, was discreet about which friends he talked to. Matthew observed how many former family friends deserted his family, but kept in regular contact with a few firm friends of his own. Nasreen made her decision to keep her mother's imprisonment a secret work

well enough; she respected her parents and was not inclined to challenge their insistence that privacy must be maintained and embarrassment avoided. Eleanor was coping well with the tension between her parents in her family. Children respected their parents/carers' policies and priorities, and most of them were judicious and resilient in finding solutions which worked for them.

5.4.2.8 Survival as a policy

There were three families (Cases 1, 10 and 22) which seemed not to have been able to reach the stage of developing a policy for handling parental imprisonment. In each case the offence committed by the imprisoned parent was particularly serious: aggravated assault by Joe's father in Case 1; manslaughter by Daniel's father in Case 10; and child sexual assault by Matthew's father in Case 22. A key factor had been that each case had been linked to serious conflict within the family's communities. Both Joe's mother's and his father's families were well known, and probably notorious, in their local town. The conflict between Joe's mother and his paternal grandmother had been of long standing, and she judged that this was likely to ignite now that Joe's father was shortly due to be released from prison. Daniel's father's conviction for manslaughter had been widely and damagingly publicised in the local press. The assailant's and the victim's families had confronted each other repeatedly and violently during Daniel's father's court case. Matthew's father's assault had been public knowledge in his school, to Matthew's and his mother's intense embarrassment.

These three families seemed to have less control over events, and less opportunities to decide on the best way to deal with their situation. Further confrontations appeared unavoidable between Joe's mother's and his father's sides of the family. Daniel's mother's policy had been to support her former partner throughout

his prison sentence, and this had meant that she had no option but to move away from her home town, and from her older children and their grandparents. Daniel had no say in this move. Matthew's mother was in a state of nervous exhaustion when she was interviewed, shamed by her husband's offence, and accused of neglecting her children by welfare agencies. Surviving what lay in store for them was the nearest these three families had so far developed as a strategy.

Conflict between Gareth (B11/16)'s imprisoned mother and her former partner's family was equally as intense as for these three families (Cases 1, 10 and 22). Gareth's mother's assault had been public knowledge at his junior school where members of her partner's family were employed and Gareth's mother's partner's family celebrated her conviction and prison sentence. The difference in Gareth's family was that his grandparents had a clear policy of their own, which was to provide stability and support to their three grandchildren while the court case was going on, for well over a year, and through their daughter's prison sentence.

5.4.2.9 Family Policy: main themes

Deciding on a clear family policy about how to deal with parental imprisonment helped families plan ahead, manage relationships with the outside world and to feel in control of events. Family policy, once set, tended to remain fixed. Most parents/carers preferred to be honest and open with their children; they had the option of seeking help when needed from their children's schools. Parents who decided on a policy of privacy or secrecy had to be self-reliant and had less access to outside help. Children, mainly well supported at home, adapted their parents/carers' policies and most preferred to exercise discretion about sharing information about their parent in prison. A small number of families who failed to develop a policy and whose main focus was on survival were less well placed to

plan a course through the imprisoned parent's sentence, and were less in control of their fate.

5.5 *Family support and external help*

5.5.1 *Conceptualising help*

This section explores the relevance and meaning of help and family support for participants in the study, particularly from the perspective of parents/carers. Families themselves were the main source of support for most of the families. Family support research (e.g. Katz and Pinkerton, 2003) has emphasised the importance of a non-judgemental, strengths based / non deficit model, very important for prisoners' families feeling shame and stigma about their involvement with prison. Most of the help they appreciated was from teachers and voluntary sector staff, and for imprisoned parents, from prison staff with whom they often got on well, consistent with research findings that relationship factors count for more than therapeutic techniques (Madsen, 2006).

5.5.2 *Extended family and agency support.*

The data on which this section is based is in *Table 12 "Summary of Family Support Data"*, below. The content of the Table, including the final column headed "**Summary of Family Position**", is illustrated by quotations from interviews throughout Chapters 4 and preceding sections of Chapter 5.

Table 12: Summary of Family Support Data

Case No.**	Parents/carers self-sufficient or not	Main support within extended family	Quality of extended family support	External Support					Summary of Family Position
				Statutory Agency	Voluntary Agency	GP	School	Other	
1	●	Mgf	●	Psy *			●		Complex needs and limited support.
2	●	pgf; aunt	●				●	PSS *	Complex needs and positive extended family support.
3	●	Mgm	●				● *	Employer PSS	Nervous wait for outcome of trial.
4	●	mgm; mgf	●						Most needs met within extended family.
5	●	pgm; aunt	●						Family shamed, but positive extended family support.
6	●	none mentioned	-	SS *	FS *		●		High needs and excellent agency support.
7	●	older siblings	●	SS	SCP	●	●		High needs and some external support.
8	●	pgf; uncle	●			●	●		High needs; managing stoically, without external support.
9	●	mgm; paternal uncle	●						Positive extended family support at a difficult time.
10	●	Isolated	-		SCP		● *	PSS	Complex needs; isolated from extended family.
11	●	Mgf	●		SCP			PSS *	Complex needs and limited support
12	●	mgm; pgm; paternal aunt	●		YC		● *	PSS *	Positive extended family and school support.
13	●	Isolated	-		YC	●	● *		Severe disruption, but much external help.
14	●	older siblings; father; mgf & aunt	●						Positive extended family support network.
15	●	Isolated	-	SS Prob			●		Family unit isolated from close relatives.
16	●	mgm; mgf	●				● *		Grandparents coping very well with disruption & conflict.
17	●	mgps; partner's brother (uncle)	●				● *	PSS	Support from school and GP
18	●	Pgm	●				●	PSS	Main support from mgm; school hostile..
19	●	father; older sister	●				●	PSS	Family appears self-sufficient.
20	●	Mgm	●			●	● *		Some family, GP and school support.
21	●	mgm; aunt	●			●	● *		Excellent extended family and school support.
22	●	Isolated	-	SS x			●		Isolated family stigmatised by agencies.
TOTALS	● = 11 ● = 11		● = 1 ● = 8 ● = 7 - = no data Isolated = 5	Psy = 1 SS = 4 Prob = 1	FS = 1 SCP = 3 YC = 2	● = 5	● = 13 ● = 4	PSS = 8 Employer = 1	
KEY	mgf= maternal grandfather mgm= maternal grandmother pgf = paternal grandfather pgm= paternal grandmother mgps= maternal grandparents ● = positive ● = mixed ● = negative/ inaccessible * = key support x = negative support								
	Psy = Psychiatrist SS = Social Services Prob = Probation FS = Family Support Agency SCP = Support for Children of Prisoners YC = Young Carers PSS = Prison Support Service								

NB: ** For children's names, please see Table 1 (p88)

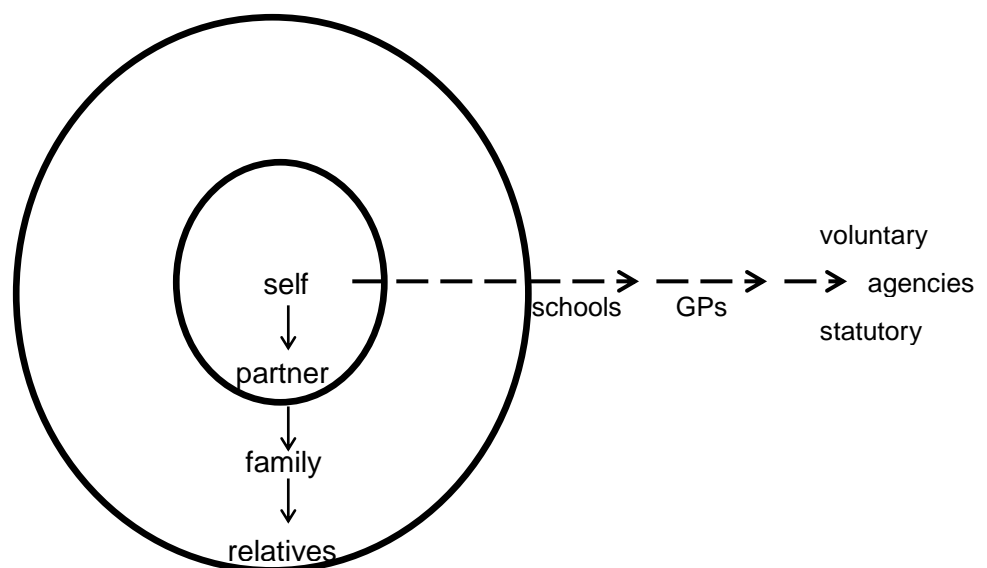
Notes on Table 14

Half the parents/carers were mainly self- sufficient; and half were more needy. Most parents/carers could access some support from their extended families. Four were isolated from them. About half the families could rely on high quality support from their relatives; others were less able to do so. More families (about a dozen) had received positive support from schools compared with a smaller number (4) which had had negative experiences. More than a third (9/22) of the families had received positive and practical support from prison linked or other family support services, including POPS. Three of these families described support received from these agencies as particularly helpful.

Parents/carers who had contacted GPs for support (n = 5) had mostly found them helpful. Families who had been in contact with other statutory services (n =5) had had mixed experiences.

Figure 8 below describes where parents/carers look for help: first to themselves; then to their partner; then to their extended family; and then outside the family.

Figure 8: Families looking for help



Faced with the threat of parental imprisonment, most families look first to themselves to deal with challenges. Most will also turn to their own parents and relatives for help and support, if this is available. “Family support” meant, literally, support from within their own family for many parents/carers. With few exceptions, those who were self-reliant, with positive support from the imprisoned parent and from their families, did not need to call on external agencies, other than schools, for help. Parents/carers may seek help from general practitioners, and other primary care services, to cope with stresses linked to having a partner in prison. Others, with less family support, look for support from statutory or voluntary sector agencies.

My sample of parents/carers seemed to fall into two groups: those who were more self-sufficient and those who were more needy. The characteristics of the two groups are described in *Tables 13* and *14* below. Positive extended family support, energy levels, relationships with school and absence of depression are shown in green (●). Conversely, lack of extended family support, low energy levels, poor relationships with school, and depression are shown in red (●). Amber (●) again indicates a warning light.

Table 13 – Self-sufficient Parent/Carers’ Characteristics

<i>Self sufficient parents/carers: characteristics</i>						
Case No.	Extended family support	Energy level	Employed	Relationship with school	Near end of sentence	Depression
4	●	●	Y	●	Y	●
5	●	●	Y	●	N	●
8	●	●	Y	●	N	●
9	●	●	Y	●	N	●
12	●	●	N	●	N	●
14	●	●	Y	●	Y	●
16	●	●	N	●	Y	●
17	●	●	N	●	Y	●
19	NK	NK	Y	●	N	●
20	●	●	N	●	N	●
21	●	●	Y	●	Unclear	●
TOTALS	● = 9 ● = 1 NK = 1	●H = 9 ●M = 1 NK = 1	Yes = 7 No = 4	● = 8 ● = 2 ● = 1	Yes = 4 No = 6	● No = 7 ● = 4 (some signs)

Table 14 – More needy Parent/Carers' Characteristics

More needy parents/carers: characteristics						
Case No.	Extended family support	Energy level	Employed	Relationship with school	Near end of sentence	Depression
1	●	●	N	●	Y	●
2	●	●	N	●	N	●
3	●	●	Y	●	N	●
6	●	●	NK	●	Y	●
7	●	●	N	●	Y	●
10	●	●	N	●	Y	●
11	●	●	N	●	Y	●
13	●	●	N	●	N	●
15	●	●	Y	●	Y	●
18	●	●	Y	●	Y	●
22	●	●	N	●	N	●
TOTALS	● = 2 ● = 2 ● = 7	● H = 4 ● M = 5 ● L = 2	Yes = 3 No = 7 NK = 1	● = 6 ● = 5	Yes = 7 No = 4	● Yes = 5 ● No = 3 ● = 3 (some signs)
KEY both tables	● = positive ● H = High NK = Not Known ● = limited ● M = Medium ● = negative ● L = Low					

More of the self sufficient group (9/11) than the more needy group (2/11) could rely on unstinting support from their immediate families. Energy levels of parents/carers appeared higher in the more self sufficient group. Nine of them had a *high* energy level (one medium). In the more needy group, while four of the parents had a *high* energy level, seven were categorised as either *medium* (n=5) or *low* (n=2). On the other side of this coin, the more self sufficient parents showed either no (n=7) or some (n=4) signs of depression; whereas in the more needy group 8 out of 11 parent/carers showed either clear or some signs of depression. The more self sufficient parents were more likely to be employed (7 out of 11); while in the more needy group, only 3 were employed.

I gained some impression that the larger number of parents who had less formal education were more needy; and that higher levels of education may have been protective factors.

Differences between the two groups' relationships with their children's school were less clear cut. Eight parents in the self sufficient group and six in the more needy group related well to their children's school. While only one of the more self sufficient group had encountered problems with school (Case 8), five of the more needy parents had done so. Imminent release of their partner from prison did not appear to be related to parents' self sufficiency. Release was fairly imminent for four of the more self sufficient group, and for seven of the more needy group.

Grandparents were a main source of support in 15 out of the 22 families. Four of these families could rely on support from both grandparents. Six of them identified both a grandparent and an aunt or uncle as a source of support. Older siblings provided a main source of support in 3 families. Three of the parents/carers lived some distance away from their extended families; they appeared isolated and family support was more difficult to access.

Out of the 11 parents/carers who described support received from their families as positive, two families, Luke's (Case 3) and Oliver and Jamie's (Case 17), had a mixed experience, with positive support from one or more family members, but with a negative contribution from others. Seven of the parents/carers described support received from family members as very positive, making a decisive contribution to the welfare of the children and the family unit. It is noteworthy that these 7 families were all in the self sufficient group, with the exception of Eleanor's, Case 2. (In this family, although Eleanor, aged 10, was receiving optimal support from her paternal grandfather and aunt, she faced serious challenges related to her mother's very long sentence.

There were two families, Joe's (Case 1) and Harry's (Case 13), where parents/carers described very effective mental health interventions for their sons, a psychiatrist in Joe's case, and a counselling service made available through a general practitioner in Harry's.

Social services were involved in 4 families, very helpfully with Caleb's family (Case 6), and, according to both Matthew and his mother, unhelpfully in Case 22. Caleb's mother also described very helpful interventions by both voluntary and statutory services. References to help received from voluntary agencies supporting children's families and young carers were also positive.

Notions of helpfulness were inextricably connected to ideas of family for half the families. It was families that enabled the crisis of the imprisonment to be survived, providing continuity of support. For some (8/14) help was primarily practical or financial. For others (5/14) there was greater emphasis on emotional support from extended family members for children. Conversely if family support was cut off or reduced, families experienced a sense of loss, incompleteness and a lack of resources to deal with their issues. Families could feel partially abandoned if one side of the family deserted the parent and children, or totally abandoned where relationships with extended family had completely broken down. On the other hand, resilient families with access to extended family support could withstand many of the upheavals resulting from parental imprisonment (8/22).

Some children sensed their vulnerability and sought out help from teachers, while a smaller number accepted more intensive therapeutic help. Children needed to decide on timing and whether help was needed. Others preferred to keep their own counsel and gave no indication that they were looking for this kind of support. Support from family and friends met their needs. One young person, Matthew (B15/22), strongly resented intervention and assessment from child protection social workers. Others needed occasional help. School provided enough help for most children, with the ordinary run of problems, as anticipated by Rutter (1987).

5.5.3 *Help from Schools for families of imprisoned parents*

Support from schools is described in more detail as it was to these that parents/carers frequently turned first for help.

School has pivotal importance for both children of prisoners and their parents/carers. Every family has a choice to make about whether or not to talk to school about parental imprisonment. School is frequently the place where the issue of parental imprisonment moves from the private to the public arena; and school seems to be a kind of proxy for how families experience the views of wider society. How schools respond to being informed about parental imprisonment makes a powerful impact on families. Schools have the power to deal effectively with bullying. Schools which are able to take issues of parental imprisonment in their stride can help both parents and children accept and deal with their situation. Schools can be a source of relief for parents who know that their child is in safe hands; and that emotional support from trusted staff can be available. Equally important is the role of schools in trying to ensure children's educational progress at a difficult time in their lives. Conversely, a negative reaction from school can strongly reinforce families' negative perceptions of their situations and of themselves.

Three-fifths of all the children in the study (17/28) described their schools' response to their situation as helpful. Two families' experiences illustrate help they received. The mother of Oliver (B11/17) and Jamie (B10/17) was initially apprehensive, but then very reassured by the helpful response she had received when she had told the children's school about her partner being in prison, and her sons had felt secure knowing that their teachers and friends would support them when need be. Ben's (B12/21) mother recounted in detail extremely helpful support received from her son's new secondary school on the day she and her husband were arrested, and in the months following. She found regular and accessible

telephone contact with her son's head of year very re-assuring, and this seemed to give her all the additional help, outside her family, which she needed.

Schools provided a large part of the external support children of prisoners in this study required, in most cases to a high standard. There were examples of primary, secondary and (one) special schools which grasped intuitively the kind of support which children needed to cope with the loss of their parent in prison, avoiding reinforcing children's feelings of embarrassment, shame or guilt. Schools were independent from families and were able to provide authoritative, professional and sustained support. Parents welcomed schools knowing enough about their circumstances to provide children with help when this was needed. Some schools went further and provided long term individual support while parents were in prison. Several boys, including Luke (B112/3), Anthony (B11/12), and Gareth (B11/16), transferred to senior schools while their parent was in prison, and Ben (B12/21) did so soon afterwards. This was a time when extra school support was particularly helpful, although this was not forthcoming for two boys, Grant (B12/8) and Kyle (B11/18). Schools had it in their power to reduce the level of stigma experienced by children and families. In the smaller number of cases (n=3) where this was not the case, their unhelpful responses (to Grant (B12/8), Kyle (B11/18) and Matthew (B15/22)) reinforced these families' feelings of shame and rejection.

5.5.4 Themes emerging about help for families of prisoners

This study strongly reinforces the centrality of the family in supporting children, their parents/carers and imprisoned parents; and also the importance for all three of deciding whether or when to seek help from outside the family. Some managed well enough without this. Nonetheless, there was a good deal of help available, particularly from schools. Families also welcomed friendly support and advice from prison based family support staff, partly because this was often readily accessible and was helpful in establishing contact with the

imprisoned parent, and in dealing with the prison environment. With some positive exceptions, family support services in the community were much less available. More help was available than I had expected from prison staff, who were knowledgeable about the psychological impact of isolation and separation, and who provided valuable guidance about courses and re-settlement. This kind of help, including basic counselling, was clearly appreciated by about half (6 or 7 out of 13) of the imprisoned parents whom I interviewed.

I have already highlighted (p 49 above) that the COPING research found that the needs of children of prisoners were much more clearly recognised in Sweden than in the UK; that professional help was more readily available in the community in both Sweden and Germany; and that UK participants were more reluctant to seek help, partly because of the wider prevalence of stigma. There are still some signs of people in the UK appearing to feel that seeking help, more especially therapeutic or psychological help, is not quite acceptable, or likely to be seen as an admission of weakness. My view is that a third (9/22) of families needed more help of this kind, either to help parents/carers deal with emotional issues; or to help children, mostly, - but not all - boys, to handle their feelings and behaviour more effectively. They were not helped by lack of skilled community support, and by the wider lack of recognition of the needs of prisoners' families.

Chapter Six

Imprisoned Parents: responsibilities, relationships, and child well being.

This chapter focuses on the impact of imprisoned parents, both mothers and fathers, on their children's well-being, exploring their roles, responsibilities, and their attitudes to both their offences and to their sentence, and their capacity for honesty with their children. Children's relationships and opportunities for contact with their imprisoned parents are considered. Both the damage and the benefits of parental imprisonment are reviewed. Finally, dominant themes in the interviews, with both parents/carers and imprisoned parents are discussed.

6.1 *Role of Imprisoned Parents*

Parents in prison can only fulfil part of their role. They cannot fully share their children's lives, and they cannot take part in ordinary family life. They are not available to spend time with their children helping with school work or being involved in family and leisure activities. They have fewer opportunities to be involved with providing guidance for their children, setting boundaries and disciplining them. Hairston (2002) noted that being able to provide for children, being physically present and being in control, were impossible for imprisoned fathers. Imprisoned parents can feel powerless and are dependent on partners or other carers to facilitate contact with their children (Dyer, 2005). On the other hand, prison can provide opportunities for parents to redirect their lives (Boudin, 1998).

Evidence in this chapter is that imprisoned parents remain vitally important for their children and can contribute to their well-being.

Aspects of the thirteen imprisoned parents' (whom I interviewed) relationships with their children are summarised in *Table 15* below. Positive past parenting practice, accepting mistakes, being honest about offences, understanding children's feelings about prison, maintaining contact and taking a positive interest in children's progress are all indicated in green (●); and the opposite in red, (●), with amber (●) signalling a warning light.

Table 15: Imprisoned Parents and relationships with their children

Case No./name of child/ren	I/P Father or Mother	Previous parenting practice?	Accepts mistakes/ failures	Honest re offences	Understands child's feelings about prison	Maintains contact	Takes positive interest in child's progress
1 Joe	F	●	●	●	●	●	●
2 Eleanor	M	●	●	●	●	●	●
5 Nasreen	M	●	●	●	●	●	●
8 Amelia & Grant	F	●	●	●	●	●	●
10 Daniel	F	●	●	●	●	●	●
11 Mark	F	●	●	●	●	●	●
12 Anthony	M	●	●	●	●	●	●
13 Harry	F	●	●	●	●	●	●
14 Ethan & Samantha	M	●	●	●	●	●	●
15 Piers	M	●	●	●	●	●	●
16 Gareth	M	●	●	●	●	●	●
18 Kyle	M	●	●	●	●	●	●
19 Alex	M	●	●	●	●	●	●
TOTAL	F = 5 M = 8	F ●=3 ●=1 ●=1 M ●=6 ●=2	● = 6 ● = 7	● = 6 ● = 7	● = 7 ● = 5 ● = 1	● = 10 ● = 3	● = 12 ● = 1
KEY	I/P = Imprisoned Parent M = Mother F = Father ● = yes ● = partly ● = no						

Note on Table 15

The variables in the table are explained below:

Previous parenting practice	Level of involvement in upbringing of child/ren prior to imprisonment
Accepts mistakes/failures	Attempts to recognise wrong-doing; honest about short-comings.
Honest about offences	Tries to explain offences to child/ren at a level that fits their interest, age and maturity.
Understands child's feelings about prison	Able to recognise child/ren's potential feelings of guilt, embarrassment and stigma.

Maintains contact	Tries to establish meaningful contact to meet child/ren's needs appropriately (e.g. through visits, telephone and letters).
Takes positive interest in child's progress	Enquiring and concerned about all aspects of child/ren's progress (home, school and leisure).

The assessments made are subjective, based on my experience of the interviews and reading of the interview transcripts for the imprisoned parents, supplemented by data from interviews with children and parents/carers.

Most of the imprisoned parents (9/13), including six out of the eight mothers, had shown previous positive parenting practice in the level of care provided for their children.. About half (6) accepted their past mistakes and were honest about their offences. This was less clear for the other (7) parents. Most (10/13) maintained contact with their child/ren; and nearly all (12/13) took a positive interest in their progress.

6.2 *Responsibilities of imprisoned parents; and their views about their offences*

Imprisoned parents can easily be stereotyped as uncaring or neglectful. They may also have been responsible and compassionate. An illustration of this is that three of the imprisoned parents (Cases 10, 11 and 18) had taken responsibility as step-parents much earlier in their lives for one or more of their partner's children. Kyle's (B11/18) mother had brought up two of her partner's children by a previous relationship (a 16 year old boy and a 14 year old girl). Daniel's (B8/10) father had taken on responsibility for his partner's two oldest children (now adults) after their father died some twenty years previously. Mark's (B13/11) stepfather took responsibility for his partner's two children, a girl now aged 16 and Mark. These had been responsible decisions. Harry's (B14/13) father had contributed nearly two decades of service

to a highly regarded national voluntary organisation; and Ben's (B12/21) father had a creditable record in raising charitable funds.

Accepting responsibility for their offences is a challenging issue for imprisoned parents. It involves confronting their own wrong-doing and the implications for themselves and their families. About half of the imprisoned parents interviewed (n=6) had faced up to their offences and their culpability in different ways.

By the time of her interview Kyle's (B11/18) mother had completely accepted that her drug dealing had been wrong and, after her release, was quite open that wearing her tag was a public reminder about her offences. She was emphatic that she would not re-offend and she made herself open to offers of help from prison and probation staff. Anthony's (B11/12) mother fully accepted that her crimes (accountancy fraud) had been completely wrong and that she deserved to go to prison; and she had informed Anthony in detail about her offences. Coming to terms with her wrong-doing involved recruiting her son as an active partner in re-assessing her role and contribution to family life. Gareth's (B11/16) mother knew that her son could not understand why she had taken a knife to her former partner, and she accepted that she deserved to be convicted for this, although her custodial sentence was unexpected. Mark's (B13/11) step-father admitted that he had been leading a double life before his arrest, disappearing for days on end into an underworld of drugs and criminal behaviour, with damaging consequences for his partner and family. He came to see his prison sentence as a positive opportunity to turn his life round. He was conscious of the abuse he had experienced from his own father and step-father, and reflected: *"I think I was trying to break the cycle, and trying to be a good father and step-father"*. (In this he typified Fairchild's (2009) observation that imprisoned fathers frequently have unresolved attachment issues consequent on earlier losses and trauma). Grant (B12/8) and Amelia's (G7/8) father was quite clear that his drug dealing had been illegal; and he did not want his son to follow his example.

Other parents were more reluctant to talk about their offences when interviewed. Ethan (B9/14) and Samantha (G17/14)'s mother declined to discuss what she had done - Samantha said her offences were drug related -, and her sentence had been increased on appeal by the prosecution. Although she strongly emphasised the importance of being honest with her children (see above, p 222) her reticence gave an impression of guilt, embarrassment and denial which would make open conversation about these issues with her children difficult. Harry (B14/13)'s father was equally reticent, only acknowledging that his offences belonged to a much earlier period in his life, which he did not want to discuss. Although Harry showed no curiosity about his father's offences, the fact that these seemed to be off limits for discussion may have left important gaps in his understanding, and to have made him less likely to share his feelings about his father's imprisonment.

Crimes with the most serious consequences were inevitably more difficult for children to understand. Joe's (B17/1) father did not discuss his conviction for assault for which he received a very long sentence (in his interview); and he had done nothing to help Joe understand his crimes, about which his son was still in a state of considerable confusion. Piers' (B13/15) mother and Daniel's (B8/10) father both asserted that their criminal involvement (affray for Piers' mother, and manslaughter for Daniel's father) was as a result of happenstance, being in the wrong place at the wrong time, not of deliberate intent. While Piers must have known quite a lot about the events which led to his mother's and his brother's conviction (for manslaughter), which was the subject of widespread publicity, Daniel was palpably confused about his father's crime; and he had received little help from him in understanding what had happened.

The burden of guilt felt by Alex's (B16/19) mother for murdering her assailant had not lessened four years after her conviction. She had been totally under the influence of drugs and alcohol at the time of the offence, and was remorseful about the impact of the murder on

her victim's family. Her sentence was so long that she felt she could not stay practically involved in her son's life; he would be 26 when she became eligible for release. She was eloquent and sorrowful about the effect of her sentence on herself and on her son: *"It affected me quite badly knowing I was out of their lives. I couldn't stop crying"*. Thinking about Alex, she said: *"To him I think it must have felt like when someone loses a parent, as in a death, really. It must be, to not have your mum there to wash and iron and whatever else for you, to cook and give them money, for you suddenly not to be there"*. She maintained contact by telephone and occasional visits, but expected little in return; her crime had been so grave that she felt there was nothing she could offer her son by way of explanation.

Eleanor's (G10/2) mother acknowledged some feelings of remorse and of sympathy for her victim. She was obsessed with her feelings about her daughter. She had been brought up in care with very little contact with her own mother, and she contrasted her love for Eleanor with her own rejection. *"I didn't want her to feel the way I do about my mother ... When I had her I think I cried for the first five days just for feeling so much love all at once. ... She is involved in everything I do ... she is the biggest part of me ... the apple of my eye. ... I couldn't stop loving her"*. She had made her cell into a shrine for her daughter. She recognised that she had been far too protective of her, lavishing her with presents when she was small. Her relationship with her daughter was the only one she could feel proud about. She recognised her limitations. *"I'm not part of her life now as I should be. ... Obviously you are not a perfect mum all the time. I didn't always get it right but I would never have harmed her"*. She had only started to re-build her relationship with her daughter fairly recently. So far this had not involved talking to her about her offence, and Eleanor had been left to try to understand this on her own.

From this review it appears that where parents accepted responsibility for their crimes this provided a much clearer starting point for their children. They had enough information about

why their parents had been in prison; and their parents made no attempt to excuse or to justify what they had done.

Where parents were reluctant to talk about their offences, children had only such information as came their way from other sources. Their parents' lack of transparency left the children to puzzle out for themselves what they should make of their crimes and what to expect of them in the future. This left a gap in these children's knowledge of their parents which their imaginations would have to fill¹⁴. The two parents convicted of murder had both found coming to terms with their crime impossibly difficult, and had not been in a position to help their children deal with the emotional impact of having a parent who had committed such a heinous crime.

6.3 *Imprisoned parents' attitudes to prison*

The views of the smaller number of imprisoned parents serving very long sentences were dominated by their need to survive and get through their sentence. Joe's father and Eleanor's mother, both in prison for a very long time, had completed some educational courses, but neither of them had completely tackled their drug dependency. While Daniel's father thought that prison had made him stronger and he had valued support from some prison staff, he appeared not to have taken advantage of educational opportunities. Alex's mother thought she might have an aptitude for a listening skills course, but found it impossible to think far ahead.

The other parents had all approached their prison sentences positively and most had made good use of their time and opportunities available. Nasreen's mother had been educated to

¹⁴ A 13 year old Swedish girl involved in the COPING research commented: *"We children are good at imagining when we are not told the truth ... Grown ups know more than ... we do and that is what we want to know"*. (Jones & Wainaina-Wozna, 2013, p.325)

degree level, and while she completed teaching and parenting qualifications and courses in prison, and had worked as a learning supporter for residents, she still felt somewhat under-used in prison; and, perhaps unrealistically, thought that her skills could have been used to better effect. Her view was that prison education focussed on the needs of women with high needs and had less to offer her.

Other parents had seized educational opportunities with enthusiasm, using their time productively and gaining useful skills. Anthony's mother and Harry's father both completed higher level qualifications and made positive contributions while in prison, supporting new prisoners (Anthony's mother) and in catering management (Harry's father). Ethan and Samantha's mother gained an all-round education in prison, and three other mothers (Piers', Gareth's and Kyle's) took advantage of opportunities for education and skill development whenever these were available. Kyle's mother was particularly proud of her achievements. Grant and Amelia's father was expecting to achieve Level 2 trade qualifications when interviewed, which he hoped would improve his employment prospects. Mark's father welcomed the structure and support which prison provided, including opportunities for community service in an open prison, where he was so productively engaged that there were "*not enough hours in the day*" for his varied commitments. These included a counselling course, and he also had experience of assisting at therapeutic group work sessions in another prison, which he hoped might lead to job opportunities when he was discharged.

6.4 *Concepts of imprisoned parenthood*

Most of their children knew that they were loved by their imprisoned parent, although they could not be physically present for their children. (The exceptions were Joe (B17/1) and Daniel (B8/10), who were both uncertain about their fathers' commitment to them.) Most of the parents (Joe and Daniel's fathers were again the exceptions) accepted their limitations as parents. It is noteworthy that all the imprisoned parents interviewed, with the single

exception of Joe's father, both fathers and mothers, specifically acknowledged the positive role and contribution of their partners or other carers looking after their children. They were unstinting in their praise for them. They knew that they could do little themselves for their children, and that they had been able to rely on their children's carers to take their place and to keep their families together.

Understanding their children's concerns about their imprisonment was challenging for parents. About half of them were able to empathise with their children being upset about being separated from them, and also recognised that their children were puzzled or distressed about their imprisonment and the stigma attaching to this. Nasreen's, Mark's, Anthony's, Harry's, Gareth's and Kyle's parents were able to imagine themselves in their children's position and appreciate the dilemmas they faced. Alex's mother was also conscious of her son's feelings of bereavement following her life sentence. Other parents (Eleanor's, Grant and Amelia's, Daniel's, Ethan and Samantha's, and Piers') found this more difficult. They seemed more hurt, more conscious of their own needs and loss, and their capacity to think themselves into their children's situation was more limited. Only Joe's father showed no appreciation at all of his son's grief and distress.

One of the clearest themes to emerge for these parents focused on reparation, making amends and seeking opportunities to become better parents. Grant (B12) and Amelia's (G7) father (Case 8) illustrates this. He saw his children as his future: *"I mean everything I do is for the kids. I just want them to have a better life than what I've had"*. He was aware of the link between his imprisonment and his son's behaviour problems: *"... I think that's kind of my fault, because he has always looked up to me being there for him, and I have just not been there"*.

Both he and Mark's (B13/11) step-father intended to make things better for their sons after their release. Mark's step-father was equally committed to the future care of his step-son,

and his own 4 year old son. He felt that he had been able to turn his life round while in prison, particularly dealing successfully with his previous drug dependency. He valued his time with his children on home leaves and took care to make parting from the children as pain-free as possible for them. He seemed particularly attuned to his step-son's feelings. He described how Mark "... *treated me like his best friend*". Mark knew his step-father had stabbed himself before his arrest: "*It must have been a lot for him to take on*".

Separation from their children was unbearable for some parents. Piers' (B13/15) mother said:

It's just taking me away from my family, that's all that's killing me. ... Never in my life will I ever come back to jail. They shouldn't send women to jail, unless you're a murderer, unless you have done a really bad crime ... What is the point of taking a woman away from her children?"

Several women (Kyle's, Ethan's, Gareth's and Anthony's mothers) concurred that, while they could adjust to life in prison, it was separation from their children that was their real punishment; and that their children suffered more than they did.

Parents' ways of coping with being in prison included wanting to re-build connections to their lives before they were imprisoned. This could be returning to normal family life. Ethan and Samantha's mother was hopeful that after some successful home leaves "... *everything will just slip back to normal*", a phrase that suggests that the process would be smooth, and, perhaps, that the period of imprisonment, and the events leading up to prison, could be quickly forgotten. She seemed to be echoing her daughter's assertion that family life could "...*carry on as normal*". Nasreen's mother had been a successful business woman in her previous life: following her transfer to an open prison she was almost able to reconstruct her business career obtaining, on her own initiative, a responsible commercial post in a nearby

city. Apart from having to return to prison at the end of the day, her life was almost back to normal.

Some fathers seemed to have decided that their lives as parents were on hold during their prison sentence, confirming Arditti's (2005) observation that fatherhood in prison could become dormant. Grant's (B12/8) father had had to accept that he could play no role in disciplining his son. If he had behaved badly his partner would "... *hold it back from me because she doesn't want me to shout at (him) while I am in jail*". Relationships with partners were no longer reciprocal. Imprisoned parents were dependent on their partners arranging contact with their children and often for financial support. For Grant's (B12/8) and Harry's (B14/13) fathers nothing could change until they were discharged. Both these fathers remained strongly committed to their children, but their contributions as fathers would have to wait until they were released. Grant's father eagerly anticipated this and wanted to make amends. "*I can't wait ... I think you appreciate more when you are in here*". He wanted to improve: "*I will do a little bit more with them this time, though*".

Most of the imprisoned parents recognised their previous shortcomings and their limitations as parents. Several of them, including Eleanor's mother, Nasreen's mother, Mark's father and Kyle's father, sought out opportunities to improve their parenting by attending parenting programmes in prison, where these were available. Again, there were two exceptions. Joe's and Daniel's fathers thought they had little to learn. In spite of having abandoned his two older sons and having left Joe with unresolved violent and suicidal feelings, his father claimed to be a "*family man*" in relation to his current wife (not Joe's mother's) children and felt in no need of guidance about how to be a good parent. Daniel's (B8/10) father was of the same view: "*...I have brought my kids (up) perfect. None of them has ever been in trouble in their lives. They have not even got a conviction, so I think I have done a good job to be honest*". His protestations about his parenting skills were not convincing. He had often been away from home for long periods. He had had a gambling addiction and had been a

cannabis user for most of his adult life, both of which must have distracted him from his family responsibilities.

Having their mother in prison could result in adult expectations being placed on children.

Three of the mothers (Cases 12, 14 and 16) in prison realised that too much could be expected of their sons. Ethan's (B9/14) mother thought that her older daughters sometimes expected her son to take more responsibility for his younger sisters than was appropriate for a 9 year old boy. Anthony's (B11/12) mother, a conscientious parent, recognised that while she was on bail awaiting sentence, she treated Anthony like an adult, taking him into her confidence about her offences.

Looking back on the period of more than a year which she had spent on bail, Gareth's (B11/16) mother was aware of how much she had expected of him, and how much she had spoiled her three children:

"I tended to put a lot on Gareth because of him being the oldest, because he was the only man in my life".

Her solicitor pointed out that she was asking Gareth to solve her problems, and that it was inappropriate for a (then) 10 year old boy to look after his mother and his younger sisters as well. Her own mother confronted her with how much she was spoiling the children with unnecessary gifts. Gareth's mother realised when she was in prison that she had felt guilty and partly responsible about the ending of her relationship with the children's father, and she seemed to want to change how she would relate to her children when she was released.

6.5 *Imprisoned parents' capacity for honesty with children*

Snyder (2009) noted that women prisoners had violated societal norms about how women and mothers should behave. Arguably, the same is true of fathers. Being honest with their children about their offences could be particularly difficult. Ethan's (B9/14) mother was emphatic about the importance of being truthful with her children. She had been clear during a long period on bail that a prison sentence was inevitable. This was no doubt easier to convey to her grown-up daughters than to Ethan, then aged just seven. Being truthful was not always uppermost in imprisoned parents' minds. Both Kyle's (B11/18) and Anthony's (B11/12) mother acknowledged that in their first weeks while they were adjusting to the prison regime, they found it impossible to focus on their children's needs or to find time to talk to them. Imprisoned parents had to decide how much children could understand about the adult world, and about the context in which their crimes had been committed. Neither of the two parents who had been convicted of murder, Alex (B16/19) and Eleanor's G10/2's mothers, had been in a fit state to discuss the reasons for their convictions with their children after their imprisonment, and made little progress on this subsequently.

Daniel's (B8/10) father, convicted of manslaughter, had talked about his offence on Daniel's first visit to see his father in prison. Daniel had asked his father: *"Did you hurt the man in the brain?"* His father acknowledged that he did not know how his son had dealt with this information: *"...I don't know what's gone through his little mind because I have not really spoken to him about it"*. This had been a one-off conversation. Daniel had not raised the matter again. His father thought there would be opportunities for more discussion after his release from prison. He acknowledged his responsibility: *"There is only one person who can make this work, and that's me"*.

Another consideration was that some children showed no signs of curiosity or concern about their parents' offences, including Mark, Harry, Ethan, and Kyle, (cases 11, 13, 14 and 18) although they were very concerned about their parents' absence. In a fifth case, Piers (B13/15), was fully informed about the incident which led to his mother's conviction for affray, and seemed not to need any further information about this.

Facing the full extent of the hurt experienced by their children could be difficult for imprisoned parents. Nasreen's mother sensed the shame which her daughter felt about her. Grant (B12/8) and Amelia's (G7/8) father had talked to his children about his offence, but not in detail. His partner shielded him from the full extent of Grant's behaviour problems. Both Grant's (B12/8) and Mark's (B13/11) fathers seemed to need to convince themselves that things would improve after their release; and this may have been to help them deal with their feelings of guilt and responsibility. Ethan's (B9/14) mother knew that his behaviour had deteriorated when he had not been able to visit her in prison, but she may have found it difficult to acknowledge how badly he was missing her. There was a limit to how much guilt these parents could acknowledge about the distress they had caused their children.

6.6 *Children's relationships with imprisoned parents*

Previous research has found that children who had been close to their imprisoned fathers were more likely to be distressed (Fahmy and Berman, 2012). This study has strongly confirmed this. Being very close to their imprisoned parent made children particularly vulnerable. Children's relationships with their imprisoned parent are categorised in *Table 16* below.

Table 16: Children's relationship with their imprisoned parent

Very close to imprisoned parent (and therefore vulnerable)	Close to imprisoned parent, but balance provided by family	Close to imprisoned parent, but more independent and self reliant	More detached from imprisoned parent
Grant B12/8 Mark B13/11 Harry B14/13 Ethan B9/14 Piers B13/15 Kyle B11/18	Eleanor G10/2 Luke B12/3 Declan B13/4 Caleb B13/6 Amelia G8/8 Gareth B11/16 Oliver B11/17 Jamie B10/17 Sameera G8/20 Ben B12/21	Nasreen G14/5 Anthony B11/12 Natalie G15/4 Becky G12/9 Samantha G17/14 Abida G14/20	Joe B17/1 Jack B9/7 Kirsty G11/7 Daniel B9/10 Alex B16/19 Matthew B15/22

The children closest to their imprisoned parent included several of those who suffered most when their parent was imprisoned. Four of them (Grant, Mark, Harry and Kyle), had been inseparable from their imprisoned parent. Harry's father's relationship with his son could hardly have been closer: *"...I couldn't go anywhere without him. I just wouldn't"*. He realised how devastated his son had been when he had been in prison. Kyle had been equally close to his mother. His transfer to secondary school coincided with his mother's imprisonment. His mother said this was a non-starter: *"...He just couldn't do it without me"*. Ethan was the youngest of these children, and was bewildered by his mother's unexplained absence. Being so close to their imprisoned parent meant that these children had had little or no experience of managing on their own, or of autonomy and independence, and this proved to be a grievous handicap when their parent was imprisoned.

Other children had also been close to their imprisoned parent and felt their loss keenly. These children also had support from their parents/carers and from their extended family, and these relationships helped to balance out their loss and enabled them to cope with and enjoy other aspects of their lives. Another group had been close to their imprisoned parent

but were more independent and self-reliant. They had more capacity to distance themselves from the complications of parental imprisonment and to exercise control over their lives.

Other children were more detached from their imprisoned parent for other reasons. Joe and Alex had grown apart from them during long periods of imprisonment. Jack and Kirsty had little time for their step-father, who had abused their mother. Matthew had decided to distance himself from his father. Daniel seemed somewhat detached from his imprisoned father, but this was a detachment reflecting his isolation, bewilderment and disappointment following his parents' separation and recent family turmoil, including his father's imprisonment.

6.7 Contact and children's progress

Dyer's (2005) observations about the powerlessness of imprisoned parents and their dependence on their partners to facilitate contact with children are reinforced in this study. Overall, families fell into three groups: those who were committed to regular and frequent visits (12/22, cases 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20 and 21); those for whom visits were more problematic, distance being a factor for several of them (6/22: cases 2, 5, 12, 13, 14 and 19); and those where visits were less frequent (3/22: cases 1, 6 and 9) or not happening (case 22).

Telephone contact was important for imprisoned parents, in different ways. Gareth's mother was able to speak to her son and her twin daughters first thing in the morning and then at night, providing them with regular and frequent support. For Grant (B12/8) and Amelia's (G7/8) father the phone was a lifeline. He called home every day: *"... then you know that everything's alright, or it reassures you ... at least I know they are alright for that day"*.

Regular contact reduced his feelings of isolation and separation from his family, and was also crucial in helping Amelia to eventually recover after her father's imprisonment.

Anthony's (B11/12) mother used visits and phone calls to focus on her son's and her

husband's needs. Mark's (B13/11) step-father telephoned home very frequently; he saw the phone calls as an opportunity for Mark to look forward to the next visit. Eleanor's (G10/2) father was happier about Family Days, which provided the opportunity for longer and more relaxed contact than telephone calls, which could upset her. Harry's (B14/13) father had accepted that monthly visits were the most that Harry and his former partner could manage with the limited funds at their disposal; he was also able to phone his son regularly. Ethan (B9/14) and Samantha's (G17/14) mother had received very few visits following her transfer to open prison. Very regular contact was essential for imprisoned parents to feel part of their children's lives.

Most of the parents interviewed (10/13) maintained a positive interest in their children's progress and achievements at school, although none of the others quite matched the level of day-to-day involvement achieved by Eleanor's mother, monitoring her daughter's school day. Mark's (B13/11) step-father and Grant (B12/8) and Amelia's (G7/8) father both talked about their aspirations that their children would have better lives and more success at school than they had had. Alex' (B16/19) mother had asked to see her son's school reports, but had not received these. Other parents, including Harry's (B14/13) father and Piers' (B13/15) mother, both talked about their sons' progress at school, but had to rely on second-hand accounts from their partners. Overall, imprisoned parents had few opportunities to be significantly involved and influential in their children's school lives, or in key events such as transition to secondary school, or transfers to new schools when families had to move home. These were reminders that their parenting role was diminished.

6.7.1 Imprisoned parents' overall impact on children's well-being

While it was difficult for imprisoned parents to make a positive impact on their children's well-being, most of them (9/13) were able to do this successfully or fairly successfully. The mothers of Nasreen (G14/5), Anthony (B11/12) and Gareth (B11/16) remained closely and

positively involved with their children while they were in prison. Mark's step-father (B13/11) and Harry's (B14/13) father both remained fully committed to their sons' welfare. Five other parents (Cases 8, 14, 15, 16 and 18) also remained committed to their children, although three of them (Grant's (B12/8) father; Ethan's (B9/14) mother; and Kyle's (B11/18) mother) could do little while in prison to alleviate their sons' distress, or to influence their behaviour and ensure their school attendance. The mothers of Piers (B13/15), Gareth (B11/16) and Kyle (B11/18) were all painfully aware of how much their sons missed them while they were in prison.

Three other parents had their children in mind but were less able to help them. Eleanor's (G10/2) mother was committed to Eleanor, but her own needs seemed dominant. Daniel's (B8/10) father showed concern for his son, but less commitment. Alex's (B16/19) mother tried to keep contact with her son, but they were no longer close.

6.8 *Being an imprisoned parent: an overview*

Findings for this study are more positive than previous research (eg Hairston, 2002; Arditti, 2005; Dyer, 2005; Roy, 2005; Tripp, 2009) about the potential for imprisoned parents to fulfil at least part of their parenting role. In three cases (5, 11 and 12) imprisoned parents were functioning as well as possible and were able to exercise some positive influence on their children; and a further seven parents (cases 8, 10, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 18) were partly fulfilling their role although with less positive influence. These parents were able to see possibilities for their families to recover from earlier shock and trauma and for more normal times to return. Their tone tended to be optimistic and somewhat hopeful. This was partly because some parents were feeling better about themselves; and partly because some (5 of them) were in open prisons and others (a further 2) were nearing the end of their sentence - a hopeful time for them. Most had approached their sentences constructively and had gained some sense of achievement, and about half of them had regained some self-respect.

Most of these parents had had positive previous experience of parenting. Previous research has usually analysed the situation of imprisoned mothers and fathers separately, and has reached different conclusions about them. Focussing on both imprisoned mothers and fathers I have found no clear gender differences with regard to their parenting capacity. Parents' ability to understand and empathise with their children's concerns about their being in prison and to be open with them about the reasons for their imprisonment have seemed more important. Regular contact with their children helped parents perhaps as much as it helped children. Telephone contact in particular enabled parents to be involved with their children's lives. The appreciation shown by these parents towards their partners and other carers helped keep a shared approach to parenting.

Many of the limitations in these parents' parenting role are obvious, , and some were described at the start of this section. They cannot physically be with their children when they are needed, or at significant points in their lives. Imprisoned parents' roles are muted or neutered in relation to control and disciplinary issues. They have to surrender responsibility for family life and they are in a position of comparative powerlessness and dependence. While some of these limitations are inevitable, others can be mitigated by prisons and support agencies adopting positive policies promoting family contact, and seeking to empower imprisoned parents' involvement in their children's lives.

I would argue that providing moral guidance for their children, even from the unpromising starting point of a prison cell, remains an important function for imprisoned parents. Their children need to know that they are loved; and that they matter supremely to their parent. Being honest with their children about what has happened, providing explanations, and facing up to their failure to provide an appropriate role model for their children, including apologising to their child where appropriate, count for much.

6.9 Harm and benefits attributable to parental imprisonment

Harm to children, shown in red (●), and benefits, shown in green (●) identified in families related to parental imprisonment are summarised in *Table 17* below.

Table 17: Harm and benefits caused by parental imprisonment

Case Nos	Harm caused to children	Benefits for children	Imprisoned parents' health/motivation improved	Imprisoned parents' addiction tackled successfully	Parents/relationship improved	Parent/Carer more independent/liberated	Restorative function of prison
1	●	● Joe's relationship with mother improved				●	●
2	●	● Improved lifestyle	● Physical health				
3	●						
4	●						
5	●	● Nasreen strengthened			●	●	
6	●					●	
7	●	● Children relieved				●	
8	●				●	●	●
9	●						
10	●			● Gambling		●	
11	●		● Physical health	● Drugs			●
12	●		● Weight loss				●
13	●	● Harry's relationship with mother improved					
14	●					●	●
15	●	● Piers' relationship with carer improved					
16	●	● Gareth's relationship with grandparents excellent	● Motivation improved			●	●
17	●					●	
18	●	● Kyle closer to father	● Clearer commitment to children		●		●
19	●		● Physical health	● Alcohol			
20	●				●	●	
21	●		● Weight loss			●	
22	●	● Matthew's increased maturity					
TOTAL	1=no damage 21=damaged	9	7	3	4	11	6=Yes 1=No

Children were harmed by parental imprisonment in 21 out of 22 families. Almost all of them were harmed in the early phase of parental arrest, conviction and imprisonment. Children were usually ill-prepared for these events. The impact of sudden and unexplained arrest and imprisonment could be searing and traumatic with long-term adverse consequences, compounded by feelings of stigma and exclusion. Some children started to recover, usually after a few months, when contact arrangements were in place, and with help from parents/carers, school and professional support. A small number of children with secure support at home were less damaged.

To set alongside this, there were some tangible benefits from parental imprisonment in most families: 19 out of 22. This proportion is higher than the third of families found to be benefitting, (including imprisoned parents tackling drug and alcohol addiction) by Arditti et al (2003) in the USA. There were clear benefits for children in seven families (about a quarter, a similar proportion to number of children recording benefits in the COPING European Survey (Jones and Wainaina-Wozna (2013)). For four of them their relationships with their parent/carer improved. Most children survived a difficult experience. Several were strengthened by this, and gained in independence and maturity. Two children, Joe (1) and Eleanor (2) were removed from families where they had been exposed to serious risk.

For families in this study, more often than expected, arrest and conviction stopped offenders in their tracks, causing them to re-evaluate their lifestyle and to re-assess their role as parents, and their children's needs. Some had been leading a double life, involved in criminal activities, stressful for themselves and for their families, and their arrest put an end to this. For these families, imprisonment brought some kind of closure and fulfilled its role of encouraging reform.

One of the clearest findings relates to the enhanced level of independence of parents/carers. There was evidence of this in half the families, 11 out of 22. There were also improvements in imprisoned parents' health and motivation (n=7); and in tackling addictions (n = 3). Prison seemed to have served a restorative function for six families, where parents had decided to stop offending and showed determination to put their children first, although I had no data about longer term impacts. Relationships between imprisoned parents and parents/carers improved in some families.

This analysis indicates that parental imprisonment is not always a wholly negative experience. Prison confronts offenders, and for my sample, most of whom were first time offenders, most wanted to reform, not to re-offend and to be better parents. Imprisoned parents showed increased respect for parents/carers, recognising their achievements.

The liberating impact of parental imprisonment was summed up by Gareth (16)'s grandparents' description of their time looking after their grandchildren, including while their daughter was in prison, as “..*hectic, but enjoyable*”. A lot of parents/carers experienced something like this. They enjoyed having responsibility for their children, demonstrating their competence, and gaining self respect and self esteem. Their relationships with the children frequently improved, and their achievements were endorsed and respected by the imprisoned parent. They had been able to hold their family together in difficult circumstances, combining looking after the children, and ensuring their continued education; while at the same time maintaining contact with the imprisoned parent.

6.10 *Dominant themes for Parents/Carers and Imprisoned Parents*

Some dominant themes for parents/carers and imprisoned parents echoed those found for children. A sense that their lives had been dominated by trauma was evident for a large majority of parents/carers (17/21), although there were also signs that more than half of

these (8/17) were recovering, or partially recovering (3/17). A smaller number (4/21) had reached the stage where things were more or less back to normal. The nearest parallel for parents/carers to the children's theme of life being there to be enjoyed was one about satisfaction - for some of them closer to exhilaration - that they had been sufficiently resilient to cope with the heavy demands made on them. Parents/carers had to combine fulfilling their responsibilities and handling their resentment and ambivalence. Resilience combined with energy and resourcefulness was much in evidence. For some, feelings of depression, isolation, shame and paranoia, even while managing their commitments, were not far below the surface.

Themes of optimism and pessimism occurred in roughly equal proportions for parents/carers (10 optimistic and 4 pessimistic) and imprisoned parents (8 optimistic and 3 pessimistic). In this regard the tone of parents/carers' and imprisoned parents' interviews were an equal match in only a few cases. Both Grant and Amelia's parents (Case 8) adopted an overall positive approach, reflecting their survival of harsh experiences, their close communication and their long-term commitment to each other. Harry's parents (Case 13) both sounded more pessimistic; although they were both child-focussed, their personal relationship was over, and they conveyed a feeling that their good times were behind them.

In other cases the tone of interviews differed for parents/carers and imprisoned parents. In four cases imprisoned parents sounded more optimistic, and their partners less so. Life sounded easier for Joe (Case 1) and Daniel's (case10) imprisoned fathers than for the boys' mothers, who had onerous responsibilities. Mark's father (Case 11) and Anthony's mother (Case 12) had developed structured and to some degree satisfying routines in prison, while their partners had borne much responsibility at home, at considerable cost to themselves. Two imprisoned mothers (Piers' (Case 15) and Alex' (Case 19)) were more pessimistic, and for both of them this was closely linked to their grief and sadness caused by separation from their children.

Rather more of the parents/carers (19/21) were clearly child-focussed than the imprisoned parents (9/13), while a small number in each group were focussed on their own needs as well as their children's. There was a strong restorative theme, about making good the harm they had done, in the interviews of five imprisoned parents; while four others acknowledged this but focussed more on re-building their families.

The concept of time was as significant for parents/carers and imprisoned parents as for their children, closely bound up with the duration of the prison sentence. I have described how most parents/carers experienced stigma and many lost contact with previous friends and family members, and this seemed particularly the case early in their partner's sentence. Parents/carers' sense of independence and self confidence was more evident later on. Most parents/carers and imprisoned parents shared their children's sense that "*now*" was better than "*before*" For most parents/carers, managing the passage of time successfully was linked to steering their families towards a better future. Time enabled families to recover, and for some to adapt and change, like Mark's mother, slowly adopting a more open approach. Imprisoned parents had to face up to the length of their sentences. Most made constructive use of their time which improved their morale and seemed to be linked to their making the best of their parenting opportunities in prison.

Chapter Seven

Discussion

This chapter explores whether childhood can survive parental imprisonment and whether experience of parental imprisonment, and of attachment disruption and loss is similar or different for boys and girls. Distinctive characteristics of the resilience of children include empathetic concern for their parents/carers and for their imprisoned parents; and caution about sharing their situation too widely. Schools and imprisoned parents have important roles in helping children handle stigma, which may be more problematic for children whose same sex parent is the offender. The thesis' distinctive contribution to exploring the differential impacts of parental imprisonment on boys and girls is further highlighted.

How does time¹⁵ mediate children's exposure to the impact of parental imprisonment? What difference does the way parents/carers talk about their lives make for their children? What fuels the commitment of parents and carers looking after children of prisoners? Do mothers and fathers experience imprisonment in similar or different ways, and are they both equally able to continue their parenting role from inside prison?

These issues are the focus for this chapter, which also describes dynamic processes in the families of imprisoned parents, and highlights new research findings, and the thesis' contribution to knowledge. Gender differences are covered for main themes, and also in a separate section.

¹⁵ In this chapter I have used the present tense to relate more general findings, and the past tense to record findings from my data.

7.1 *Impact of parental imprisonment on children's experience of childhood*

Alderson (2005) identified two main emphases in theories about childhood. In the first, children are seen as strong and resourceful and able to work with adults to solve problems; and in the second, children are perceived as deprived or ignorant or needing services and support. In this thesis I have identified active childhoods for a majority of children, up to three quarters of them; while others seemed more passive and more at the mercy of events. Children moved between being more active and more passive, and between managing fairly successfully and finding their situation more demanding.

The larger group of children were able to make up their own minds about their situation, decide whom they wished to talk to about this, and to reach their own decisions about their future relationship with their imprisoned parent, including the amount of contact they would have with him or her. Parental imprisonment had re-shaped their families and was a constant but not totally dominant dimension of their lives. These children recognised their vulnerability without seeing themselves as especially needy. They were decision makers, actively involved in making choices about their lives. Relationships with their parents/carers were mainly positive; they were contributing to family life and deciding for themselves whether and how they needed to seek help. Most were in active contact with their imprisoned parent. The more passive group of children were more pre-occupied about their imprisoned parent. They made fewer choices for themselves, were more dependent on their parents/carers and less aware of the needs of other members of their family. The interruption of their now suspended relationships with their imprisoned parent had caused crises from which they had struggled to recover.

From the participants in my study it appears that childhood is irrevocably changed by the experience of parental imprisonment. Children's views about their parent and about parental behaviour inevitably change as they are brought face to face with adult wrong-doing, often

for the first time. Parents have defaulted on expected standards of proper behaviour. Instead of providing children with safety and sustenance and social and emotional support (Bradley, 2007), they have destroyed equilibrium and disrupted relationships in children's lives. Mutual trust between parents and children (Giddens, 1999) has been undermined. Friends and sometimes family members may abandon families of prisoners. Families experience stigma and shame. Children witness the strain imposed on their parent / carer. Often there is too little money. Children have vivid imaginations, and may wonder if they are to blame. The recent COPING Research (2012) anticipated families of prisoners facing the triple jeopardy of break-up of the family; financial hardship; and stigma and secrecy leading to adverse social and educational repercussions (Jones & Wainaina-Wozna, 2013, p23).

However, based on the findings of this study, although their childhood will always be different, the chances that children will survive parental imprisonment, - holding on to their aspirations, making progress with their education, and enjoying their lives at home and with their friends - are fairly good. Some children gain understanding of how adults behave. Although the gap in their lives is not easily filled, secure care from the parent/carer looking after them restricts harm to children; and this is likely to be limited if the parental offences are not the most serious, and the prison sentence not too long. While childhood had been perturbed or damaged for a number of children, others had responded well to new challenges, developed appropriate strategies to handle them, and had become more reflective and more aware of how major change impacts on families.

The clearest finding, and one which is mirrored in other findings in this thesis, is that girls' childhoods appeared strikingly happy, and considerably more so than for the boys in the study. They seemed to positively enjoy their lives at home, at school or work, and with their friends; and to be carefree for at least some of the time. All of the nine girls appeared happy when interviewed, including those who had been seriously traumatised by their parent's imprisonment. Almost all of them had had secure relationships with the parent looking after

them, supplemented by extended family support. This description of being happy fits only a small proportion of the boys: 5 or 6 out of the 19. These were mainly those whose fathers were serving short sentences and another on remand with some prospects of early release. Childhood had been more troubled for other boys whose parents were serving longer sentences.

7.1.1 *Childhood and children's rights*

This thesis provides a child-centred perspective on parental imprisonment, a perspective pre-figured by the UN Charter on Children's Rights (1989). Children's rights and parental imprisonment clash unavoidably. Children's rights to be looked after by their parents are inevitably trumped by their imprisonment. In the UK only tentative steps have been taken to require the judiciary to pay regard to children's interests when sentencing parents; a far cry from the principle of the paramountcy of children's welfare (Children Act, 1989),¹⁶ binding on the decisions of Family Courts. Children's worlds are narrowed by the imprisonment of their parents, even though some may thereby receive a measure of protection. Children have to face up to parental criminality, threatening the security of their childhood. Culpability rests with the parents whose illegal actions have paid little regard to children's welfare.

Children's rights can be perceived as straightened, restricted and residual following parental imprisonment. Their parents/carers embark on damage limitation. In this study most parents/carers were tenacious in trying to enable their children to have an optimal experience of childhood in their new circumstances, including contact with their imprisoned parent where this was desired. Continuity of support from their extended family and of education were salient requirements for children, and most parents ensured these where their children's

¹⁶ Reece (1996) argues that, notwithstanding widespread support, the principle of the paramountcy of children's welfare is too vague and too value-laden to be of much help in legal disputes; and that strengthening the protection of children's welfare is more important.

needs rather than their own took priority. Outside the family, a basic right for children was being well supported, without prejudice, by school.

The fundamental rights of children of prisoners include knowing that their questions about their parent's offences and prison sentence will be answered; and being re-assured that they themselves are free from blame. Information is empowering: helping children to sort out their thoughts about their imprisoned parent, and to feel more in control. Explanation and knowledge aid understanding. Optimally children need to be able to talk openly and honestly to both their parent/carer and their parent in prison. Children in my study who were who were knowledgeable, and who had received the most patient explanations about their parent's offences and prison sentence, were the least vulnerable, and their childhoods the least damaged.

7.2 *Children of prisoners' experiences of attachment disruption and loss*

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) found that maternal abandonment is a frequent cause of childhood trauma. Kampfner (1995) found evidence of deep emotional bonds between children and their imprisoned mothers. I have found as much evidence of children experiencing trauma from the loss of imprisoned fathers as imprisoned mothers, (which may reflect higher levels of involvement of fathers in child care in contemporary UK society), although girls were better able to handle their feelings about this. However, the kind of loss which children whose mothers or fathers were in prison experienced was different. The clearest loss for children with their mothers in prison was of day to day care, love, support and the shared routines of family life. Children, mainly boys, with their father in prison conceived their loss more in terms of deprivation of guidance, companionship and time spent playing or working together.

Children are inevitably shocked or traumatised by parental imprisonment, involving feelings of loss and mourning. This was the case for children in almost all the families in my study (21/22), Boss (2010) emphasised that the kind of ambiguous loss caused by parental imprisonment is different than loss caused by parental death because it lacks clarity, causes confusion and is difficult to resolve. In my view, while some children worry about the nature of their parent's offence, particularly where this involved violence, all are confused about why their parent would do something which was bound to harm them and their family, and to damage their reputation.

Parental imprisonment impacts on the whole family, and in different ways. Based on my study, children mourning the loss of their still loved imprisoned parent have also to manage their own feelings of shame and embarrassment, and they are also affected by the feelings of their parent / carer and other family members. Having an imprisoned parent changes how children think about themselves and about how they should now regard him or her. They feel different than other children: angry, humiliated and diminished. Children cannot tell how others, including family members, will react, and whether they will be allowed or encouraged to raise their concerns, or whether it is safer to say less. Some children experience feelings of revulsion or moral outrage against their imprisoned parent, including about the violent nature of their parents' crimes, or simply that their parent had been found guilty of law-breaking. Others are more generally perplexed, less concerned about their parents' offences, and sad or grieving about their absence.

7.2.1 *Gender differences*

Confirming previous findings, (Murray, 2005; Fahmy and Berman, 2012), the children most deeply affected by parental imprisonment in my study were those whose prior relationships with them had been closest; whether the imprisoned parent was their mother or their father seems not to have been a crucial factor. What is much clearer is the differential impact on

boys and girls. Children who had been able to resolve their feelings of loss were those whose social life was continuing without too much interruption both as regards education and home life, and whose relationships with family members, including their imprisoned parent, were being maintained and, by and large, enjoyed.

By this measure most of the girls had come through their experience well. Boys fared much less well. For more than half of them (12/19) their feelings of loss were unresolved when interviewed, months or years after their parent was imprisoned. The severity of their sense of loss varied: from acute for about a third, to glimpsing recovery for another third. All of them had had very close relationships with their imprisoned parent. All of them had been seriously affected emotionally by their loss, and this had been reflected in their behaviour for more than half of them. Differences between boys and girls seem much more marked than those observed by Mullender et al (2002) amongst children living through domestic violence.

The boys who handled their loss better appeared exceptional: either exceptionally well supported by their parent / carer, or exceptionally well informed, or exceptionally mature and independent. For boys, struggling with parental loss appears more normative; and the same appears to be the case for girls managing their feelings and their situation well. Explanations for these differences are uncertain and not easily discovered. I have argued (see section on Gender, p161 above) that being looked after by their mothers while their fathers are in prison is a stronger protective factor for girls than for boys; and that girls are better able to describe their feelings, with more capacity for reflection, and to derive more support and comfort from friends and close relatives. Reasons for these differences, which have not been the focus of previous research, are elusive. Part of the explanation may lie in boys finding the combination of parental, and particularly paternal, offending and grief for their loss inherently more complex, more distressing and more challenging than girls; and in a similar speculative vein, boys may be less well able than girls to express their feelings about this.

7.3 *Signs of resilience in children of prisoners*

Masten (2006) identified the capacity to form lasting bonds with their parents and carers, children's agency, having the confidence to steer their own lives, and optimism about the future as key elements in children's resilience. Rutter (1987) and Miller (2007) identified the 'steeling effect' of experiencing adversity (Rutter) and the process of growing from life stressors (Miller). Werner (1984) found that resilient children were able to promote positive responses from care-givers. Children in this study able to handle parental imprisonment displayed both innate and social resilience: they were able to draw on their own resources, but were also sustained by support from carers and other close relatives, from friends, and by a sense of self worth often gained from achievements either at home or at school.

My study found that positive relationships with their parents and carers underpinned children's resilience. Oliver and Jamie (B11/17 and B10/17), for example, knew that their mother was their unswerving and dependable ally, on whom they could rely for protection and support. What mattered most to Becky (G12/9), only a year older, but already more grown up, was that she knew she could ask her mother anything she needed to about her imprisoned father. Most parents/carers showed much commitment to their children. Their relationships were strengthened by their shared challenge of managing to survive without the imprisoned parent, including adapting to arrest and prison regimes, dealing with hostility and stigma, and changes of school and homes. Children's resilience was strong where parents clearly enjoyed their children's company and took pride in their achievements.

A new element in my study is the strength of evidence that children's resilience was characterised by a two-way empathetic process: children being supported by parents/carers and offering support in return. Children could rely on their parents/carers for security and support, setting boundaries and dealing with practical arrangements. Resilient children responded by giving their parents/carers respect, recognising their vital contribution to

running the home and the sacrifices they were making, and the pressures they were under.

These children also provided practical help at home or looked after younger siblings.

Parents /carers felt supported by their children. Less resilient children - there were several examples - were less attentive to their parents/carers' needs, and too pre-occupied with their own anxieties to be able to offer them solace, or much by way of recognition of their endeavours on their behalf.

As examples of children's capacity for empathetic concern, three boys took on a caring role for their parent at home. Each of their parents showed signs of considerable stress as well as needing help with physical disabilities. Their relationships became closer (as did those of children caring for mentally ill parents in Aldridge's (2006) study) and the children provided emotional as well as practical support. They took on their responsibilities willingly and without resentment, like the young people with HIV positive parents in Tisdall's (2004) research.

Some children took on a quasi-parental role, taking more responsible decisions, developing a more equal partnership and gaining more influence in their family. More generally, the most resilient children were those most actively involved in family and school life, supporting their family and making plans for the future. Less resilient children were those who took less responsibility, who were more taken up with their own issues, more oblivious to the needs of other family members, less able to look ahead and less in control of events.

Neenan (2009) argued that attitudes and responses to adversity counted for more than the experiences themselves. The most resilient children lived through the shock of their parent's imprisonment, and their experiences made them different and stronger people. They made a distinctive contribution to shaping their family's adjustment to the imprisonment, and felt emotionally stronger because of their experience of their parent being in prison, providing confirmation of the steeling effect. This seems to be closely linked to being able to learn from events, and to turn adversity to advantage, which was demonstrated to some degree by about half the children who participated.

Children's resilience was also characterised by their care and concern for their imprisoned parent. Most of the children's relationships with their imprisoned parent were close. Maintaining contact provided them with re-assurance about their parent's health and well-being. After the initial shock of their parent being locked up, children's morale almost invariably improved when they could see that their parent was coming to no harm or doing well in prison, and that they could still have a reasonably active relationship with him or her. As with their parent / carer, the relationship was a dynamic two - way process, helping the imprisoned parent feel connected to their lives and confirming and validating their parental role.

7.3.1 Resilience and emotional intelligence

Rutter (1987) found no evidence that children's resilience was related to intelligence, suggesting that other factors may count for more. In my view, children with different levels of intelligence and academic ability start on a level playing field as regards emotional intelligence and handling problems of parental imprisonment. Children of prisoners face both emotional and psychological as well as social challenges. Those able to talk about their feelings at home to parents and siblings mainly adjusted well. For both boys and girls, knowing that their mood could change, that they were likely to feel upset at times, and that they would sometimes need help, were positive indicators. Children's social skills were severely tested. Being able to enjoy the company of friends helped children withstand family pressures. Just being with friends, being "normal" and away from family problems, was supportive for them.

While more intelligent children could use their reasoning capacity to work out their feelings about their situation, it is noteworthy that children and young people described as having learning disabilities also showed clear signs of resilience linked to emotional intelligence.

They were able to describe their feelings of loss for their imprisoned parent, more so than some other children in mainstream education. In particular they were able to realise that how they felt was closely connected to how they (all of them were boys) behaved. They recognised their deep emotional bonds with their imprisoned parent, identified by Kampfner (1995). Being able to talk about their feelings involved considerable effort, but helped them to feel better about their situation. They made good use of professional support when this was needed.

It is possible that children with learning disabilities may have more intuitive understanding of their feelings. Another plausible explanation may be that those looking after them knew that their behaviour was volatile, realised that they needed more focussed help because of their disabilities, and had ensured that they had enough opportunities to talk about their imprisoned parent.

7.4 *How children deal with stigma*

Sack (1976) observed how boys absorbed guilt because of their fathers' criminal behaviour. Braman (2004) described stigma as "*sticky*", attaching to family members as well as to the imprisoned person. Cooklin (2009), focusing on children with mentally ill parents, emphasised their need to understand what had happened and the importance of help from an adult able to take an objective view of their situation.

In this study, stigma experienced by families could be triggered by actual events, such as being abandoned by family members or excluded by schools. Self stigma, involving self-blame and accepting common stereotypes applied to excluded groups, (Corrigan et al, 2009) was frequently experienced by parents/carers and sometimes transmitted to children. Stigma was pervasive and disabling, impacting on both children and their parents/carers. Families felt different, degraded, less worthy and inclined to cut down social contacts, fearing being

hurt and wounded by the reaction of others, on top of their own feelings of loss, mourning, disgrace and powerlessness. Tackling stigma is at the root of addressing the needs of children of prisoners. The role of schools' is pivotal. School support can strengthen and encourage children, while hostility from schools reinforces stigma and families' feelings of powerlessness. Firm handling of bullying or taunting of children by schools dissolved stigma; while hostile responses cemented it.

Nearly all the children in the study, both boys and girls, felt in some ways set apart by parental imprisonment. Through no fault of their own, parental imprisonment left them with some explaining to do, or with family matters to conceal. Few children managed to detach themselves completely from shame about their parents' guilt.

Boys and girls experience equivalent levels of stigma, although boys' behaviour is more likely to trigger exclusion or rejection, and boys have more problems dealing with this. Although the number of cases was small, there are indications from my data that children are more shamed by same sex parental crime. The pattern observed is that boys felt more disgraced by their fathers' crimes, and more puzzled or intrigued by their mothers'. Some boys were rendered distraught by their fathers' offences and imprisonment: fathers lost their respected status, and their sons could not tolerate contact with them; for the time being their relationship was over. The smaller number of girls appeared more likely to take a more indulgent view of their fathers' offences and to be more seriously perplexed and disturbed by their mothers' wrong-doing. Same sex parents defaulting on expected standards of role modelling behaviour seemed to weigh especially heavily in children's estimation.

7.4.1 Children's ability to handle stigma.

Children are better able to handle stigma where they are helped to understand their feelings about this, and where they receive strong reinforcement from their parent/carers or other adult,

that parental crime is not their fault. Where children were given clear information and explanations about their parents' imprisonment they experienced less stigma. About half the children received sufficient information and help from a parent/carer or other adult and were able to deal with parental imprisonment without added feelings of guilt. Parents/carers could prevent children feeling stigmatised where they insisted that children should not feel bad about their parent's misdeeds, and were honest and direct about what had happened, while helping children to understand what had led to their parent's offending behaviour. By contrast, children denied clear information about parental arrest and imprisonment felt confused and ashamed; their self-regard was dented and their development stunted.

Much of the responsibility for helping children handle stigma falls on parents/carers, who may have had to explain to children why their parent has been imprisoned. While these explanations can help, they cannot resolve children's feelings of being let down by and shamed by their imprisoned parent. They need to be able to re-construct an amended and realistic view of their imprisoned parent. Only the imprisoned parent can help children with this. They need to hear their parent acknowledge what they have done wrong, provide explanations for this as far as possible, and let their child/ren know that they realise how confusing and distressing this is for them. They need to be open to children asking whatever they need to, and to be willing to return to the subject, painful as it is, whenever children want this. Children are re-assured by parents giving the best explanation they can for what they have done.

7.4.2 Evidence about the importance of caution and discretion for children.

Hagen & Myers' (2003) finding about more socially skilled children whose mothers were in prison exercising discretion about sharing information about them is borne out by my study. For children participating in this research secrecy was not generally required, although some concealed their parents' imprisonment from friends and acquaintances.

However, out of the whole group of 28 children all except one were disinclined to talk openly about parental imprisonment. At one level this is connected to children having unresolved feelings about shame and stigma. At another this reluctance can be seen as considered and responsible. Care and caution made sense to both more able and less intelligent children; and the importance of this may have been impressed on them by their parents/carers. They could see no benefits in sharing information about parental imprisonment widely, not knowing how other children would react, and fearing gossip. Things could get out of hand, and broadcasting embarrassing details could have unpredictable consequences. Children felt able to talk to trusted school staff, and benefitted from this, where this was sanctioned by their parents/carers, who usually paved the way by talking first to school staff themselves. Several children (6/28) took a deliberate decision that they would talk to none of their peers, while a few decided to share this information just with one or two trusted friends.

Being guarded about discussing parental imprisonment was partly a learnt behaviour. About half the children's caution mirrored their parents/carers' approach. It was also intuitive: several children were more cautious and guarded in discussing parental imprisonment than their parents/carers. The two youngest children interviewed, aged 7 and 8, regarded their father's imprisonment as a private matter. Talking freely about parental imprisonment was off limits for most children.

7.5 *The significance of gender impacting on children's reactions*

I have argued throughout this thesis that boys are more adversely impacted than girls by parental imprisonment. More of the boys (16/19), compared with four out of the nine girls, experienced emotional disturbance caused by parental imprisonment. While all the girls survived the experience, about half (8/19) of the boys' developmental progress was halted or impaired. A much lower proportion of the boys' (8/19) education was progressing

satisfactorily than the girls', who were mainly doing well at school. More of the boys had anger management or behavioural or emotional problems. It seems unlikely that these differences were the result of chance. One indicator is that in all the four mixed sibling pairs there were more concerns about the boys' than the girls' progress.

I have already highlighted the importance for girls of their mother's support (see section on Gender, (p161 above) while their father was in prison. The absence of a same sex role model seemed more damaging for boys whose fathers were in prison. The quality of care provided by parents/carers mitigated the damage caused by parental imprisonment for nearly all the girls in the study, but was less effective in reducing emotional harm for the boys. As well, for the boys, the seriousness of the parental offence and longer prison sentences were aggravating factors. There are few clues in the literature to explain this, other than expectations that boys whose fathers are in prison are likely to follow in their footsteps (Murray and Farrington, 2005; Miller, 2007).

I have also argued that children in this study missed their fathers equally as much as their mothers in prison. Dallaire's (2010) finding that imprisoned mothers were more than twice as likely than imprisoned fathers to have children who were imprisoned as adults powerfully signals the damaging effects of maternal imprisonment (even though the number of incarcerated mothers with children in prison in her sample was fairly small). In my study, maternal imprisonment certainly left a cavernous hole in children's lives. Although demographic patterns are changing, children still spend more time with their mothers at home. While most children whose mother is in prison are looked after by grandparents, by other relatives, or in foster homes, in my sample these children were looked after within their families, either by their fathers or other close family members. These families showed much flexibility in being able to commit themselves to these children's care during their mothers' imprisonment. All of these children mourned the loss of their mother in prison. Equally

certainly, some of the boys with their fathers in prison, missed them as profoundly as other children missed their mothers during their imprisonment.

Nonetheless, most of the children whose fathers were in prison had relationships with their mothers which were probably closer. I interviewed only one boy, Harry (B14/13), whose relationship with his father had been closer prior to his imprisonment than that with his mother. If it was the case that these boys' relationships with their fathers were less close than those with their mothers, what were the elements in their relationships with their imprisoned fathers that the boys missed most? Partly, losing their fathers meant less boundaries, less feeling of security and less control; and partly it may have been the loss of their whole family, of being with their mother and father together. Boys may have experienced their mothers as taken for granted providers, whereas their time with their fathers was special for them, focussing on enjoyable activities and companionship.

Fritsch & Burkhead (1981) posited a link between paternal imprisonment and children's behavioural problems, related to lack of paternal discipline and control; and between maternal imprisonment and children's emotional problems, related to lack of maternal nurturing. Murray and Farrington (2005) emphasised strong connections between paternal imprisonment and boys' anti-social behaviour and later convictions. My findings, based on a smaller sample, suggest that Fritsch and Burkhead's dichotomy is too simplistic, perhaps reflecting recent changes in the gendered role of parents. Boys with either their father or their mother in prison were more likely to display both emotional and behavioural problems; and girls with either sex parent in prison were more likely to experience emotional difficulties. Several girls showed clear signs of emotional distress, for example through disturbed sleep patterns; or, while holding their emotions in check, showed glimpses of psychological turmoil; and none of them were involved in delinquent behaviour. Some boys experienced emotional distress more acutely than the girls, including self-harming. The clearest pattern for boys was for them to be emotionally distressed and for this to be evident in their

aggressive behaviour. These symptoms, for both boys and girls, could abate, with patient care and support.

7.6 *The significance of time for children's resilience*

7.6.1 *Children's understanding of past, present and future*

While children of prisoners' symptoms of distress reduce over time, consonant with Mullender et al's (2002) observation that children whose parents had been involved in domestic violence needed time to distance themselves from these events, there has been little clear focus on the significance of time for children's resilience in previous research.

Time defines the experience of children of prisoners, anticipating their parents' conviction, marking time while they serve their sentence, and looking forward to their release. In my study, children's trauma receded and their resilience was enhanced with the passage of time. Children talked about time being a factor impacting on their adjustment to parental imprisonment. Some children talked about how things upset them less now that they were more grown up. Children frequently described growing accustomed over time to prison security arrangements. Time between visits could be managed by a timetable of planned and frequent telephone contacts, and looking ahead to plan the next time they would meet. Children could seem to be suspended in time, mid-way through their parent's very long sentences. They had endured much over the time their parent had been in prison. Release dates could be interminably distant where longer sentences were involved. Children thought about the time in the future when their families would be reunited and started to count down the days until their parents' release. Being able to perceive how time was passing towards their release date could give children a measure of control and an incentive to plan ahead.

Most families experienced the sudden shock of arrest leading to conviction and imprisonment as a violent interruption to normal life, and led to their postponing opportunities for explanation and reconciliation. Conversely, long periods on bail at home left families anxious and uncertain, pre-occupied with issues of innocence and guilt, sometimes in denial about the inevitability of a prison sentence, fearful about children's reactions, and lacking a clear focus on children's concerns. Time on bail can provide opportunities for parents awaiting trial to fully explain their actions and the likely results and to prepare children and their schools for their prison sentence. This can usually only happen where parents have acknowledged their guilt and can consider their children's needs. Attempting to engage with their children's confusion counts for much, and offers children the best chance for them to handle feelings of stigma and shame.

Transition to senior school was a key moment for children in the study, less problematic where the move was completed before their parent was imprisoned. The difference between families who managed the transition well and those for whom it went badly was partly their capacity to plan ahead, anticipating problems and seeking help. The problem of transition was how children could carry their families' recently troubled past into a new, uncertain and unfamiliar social setting where their histories were unknown, and where responses from peers and from professionals were alarmingly unpredictable. Their capacity to see a future for themselves depended on how their new school re-assured and supported them.

Children's lives are lived in the present. Even short prison sentences can seem to be a very long time for young children, and a two or three year term must feel like a life time. Children's resilience depends partly on their having sufficient understanding of the past, both happy and less happy experiences; a strong feeling of living in the present; and an ability to look forward to the future. By the time they were interviewed, children's perspectives had changed. Events had piled up. Time had brought familiarity with prison regimes, which were now part of their lives, and for most children, a kind of fragile security. Some children - most of the girls

and perhaps half of the boys - started to feel and to talk about themselves as more grown up. This kind of talk reflected feelings of emerging security about their present lives, and more hopes and plans for the future.

By contrast, other children were caught in the present, still damaged by their parent's imprisonment and unable to think about the future. Their relationship with their imprisoned parent mattered crucially to them. Their absent father or mother was not available, and their loss had a dominating influence on their lives. These children had little to say about their memories of their past lives; they lived in the disturbing present, and the future, something which they could not influence, was outside their field of vision.

Children's feelings of loss for their imprisoned parent could gradually wane, although this process could be lengthy, and as they became less potent they could start to look forward as well as back. Other children were able to enjoy the present moment, accepting what had happened in their family, and feeling well supported and happy about what the future would bring. These children had much stronger and happier memories of their past positive relationship with their imprisoned parent and were strengthened by continuing contact with him/her.

Hopefulness was part of the impression conveyed by about three-quarters of the children (again by more of the girls than the boys). Hopefulness was about children perceiving that things could get better, and that they could become more independent. A crucial element was resolving their interrupted relationship with their imprisoned parent: understanding what had happened and deciding what their future together would be. As time passed children appreciated more the support their parents/carers had provided, and their relationships with them became closer and, for some, less fractious. By the time I met them, most of the children who had come to terms with their parent's imprisonment, three quarters of the sample, recognised and valued the help they had received from their parents/carers.

Time was an important factor for parents and carers as well. Those who had been in no way involved in their partner's crimes moved more quickly to seize the initiative, set their families' affairs in order, and gain control over events. Others who had been or felt more complicit, being jointly arrested with their partner for example, took longer to recover themselves, and needed more time before they could offer children the help they needed. Some started to feel supported by their children, and they worked together to make family life work. Other parents/carers and imprisoned parents co-operated together over repeated or lengthy prison sentences to try to ensure their children's well-being.

7.6.2 The value of parents/carers' narrative accounts for children

Parents/carers and imprisoned parents were able to describe parental imprisonment within a longer and broader context of family life, often over many years. They described the history of their relationships, stability and conflict, circumstances surrounding arrest and imprisonment, and the significance of these events for their children. Some accounts were more measured and considered, and others were fast moving and colourful. Interviews with imprisoned parents tended to be more clearly focussed and structured; they had had time more time for reflection and preparation.

Most parents/carers and imprisoned parents shared their stories willingly. They wanted to be heard and found being listened to helpful. Their narratives were often fluent and readily accessible, and were likely to have been so, in whole or in part, to their children. These children had a good deal of information about their own histories. This is likely to have been helpful for them at critical moments. They had more chance to see their lives through a wider lens, and with a longer perspective. Their parent's imprisonment was a part of, but not the whole of, their lives. These children had more landmarks, and they could see forward as well

as backwards. Children who had a strong sense of their families' past, and opportunities to talk about this when they needed to, felt more secure and more hopeful about their future.

The opposite was the case for children whose parents' accounts were more confused or more staccato or truncated, with less information and explanation about past events, including about their imprisoned parent. There were gaps in their understanding; they had fewer opportunities to ask questions; and they had more uncertainty about their position in their family and about their future security.

In support of these arguments, there is evidence of a link between several parents/carers who provided strong narrative accounts and families adopting policies characterised by openness and honesty; and one or two with a strong emphasis on honesty, but more focus on survival. In these families I surmise that there was a lot of information available to children about their family history. Conversely, there were a very small number of families where narrative content from parents/carers was weaker, and where family policy was much more closed. For children in these families, access to family history is likely to have been much more restricted¹⁷.

7.7 *Parents and parenting: contributions to children's well-being*

7.7.1 *Accounting for the effectiveness of Parents/Carers*

¹⁷There were 5 families where there was a clear connection between strong parent/carer narratives and "open" family policies (cases 4, 9, 16, 17 and 20); and 2 others with open policies but more emphasis on survival (cases 1 and 22). The 2 families with weaker parent/carer narratives and more closed family policies were cases 10 and 11.

The importance of the quality of parent/child relationships (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2001) and of the stability of caregivers (Poehlmann, 2005), have been cornerstones of previous research about the recovery and resilience of children of prisoners. In my study most parents/carers rose to the challenge of parental imprisonment, and adapted to their new status, usually as single parents, and with reduced income. Overall, parents/carers demonstrated high standards of parenting. None were neglectful. They appear to be distinct from samples of parents involved in the child protection system, with whom they are sometimes compared. Almost all parents/carers demonstrated either unconditional positive regard for their children, or good enough parenting abilities, and an authoritative approach (Darling, 1999), combining responsiveness and control. My focus here is on attempting to analyse the factors which account for the effectiveness of parents/carers' contributions.

The dominant impression from the interviews with parents/carers is the satisfaction and sometimes the fulfilment which they derived from their responsibilities. Their role was absolutely necessary for both children and imprisoned parents. All the parents/carers realised this. They had to balance responsibilities for household budgets, child care, and for ensuring their children's education; and for maintaining contact with the imprisoned parent, which could be arduous. Their achievement was to restore some kind of order and normality to family life. Finding that they could balance their commitments, and that they were appreciated by the imprisoned parent and by their children, were sources of pride and increased self-respect for most of them. They responded to the challenge of having less money, some by holding on to or obtaining work, some by reducing out-goings, and some with financial support from their families. Reduced income had less impact where the imprisoned parent had not been contributing financially to the family or had been on benefits prior to imprisonment.

Parents /carers in about half the families, most of them mothers and also including grand parents, found responding to the demands placed on them empowering. Some felt liberated

from oppressive relationships, relishing their independence, with greater freedom to organise their lives. The balance of power in their relationships with their partners swung in their favour. Most of them knew that their partners were impressed with how well they had managed. They were child- focussed and took pride in their children's progress, and their confidence helped their children. Single fathers proved equally effective, although they tended to be more vocal in expressing their resentment about their situation, and less tolerant about their partner's offences. Parents/carers who found their role more limiting, or who felt more demoralised, still took some pride in keeping their families together.

7.7.2 Being organised

Resolving and recovering from crises requires individuals to impose organisation on their lives (Golan, 1978). Disorganisation, as well as ambivalence and detachment, is experienced by children with mothers in prison (Poehlmann, 2005). Juggling their commitments successfully required parents/carers to be well organised, which increased their sense of self-worth. Most of the families interviewed (17/22) managed this well. (Interviews would not have been arranged otherwise). Many fitted in weekly prison visits. Levels of organisation from parents/carers and children were frequently exceptional. Even those families who were more overwhelmed managed to fulfil many of their responsibilities, achieving a kind of energetic, constructive, and sometimes chaotic structure for their lives. Children benefitted where parents/carers re-imposed order and continuity in their education, and organised regular contact with their imprisoned parent.

7.7.3 Loyalty: benefits for children

Although loyalty has not figured significantly in resilience research, there is agreement that conflict between parents (rather than separation) is a cause of psychological difficulties for children (Kroll, 1994), and of children's behavioural problems (Buchanan & Hudson, 1998).

Loyalty was evident in a large majority of relationships between parents/carers and imprisoned parents, including some whose relationship was not continuing; and was mainly absent where relationships had been ended by violence. Loyalty was two - directional, from and towards both parents/carers and imprisoned parents. It stemmed from parents' shared responsibility for their children, as well as, from the parent / carer's point of view, from sympathy for the imprisoned parent's predicament. For many parents / carers, most of them mothers, this loyalty was unconditional, notwithstanding the pressures imposed on their families by the imprisoned parent's offences. (In one family (Case 10) the mother's loyalty to her son's father appeared submissive, and tended to eclipse her son's needs). Other parents described their loyalty towards their partner as conditional on improved behaviour and on their partner committing no further offences.

Altogether two thirds of the children were helped by loyalty between their parents/ carers and their imprisoned parent; even where this was granted more grudgingly or with resentment. These children had an important experience of stability. Their own loyalties were not divided. They had both their parents concerned about their welfare. Their parents/carers encouraged and facilitated their contact with their imprisoned parent. Conflict between their parents would have been a further threat to their resilience.

7.7.4 Imprisoned Parents: contributions to children's welfare

While previous research has been generally optimistic about imprisoned mothers' parenting capacities (Martin, 1997; Boudin, 1998; Kazura, 2000; Sharma & Kochner, 2008) and much more pessimistic about imprisoned fathers (Arditti, 2005, Clarke et al, 2005), I have found less evidence of this kind of differentiation. For both imprisoned mothers and fathers in my study, parenthood remained an active and crucial element in their identity, although both were dependent on partners for support and contact with their children.

Experiences of imprisoned parents in my study tend to encourage optimism about the continuing value and validity of their role. Most, both mothers and fathers, were child and family centred. Nearly all of them all missed their children greatly. Clarke et al's (2005) description of imprisoned fathers as outsiders in their own families is apt, but could apply equally to mothers. Imprisoned parents' involvement in their child/ren's lives was inevitably intermittent. Both imprisoned mothers and fathers did what they could to modify this, mainly by very regular and frequent telephone contact with their families and children. Telephone contact was a lifeline for these parents. They responded positively to the loyalty shown to them by their partners. Almost all imprisoned parents interviewed were unstinting in praising the quality of the care which parents/carers had provided for their children.

7.7.5 Imprisoned parents: parenting capacities

All the (eight) imprisoned mothers interviewed were seriously committed to their parental role. Their identity as mothers was much stronger than their identity as criminals; and their convictions and imprisonment represented an interruption in their lives as mothers. All of them were grieving for their children. They were trying to reconstruct their lives, including their maternal roles, while they were in prison. The two mothers serving life sentences also retained very strong maternal feelings; both of them, with many years of their sentence ahead of them, were clearly in mourning for their lost mothering roles.

A similar pattern was evident for the imprisoned fathers. Three (of the five) of those interviewed had very strong paternal feelings: their sense of parental identity was as strong as for the group of imprisoned mothers. They claimed to have no wish to continue their involvement in crime; and, like the imprisoned mothers, they often adopted the kind of redemptive script identified by Arditti (2012); and looked forward eagerly to resuming their role as fathers. All five of them saw themselves as strong family men; although for two of

them their history as parents was more compromised, their own needs preoccupied them more, and their commitment to their children was more doubtful.

Inevitably, imprisoned parents are displaced in their parental role by the parent / carer with day to day authority over the children. Their relationships with them are unbalanced, (*“all taking and no giving”*, in Clarke et al's 2005 description (p 230)). Parents/carers retain control, including financially, placing them in a dependent or even a subservient position. Although children still vitally need their imprisoned parent, their contribution is less. Their residual parental role is framed around providing children with reassurance about their commitment to them. Younger children notice this least. Imprisoned parents' contribution could be enhanced where they made optimal use of contact time to repair relationships and made thoughtful contributions to children's routines. Imprisoned parents have to yield primacy to the child's parent / carer. A few could help to provide guidance for children. One or two could help provide them with structure and even discipline, where the parent / carer encouraged this, and where the imprisoned parent recognised the limitations of their role. This active role was denied to imprisoned parents whose children needed less contact with them, or who had put their relationship on hold.

Recognising how much they are needed by their children confronts imprisoned parents with their guilt and shame and the impact of their crimes on their children. As a therapist for women prisoners, Boudin (1998) identified such recognition as an essential step before imprisoned mothers, and (in my view) fathers, can respond to children's needs. My evidence confirms that parents who recognised their culpability and responsibility for their children's distress had the capacity to help them most and to re-build their relationship with them.

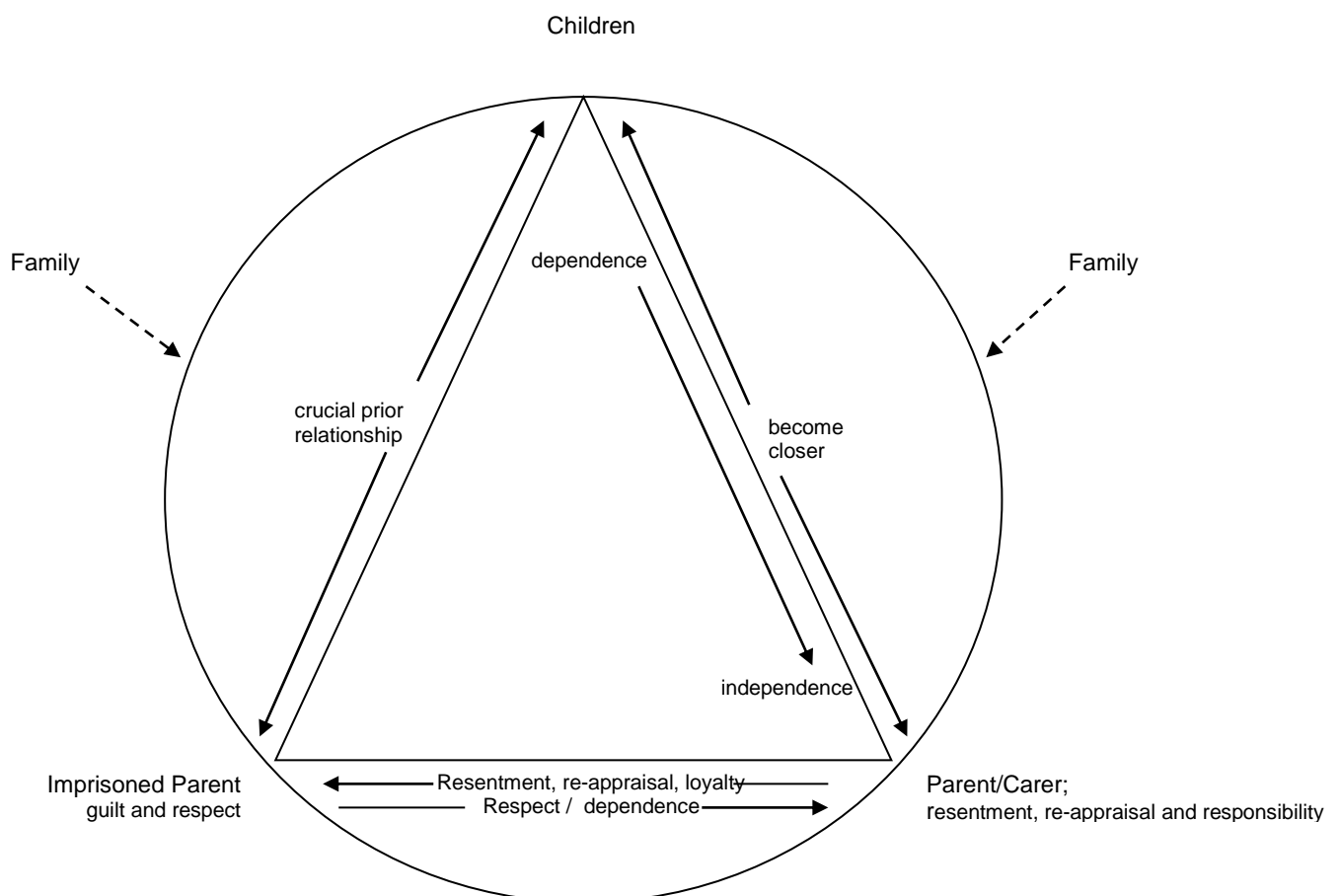
Parental imprisonment harms children. Alongside this, imprisonment brought tangible benefits for imprisoned parents, including improvements in health and access to further education. There was also a strong restorative element in the experiences of nearly half the

imprisoned parents interviewed (6/13) in my study. They saw themselves as having been justly punished and they were using prison to make amends, helping other prisoners, and making constructive plans for their release.

7.8 A dynamic family process model

Figure 9 below illustrates a model of dynamic processes identified in this study for children of prisoners and their families.

Figure 9: Dynamic Family Processes



At the start of the prison sentence, children's feelings of loss, parents/carers' feelings of resentment, and imprisoned parents' feelings of guilt, are dominant. Children's recovery is related to the closeness of their prior relationship with their imprisoned parent; parents/carers re-appraise the imprisoned parent and demonstrate responsibility; and imprisoned parents gain respect for their families.

Figure 9 provides a model describing changes in participants' feelings and relationships during the prison sentence.

Children's feelings are dominated by shock, loss and mourning at the start of their parent's prison sentence. The closer the child's prior relationship with the imprisoned parent, the harder it is for them to recover, especially for boys. Some need help from outside the family with this. Relationships with their parents/carers become closer. Children move towards becoming more independent.

Parents/carers' feelings are dominated by resentment, as well as by loss and abandonment, in the early stages of their partner's imprisonment. They carry a heavy burden of responsibility for their families, frequently including loyalty to their partner. They re-appraise their view of the imprisoned parent and develop a family policy for handling the period of imprisonment. Their lives are extremely busy and active. Over time they gain some control over events and regain some feeling of normality. They experience role satisfaction, and recognise their achievements.

For imprisoned parents, regret, guilt about children and families, and powerlessness are predominant feelings. During their sentence their respect for their partners increases. Their relationships with them lack reciprocity, and are characterised by dependence. Their status as parents remains a crucial part of their identity. Their parenting mode is more passive, although they may contribute to family life from prison. Their self regard can be enhanced by making constructive use of their period of imprisonment.

7.9 *Contribution to knowledge*

A distinctive element of this thesis is that it is child-focussed and based on evidence from children, parents/carers and imprisoned parents. The data yielded valuable and nuanced new perspectives on interactions within families and between participants. In so far as its findings may be generalised, this is limited to similar samples of comparatively low risk children whose parents are mainly first time offenders who remain in contact with their children. Contributions to new knowledge include: discovery of new family processes, including reappraisal of the imprisoned parent and the development of family policy; the prevalence of caution amongst children of prisoners regarding discussing their situation; new findings about the differential impact of maternal and paternal imprisonment on girls and boys; new slants on the role and contribution of imprisoned parents; and on the harm experienced by children and families; and on the benefits they may experience. Much emphasis is placed on the role and contribution of schools in helping children adjust to parental imprisonment.

7.9.1 *Adjusting to parental imprisonment*

Comparing children with imprisoned parents to children who experience other kinds of loss, the unique dimension of their situation relates to how children adapt to parental wrong-doing and imprisonment, and its stigmatising consequences. A key observation in this study is about the lack of reciprocity between parents/carers and imprisoned parents. Demands made on parents/carers are heavy, and can seem limitless, while imprisoned parents can offer little in return. Tensions invariably arise. Parents/carers start to feel more independent and more in control. They are bound to reconsider and reappraise their view of the imprisoned parent. The status of more than half the imprisoned parents reduced in the eyes of parents/carers, although some of them recovered their standing somewhat during their period of imprisonment.

Closely related to the process of reappraisal is the observation that families invariably develop some kind of policy about how to relate to the wider world, emphasising openness or honest, or privacy and secrecy. Children's approach is much influenced by the views of their parents/carers. Family policies, once adopted, change only slowly, if at all.

7.9.2 Children's reactions and gender issues

This study confirms previous findings that children's capacity to survive parental imprisonment is dependent on the quality of their relationship with their parents/carers. Unconditional positive support or good enough parenting are closely linked to children's well-being. Open communication systems within families help children adapt: particularly children knowing that they can ask questions and gain understanding about their imprisoned parent's situation. Children need to be able to see their imprisoned parent in the round, with both good and less good qualities; they need to come to terms with the facts of parental imprisonment; and to be able to enjoy their lives and to plan ahead. Access to wider family support, including from grandparents and siblings, helps children adjust to parental imprisonment.

Partly because stigma about parental imprisonment remains pervasive, children (virtually all of them in this study) remain cautious about discussing parental imprisonment. This is partly as a result of learned behaviour, from parents/carers and families. Such caution is long lasting. Parental imprisonment makes children feel that they stand out from the normal run of families; that they need to tread carefully, and test things out with their families and other trusted adults. Children's well-being is also closely related to their capacity to distance themselves from their imprisoned parent, and to focus on their own priorities.

Boys are more vulnerable than girls to the impact of parental imprisonment, including negative impacts on self-esteem and behaviour. Children appear to feel more shame and stigma about the imprisonment of same sex parents. Close relationships to parents prior to their imprisonment make children more vulnerable. Maternal imprisonment leads to more diverse care arrangements for children, and leaves a larger hole in children's lives. Girls' emotional intelligence, and their capacity to develop support networks with relatives and friends, AIDS their resilience. Girls with a father in prison appear least impacted by parental imprisonment, due to support from their mothers looking after them who are able to provide them with an appropriate role model. Boys whose father is in prison lose their role model, and support from their mother caring for them may be insufficient to help them cope with their situation.

7.9.3 Overall impacts and schools: new emphases

Time is a crucial factor for children managing their parents' prison sentences. Parents/carers can find their role empowering. The role and contribution of imprisoned parents, fathers particularly, has been underestimated in previous research. Imprisoned parents remain significant and influential for their children. Their parenting capacity is enhanced by continuing and regular contact with their children and by maintaining open communications with them, including about their offence. One of their key functions is recognition and reinforcement of the role of parents/carers.

Parental imprisonment harms almost all children. Over time families may also experience benefits. Children can experience higher levels of protection. Some are strengthened by their adverse experiences. Relationships between children and their parents/carers tend to improve, and children may feel the benefit of their parents/carers' enhanced level of independence and self-respect. Imprisoned parents can experience health improvements,

tackle their addictions, and their morale can be improved by access to further education opportunities.

I place more emphasis on the potential for schools to help children and families adjust to parental imprisonment than previous studies. Schools can provide access to trusted adults. Their strengths include understanding of the importance of confidentiality, and expertise in tackling bullying and prejudice. Schools can provide security for children, including those who may not require individual support, and those who can benefit from more guidance or counselling. On the other hand, schools may damage children by reinforcing stigma, making them feel excluded and denying them opportunities to be helped.

Chapter 8

Conclusions

8.1 *Main findings from the thesis*

This section provides a summary of main findings, grouped thematically.

8.1.1 *Children's resilience*

- (i) Children able to handle parental imprisonment displayed both innate resilience, - a capacity to take responsibility for themselves -, and social resilience, characterised by being able to access and benefit from support from parents/carers and close relatives and friends, and to achieve a sense of self-worth from contributions and achievements at home and at school.
- (ii) I found that children's resilience was characterised by a two-way empathetic process: children being supported unconditionally, or well enough, by parents/carers and offering them support in return.
- (iii) The quality of children of prisoners' relationship with their parent/carer is the most important protective factor for them. They are helped by knowing that they can ask whatever they wish to about their imprisoned parent.
- (iv) Unlike Sack (1977), I found that most children were curious and concerned about their parent's offence, particularly where this involved violence. My evidence clearly indicates children's preference for being cautious about sharing information about

their imprisoned parent. Some children deliberately used understatement to handle difficult feelings. Some children with learning disabilities demonstrated unexpected levels of emotional intelligence.

- (v) Children's resilience is also characterised by being able to put some distance between themselves and their imprisoned parent, confirming the validity of Norman's concept of adaptive distancing (2000); and some were strengthened by their experiences, confirming Rutter's inoculation or steeling effect (1987).
- (vii) Time is a crucial dimension in how children experience parental imprisonment. For most children the shock caused by arrest and imprisonment wanes as time passes. More speculatively, children may benefit where their parents/carers are able to locate their parent's offending within a longer perspective of their family history.
- (vii) Children were helped by emotional support from grandparents, older siblings and other relatives. "Only" children more often had their parents' undivided attention

8.1.2 *Children: gender issues*

- (viii) Most children with their father in prison are cared for by their mother, whereas most children with their mother in prison are looked after by grandparents, other relatives (or in foster homes) and fewer by their fathers. This is much the clearest overall difference between the two groups.
- (ix) Because of these differences in patterns of care it is difficult to make comparisons between the impact of maternal and paternal imprisonment, or to conclude that either maternal or paternal imprisonment is more or less damaging for children. I have found no strong evidence to support Juby and Farrington's (2001) assertion that

maternal imprisonment, linked to Bowlby's (1983) theory of maternal deprivation, is inherently more damaging than paternal imprisonment. Children in my study experienced as much emotional turmoil consequent on paternal imprisonment as for maternal imprisonment.

- (x) As well, I have found only limited evidence to support the link asserted by Fritch and Burkhead (1981) between paternal imprisonment and externalising or "acting out" behaviour, and between maternal imprisonment and internalising or "acting in" behaviour. My findings are that children with either their father or their mother in prison are equally likely to experience emotional distress. Boys are additionally likely to demonstrate behavioural problems.
- (xi) Rutter's (1987) finding that girls demonstrate rather more resilience than boys is borne out by my study. More of the girls were resilient, and more of the boys were vulnerable to the effects of parental imprisonment.
- (xii) In my study girls with their fathers in prison who were looked after by their mothers experienced less emotional turmoil than boys in the same situation. These girls benefited from their mothers' continuity of care, and acting as their role model. The boys missed their fathers providing them with a role model of appropriate behaviour, and some of them could have concerns that they would follow in their father's criminal footsteps.
- (xiii) I conclude from this and related evidence, albeit tentatively, that children may be more likely to experience emotional turmoil and confusion from the imprisonment of their same sex parent.

- (xiv) I have a higher level of confidence than other researchers that **schools** are most often the agencies best placed to help children of prisoners (and sometimes their families as well) both to keep up their school work, to provide individual support and to tackle stigma and bullying, and to seek more specialist help where need be. I agree with Rutter's (1987) observation that school teachers are best placed to help children with the ordinary run of problems.

8.1.3 *Family Processes*

- (xv) Perhaps unsurprisingly, children (both girls and boys) grow closer to their parent/carer (mothers, fathers and grandparents and other carers) while their parent is imprisoned. I also found that parents/carers can grow closer to the imprisoned parent, perhaps because their relationships are more structured, and the imprisoned parent's behaviour may improve, a process explored in detail by Comfort (2008).
- (xvi) I found clear evidence of parents/carers gaining self-confidence, independence and a sense of empowerment, not highlighted by other researchers, from successfully fulfilling their responsibilities towards their children and their imprisoned partners. They frequently demonstrated a capacity for organisation, and loyalty towards their imprisoned partner, both frequently beneficial for their children.
- (xvii) The experience of stigma was prevalent for these families. A majority of imprisoned parents were first time offenders, so this finding is consistent with Morris' early (1965) research which found little evidence of stigma in families of repeat offenders, but more for first time offenders' families.
- (xviii) A new finding in my research is that all parents/carers (with the possible exceptions of those who may have been in some way complicit in their partner's offence, or where

patterns of offending may have been habitual) re-appraise their partner's role and status, which I found to be diminished in more cases than not.

- (xix) A related finding is that all families develop some kind of policy about handling parental imprisonment, which may be based on openness and honesty, or on discretion, or on privacy or secrecy.
- (xx) Parents take the lead and children usually play a minor role in these processes, but children are likely to be affected by them.
- (xxi) Most parents/carers looked first for support within their extended families. More self-sufficient families could rely on more support of this kind; they also had higher energy levels and had more access to employment, and enjoyed better health, than more needy parents.

8.1.4 *Imprisoned parents*

- (xxii) Children adapted well to prison security regimes. Contact with their imprisoned parent, by telephone, visits and sometimes by letter, was in most cases essential for children's wellbeing in this research. Family days, where available, allowed opportunities for more meaningful interaction with children.
- (xxiii) I emphasize the importance of the more limited opportunities available to imprisoned parents to partially fulfil their roles as parents.
- (xxiv) I agree with the importance which Boudin (1998) attaches to imprisoned mothers/parents acknowledging their guilt, and the hurt they have caused their children. With limited access to therapeutic support, imprisoned parents in my

research could find this daunting. If parents can be honest with their children, they can help prepare them prior to their imprisonment.

- (xxv) I also agree with the emphasis placed by Clarke et al (2005) on the lack of reciprocity in relationships between imprisoned parents and their partners. I found less evidence of “prisonisation” (Comfort, 2008) and of “inmate identities” and extreme masculinity (Tripp, 2009) than other researchers, and more evidence of active fathering, amongst imprisoned fathers, where they were encouraged in their parenting role by their partner.
- (xxvi) Alongside the harm caused by parental imprisonment, I found that a majority of families experienced some benefits, sometimes for children, and rather more often for parents/carers and for the imprisoned parents themselves.

8.2 A note on practice implications; and on future research

8.2.1 Practice implications

The COPING research identified widespread practice and policy reforms aimed at improving services and support for children of prisoners, and included recommendations to achieve child friendly criminal justice systems impacting on arrest, sentencing policy and enhanced prison visiting arrangements; and also promoting the role of NGOs and the role and contribution of schools supporting children of prisoners (Jones & Wainaina-Wozna, 2013, pp 549-597). I strongly endorse the importance attached by COPING to the role of schools in keeping children focused on their academic progress.

A key practice issue for schools is the dilemma arising when children and parents do not provide information about parental imprisonment. This may prohibit schools from providing

much needed support. However, if children decide not to inform schools about their situation, this may indicate that their need for privacy and confidentiality may matter more to them, at that point, than individual support. Children should be free to choose their own time to seek individual help. Schools may frequently learn about parental imprisonment even where they have not been specifically informed about this. They will still be able to monitor children's progress and help them feel as secure as possible. Clear anti-bullying policies can provide practical reassurance for children of prisoners, and may offer them valuable protection.

Children can be helped where their imprisoned parent is encouraged to fulfil their parenting role. Prisoners should be helped to take an active interest in their children's school progress, exercising their rights to see school reports and to have direct contact with schools, where appropriate. Opportunities should be available for children to have the time and space in prison to maintain, and if need be, to repair their relationships with their imprisoned parent.

Children's caution about discussing parental imprisonment, and their concerns about confidentiality, may be addressed if they have opportunities to join support groups with other children of prisoners, such as those which have been made available by Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Groups in the north west of England. Fully developed group work and family support is very well established in Sweden and can provide a model for service development in the UK. Families in this study valued readily accessible prison visitor services, offering practical support and guidance about the prison environment, and liaison with statutory and benefits agencies. Young carers' support services also provide a useful model, offering children contact with other young people in similar situations, a break from family responsibilities, enjoyable activities, and access to individual support when needed. There are parallels here with Tisdall et al's (2004) findings in the field of HIV AIDS, where children appreciated social workers who provided continuity, gave children time to take part in activities of their own choosing, and let them decide when they wanted to discuss personal issues.

More broadly, children will benefit most from changes in the climate of public opinion, which remains hostile to imprisoned parents. The necessary step of separating out children's needs from the offences committed by their parents is difficult to achieve in practice. Children need reassurance that they do not share the guilt attaching to parental criminal behaviour, and to know that their own needs will be considered and addressed without prejudice or stigma.

8.2.2 *Future research*

My research has explored fairly widely the impacts of parental imprisonment on children and reached some conclusions about gender differences. Some of these conclusions, such as children being likely to be more severely impacted by same sex parental imprisonment, are tentative, perhaps at the level of what Charmaz (2006) describes as "*plausible accounts... rather than verified knowledge*", which I would judge to be a reputable level of discovery from case study research. (Here I much prefer the Collins definition (1989, p401) of "plausible" as "apparently fair or reasonable" to the Oxford Concise definition (1988, p785) - "specious, seeming reasonable; persuasive but deceptive"). Recent studies have largely ignored differential impacts of parental imprisonment on girls and boys, and a focused piece of research on this topic could be valuable. I hope that subsequent research would also include further exploration of the significance of the concepts of family re-appraisal of the role and status of the imprisoned parent; and of the part played by family policy in the ways families deal with the impact of parental imprisonment, which I have identified in this study.

Finally, I acknowledge below my lack of success in recruiting looked after children in my sample. I hope that further research into the impact of parental imprisonment on children would include this neglected group, and other children who have had less contact with their imprisoned parent.

8.3 *Limitations of the thesis*

The thesis has significant limitations. One of the clearest was that most families which took part in the research were recruited from prison visiting centres. This meant that children not in contact with their parents in prison were mainly not included in my sample. Also, by the time of the interviews, most children and families had, to varying degrees, adjusted to having a parent in prison. I would estimate that my sample of children were probably exposed to medium to lower levels of risk compared to the total population of children of prisoners. While in my view it is probable from this case study that results for other comparable children and families would be broadly similar to those I found, this applies only to families in fairly close contact with the imprisoned parent, who have had time to adjust to their situation.

Much emphasis was placed on the desirability of achieving a balanced sample for the in-depth interviews, between children in the *normal*, *borderline* and *abnormal* categories based on their Goodman's Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) scores. In spite of determined attempts to identify children whose strengths and difficulties questionnaire scores indicated heightened vulnerability, the proportion of such children was lower than targeted. As a consequence, the study found much rich data about the experiences of more "normal" children. However, even though the sample was to some extent skewed in this direction, the interviews did include children with a wide range of issues, including children whose mental health was clearly vulnerable. Also, the numbers of girls in my sample was lower than the number of boys; and the number of imprisoned parents interviewed was lower than the number of parents/carers.

A related issue was that a higher proportion of imprisoned parents were serving sentences for white collar crime, or for drug related offences, than in the prison population overall. For

a majority of the children involved it was possible to look forward to the end of their parent's prison sentence, even if this was still some time away. Several of the imprisoned parents were located in open prisons, with a view to rehabilitation. The interviews again provided a valuable source of data for children in this situation. This 'skew' in the sample was partly redressed by evidence from a much smaller number of children whose parents were serving very long sentences for very serious offences.

There are other important limitations. For a majority of the imprisoned parents this was their first prison sentence, and the sample only included two parents who had spent most of their adult lives in prison. This means that my results are less likely to be relevant for families of habitual offenders with numerous prison sentences whose children may have had different kinds of experiences, perhaps including being less shocked and traumatised by parental imprisonment. Secondly, the proportion of white British children in the sample was considerably higher than for the prison population overall. Only two of the twenty two families were from black and minority ethnic groups. It is clearly not possible to generalise findings to these sections of the population. Thirdly, attempts to recruit looked after children with parents in prison for the interviews were unsuccessful. Had this been achieved it is likely that more would have been learnt about the perspectives of children with much less contact, and more acrimonious relationships, with their imprisoned parent. The numbers of children interviewed who were currently, or who had previously been, on local authority child protection registers, or subject to safeguarding procedures, was fairly small, although not negligible.

Other limitations were linked to the research methodology. Children and parents were interviewed at a single point in time. There was no opportunity to compare children's experiences at different points during their parent's imprisonment, nor to review their progress following their release from prison. Apart from the use of SDQ scores in the earlier COPING survey, no standardised measures were used to assess children's progress. Finally,

no first hand data was collected from schools or other agencies on children's reactions to parental imprisonment and their subsequent progress.

Although I am very conscious of these limitations my hope, referred to at the outset, that the thesis could provide a unique view of children's experiences, has, in my view, been at least partially successful. I have kept a clear focus on children's accounts, supplemented and developed by those of their parents and carers; and have been able to make a useful contribution to knowledge in this field.

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Appendix 1

Case Summaries for Research Participants

The summaries below are included to provide background to explain the circumstances of research participants. Some participants' recollections of dates and time-scales were imprecise.

Girls and then boys with their mother in prison are summarised first, and then girls and then boys with their father in prison. Children in each group are discussed by age, the youngest first. The three mixed sibling pairs are summarised together. Children are all referred to by the pseudonyms (first names only) by which they were known throughout the thesis.

KEY: eg Eleanor G10/2 = Girl aged 10, Case 2

Grant B8/14 = Boy aged 8, Case 14

Girls with their mother in prison

Eleanor (G10/2)

The researchers met Eleanor and her parents at a Family Day at the prison where her mother was serving her sentence. Eleanor and her father were interviewed separately a few weeks later; and her mother was interviewed in prison.

Eleanor's mother had little contact with her parents and was brought up in local authority care. After leaving care, she became heavily dependent on drugs and alcohol and gained a reputation for violence. After Eleanor was born she looked after her on her own after her

relationship with Eleanor's father ended. She was convicted of murder and received a minimum sentence of 14 years when Eleanor was 2½. Eleanor remembered witnessing part of the assault. Her father, now with a new partner, resumed care of Eleanor after her mother was arrested.

Eleanor's memories of her step-mother were unhappy. Her father's relationship with her had ended some 3 years previously, and he had given up his work to be a full-time carer for Eleanor, with much support from his sister and his father.

Eleanor's parents were in their mid-30's. After an initial period of regular, supervised prison visits, Eleanor had had infrequent contact with her mother in prison. Closer contact at Family Days in her mother's prison had been resumed following intervention from a prison based family support service. Her mother had intense feelings for her daughter, and described her cell as like a shrine for her. Eleanor missed her mother greatly and said that she enjoyed her now more frequent contact with her. Her father had had to cope with Eleanor's earlier psychological reaction to losing her mother. He found that she was often upset by telephone calls and following visits. Her mother still had 7 years of her sentence to serve, and hoped that she would have a relationship with Eleanor after her eventual release.

Nasreen (G14/5)

Interviews were completed with Nasreen's father and Nasreen herself, on her own at their home; and with Nasreen's mother in prison.

Nasreen's parents were British Asians in their early 40's. The family lived in a detached suburban house. Nasreen's father had had his own business, and her mother had had a responsible retail job. Nasreen had attended a private school all her life. The family had had a high standard of living with holidays abroad until Nasreen's father's business collapsed.

Family finances came under strain and debts piled up. In desperation, Nasreen's mother engaged in fraudulent activities for which she was convicted and received a 3 year prison sentence, which she served initially at a local prison. Following her transfer to a more distant open prison, she succeeded in obtaining another responsible job from a sympathetic employer.

Nasreen's father had had no knowledge of his wife's crimes. He was now working again and looked after Nasreen throughout his wife's prison sentence. He tried to put his family affairs on a sounder footing, with practical and financial support from his family. He was deeply shamed by his wife's prison sentence, and was determined to keep this private. Nasreen followed her father's lead and did not disclose her mother's imprisonment to teachers or friends at school. She appeared intellectually and musically gifted. Her mother maintained the closest possible contact with her daughter by telephone, and had regular home leaves. She was due to be released within about a year.

Samantha (G17/14) and Ethan (B9/14)

Samantha and Ethan were interviewed together at their home. Their older sister, aged 23, who looked after them, contributed to the interview. Their mother was interviewed in prison.

The children's mother was in her 40's, and was approaching the end of a long prison sentence (3 years served). Details of her offence were not disclosed. She had had 6 children, 3 older sisters (Samantha was the youngest of these), and 2 younger sisters, aged 5 and 6. The children's mother was divorced and said that she had brought up the 3 younger children as a single parent. The children remained in contact with their father and their grandparents.

Following their mother's remand in custody, when Ethan was aged 6 or 7, the oldest daughter took the whole family to live in her home; she also had a 3 year old son. She and the next oldest sister, aged 20, both had jobs (as did Samantha) and they shared the care of the whole family between them, with support from their extended family. This was a considerable achievement. The children seemed happy and well looked after.

Ethan, the only boy, seemed to have been affected most by his mother's long absence. According to his mother, his behaviour had plummeted after a prison visit had been cancelled. Visits had been frequent while their mother was in a local prison, but were now much more difficult following her transfer to a more distant open prison. Samantha supported her brother during their interview. She said they were a 'normal' family. The children's mother was proud of her family and missed them greatly. She expected to be able to readjust to family life following her release from prison.

Boys with their mother in prison

Anthony (B11/12)

Anthony and his father were interviewed at their home. Anthony's mother was interviewed in prison.

Anthony's parents were in their 50's and his father was disabled. He had had 3 older children from a previous relationship. Anthony's parents were committed Christians and were involved in voluntary and mission work. His mother had received a 5 year prison sentence after long-term accountancy fraud had been uncovered. After serving the first part of her sentence in a local prison, she was transferred to another, much more distant prison. Her husband campaigned vigorously and successfully for her return to the local prison. He

and Anthony had had to move to a smaller home, adapted to meet his needs, soon after his wife's imprisonment. The situation had strained Anthony's parents' relationship.

Anthony's mother had used her time on bail to prepare him for her prison sentence.

Anthony had grown closer to his father and acted as his carer. His father had visited his new secondary school and explained the family's circumstances. Anthony managed the transfer to the school successfully and enjoyed school life. He had grown accustomed to prison security and visits; longer children's visits had helped him to maintain his relationship with his mother. His mother had experienced stigma and rejection from her own family.

However, she said that her health had improved and she had used her time in prison constructively.

Gareth (B11/16)

Gareth and his grandparents were interviewed at their home. His mother was interviewed in prison.

Gareth's mother was in her late 30's. Gareth had twin sisters, aged 8. His parents' relationship had apparently been violent over a long period. His mother had been arrested following a domestic dispute in which she had attacked her partner with a knife. According to Gareth's grandparents, his facial injuries were not serious. Gareth's mother was on bail for some 16 months. During this period she and the 3 children went to live with her parents. Eventually Gareth's mother received an unexpected 12 month prison sentence. The grandparents obtained custody of the 3 children, with regular contact with their father and his family.

Gareth could not understand why his mother had attacked his father with a knife. His grandparents did not condone their daughter's behaviour. The children had been distressed

both by the conflict between their parents and subsequent contact arrangements, and by their mother's imprisonment. The children's father and his family had celebrated her prison sentence. The grandparents looked after the children well without attempting to take their mother's place.

The children's mother hoped that she would be released after serving a third of her sentence. Gareth, with support from his grandparents, had made a successful transition to secondary school while his mother was in prison.

Kyle (B11/18)

Kyle was interviewed at his home with his father and paternal grandmother. It was not possible to interview his mother in prison, and she was therefore interviewed at home a month after her release.

The couple had been together for 13 years. The family included Kyle's father's 16 year old son and 14 year old daughter from a previous relationship. . Kyle's father was employed in the construction industry. His mother had been arrested at home for drug dealing. She knew that a prison sentence was likely, but did not explain this clearly to Kyle. The family went to live with the paternal grandmother while Kyle's mother was in prison for 8 months.

The 3 children all missed their mother. Kyle had been particularly close to her and was overwhelmed when she was sent to prison. To start with he had to be dragged away from his mother when prison visits came to a close. His mother's imprisonment coincided with his transfer to a secondary school. Although his father supported him as much as he could, Kyle was quite unable to manage the move without his mother's help. His new school was unsympathetic and prosecuted his father for his non school attendance, although the case was dismissed by the court. Kyle hardly attended school during the 8 months his mother

served in prison. His father used this period to renovate and redecorate their house in preparation for his mother's return. She regretted her offences and the double life she had been leading beforehand. She said she was determined not to reoffend, and made constructive use of help available in prison and from the probation service. She also said that Kyle was proving difficult to handle after her release. He was being reassessed by an educational psychologist to decide on his future schooling.

Piers (B13/15)

Piers and his mother's partner, who was his guardian, were interviewed separately at their home. His mother was interviewed in prison.

Piers' mother had two older sons, aged 18 and 20, from a previous relationship. She had separated from her first partner because of his heroin addiction, and said that she had enjoyed life as a single parent, working whenever possible. (She was a qualified chef). She had ended her relationship with Piers' father between 2 and 3 years previously, and had started a new relationship with her current partner. Piers' mother had become involved in a fight involving her 18 year old son and another man, who died as a result. Her son was convicted of manslaughter, and she was convicted of affray after several months on bail. She received a custodial sentence.

Her partner took responsibility for Piers. He regarded Piers' older brothers' influence as unhelpful, and focused on improving Piers' behaviour and school work, with some success. He had to move away from their home town with Piers as his mother's release date approached, as a condition of her licence. Piers described his relationship with his mother's partner as close. He missed his brothers (both he and his mother visited his brother in prison as often as possible) and his grandparents. He was uncomplaining and tried to make light of his problems. He knew he could get angry at school. His mother was distressed by her

separation from her family, and she knew that he found her absence unbearable.. Piers was waiting to start a new school when he was interviewed.

Alex (B16/19)

Alex was interviewed at home; and his mother was interviewed in prison. I had met them both on a Family Day at the prison. His older sister was interviewed by telephone. Alex's father was not interviewed.

Alex's mother was in her late 40's. He had an older sister, aged 23, who had a 3 year old daughter. Their parents had divorced about 2 years before his mother's conviction, although they remained in contact. Alex's mother was convicted of murder while under the influence of alcohol, and she had received a minimum 14 year prison term, 4 years previously. It was some months before she could face visits from her family. She was remorseful about her crime and its impact on her victim's family. To start with, her children, supported by their father, visited each month, although the frequency of visits had reduced. Alex's mother said that she telephoned her children each week, and spoke to Alex when she could.

Alex and his older sister lived in their mother's house, although their relationship was not particularly close. His father had kept in very regular contact with Alex and made sure he attended school regularly. Alex had matured, and he had grown apart from his mother. He emphasised that he himself had done nothing wrong. He had recently left school without very clear plans for his future.

Alex's mother thought that her alcoholism and her offence were partly caused by the loss of her father, and partly by depression. Inside prison, it had taken her a long time to overcome her alcohol dependency. The prospect of a further 10 years in prison, and recognition that

she could not play any part in her children's or her granddaughter's lives for a long time, contributed to her low morale.

Girls with their father in prison

Amelia (G7/8) and Grant (B12/8)

The two children and their mother were interviewed, separately, at their home. The children's father was interviewed in prison.

The children's parents were in their late 20's and had been together since they were teenagers. Their father had always worked as a labourer. When the recession hit he was made redundant and could not find employment. He could not manage to support his family on benefits and turned to drug dealing (he was not a drug user). He was convicted and was serving a 4 year prison sentence.

The family lived opposite the children's school, from where the police raid and arrest of the children's father were clearly visible. The family experienced considerable stigma. The children's mother worked in a retail outlet.

The children were distressed by their father's imprisonment and 2 year absence. Amelia's spirits improved and she enjoyed weekly trips with her mother to visit her father in prison. Grant found his father's absence unbearable. His behaviour was adversely affected by visiting him, and he stopped going to see him. Grant's behaviour at school was aggressive and sometimes violent, and he was suspended on several occasions. He had attended a special unit, and plans for his continuing education were under review. His parents were hopeful that his behaviour would improve when his father was eventually released.

Sameera (G8/20) and Abida (G14/20)

Sameera and Abida and their mother were interviewed separately at their home. Sameera's father was contacted in prison but declined to be interviewed.

The children's mother was British African Caribbean. She also had sons aged 22 and 12, and a daughter aged 20. She had met her partner 10 years previously. He was 11 years younger than her and was the father of Sameera. He received a 5 year prison sentence for drug dealing and had been in prison for some 18 months. The children's mother was close to her own mother who lived nearby, and to her two sisters. She described having been abused herself from an early age; and she said that her partner had been emotionally abusive towards her. She described how he had become involved with another woman with her own children while on bail. After being sent to prison he was still seeing his girlfriend and her children, and putting them before his daughter. The children's mother persuaded him to change his behaviour and he started to see Sameera. The children's mother now visited her partner very regularly (she said twice every weekend), with a car full of children.

The children's mother said that both the girls were progressing well at school, although she had concerns about her 12 year old son being bullied and unhappy. Sameera was reticent during her interview, but said that she was pleased to be able to visit her father, to whom she seemed close, talking to him on the phone frequently. Sameera had been distressed, and had had nightmares and slept with her mother when he had first gone to prison. Her older half-sister, Abida, was poised and polite, pleased to be in contact with her step-father and planning to be a primary school teacher. The children's mother had a positive and friendly relationship with her children, for whom she set clear boundaries.

Kirsty (G11/7) and Jack (B9/7)

The two children and their mother were all interviewed separately at their home. The children's step-father was not interviewed.

Their mother was in her late 30's. She had three older children aged between 16 and 20. Her relationship with the children's step-father had lasted for 5 years. He had been in prison for 5 months earlier in the year, and was now serving a further 4 month sentence for assaulting their mother, who was seeking to divorce him. The children had visited him in prison before, but contact had now ceased. Their mother said that Jack had been sexually abused by her mother, who had died 2 years previously. Their mother had become depressed. The two younger children were on the child protection register because of violence in their home.

Jack's school had been in frequent touch with his mother about his behaviour. His teacher had been sympathetic about his step-father being in prison. Jack said that he was close to his mother and his older brother, aged 20. Kirsty said that she had settled well in her new, large secondary school. She was well supported by her older sisters during her interview.

Becky (G12/9)

Becky and her mother were interviewed separately at their home. Her father was not interviewed.

Becky's father had been remanded in custody for 6 months, following two years on bail at home. Her mother had been advised that her partner should expect a long prison sentence, for drug dealing. The couple, in their early 40's, had been together all their lives. Becky had older sisters aged 22 and 19; an older brother aged 17 at school, and two much younger

brothers as well. Her mother was extremely busy, as a hairdresser, breeding dogs and running the family. She had much support from her mother and her partner's brother. With help from her family, she visited her partner with her young sons, and occasionally with Becky, every week. She fully intended to maintain her relationship with her partner.

Becky enjoyed her school life and her social life. Her mother said that she was not 'academic', and quite often in detention. Becky enjoyed her friends' company and had talked to them about her situation. She was close to both her parents. Her father had talked to her when he had learned that he was about to be remanded in custody. Becky did not much enjoy prison visits as her younger brothers demanded all her father's attention. Her older brother and sister (B17 and G19) were more angry with their father than was Becky.

Natalie (G14/4) and Declan (B13/4)

The children's mother was interviewed at her home. Natalie and Declan chose to be interviewed together, also at home. Their father was not interviewed.

Natalie and Declan had an older brother aged 16, who was not interviewed. Their parents, who were in their late 30's, had been together since they were at school. Their mother said they had had a period apart. She and her children had close support from her parents. Her partner's work had required him to be away from home all week, with contact with the children at weekends. He was now on his third prison sentence, this one for 15 months, for alcohol related offences. The children's mother said that she and her partner had separated, although she did not rule out the possibility that they would get back together.

The children and their mother all spoke warmly about their father, except when his behaviour was affected by alcohol. Their mother organised visits to see him in prison every week, and he was in daily contact by telephone.

Their mother said that the main impact of his imprisonment had been reduced family income. She had a busy life running a hairdressing business. She thought that her former partner's imprisonment had made little impact on Natalie and Declan, as he had been away from home so much previously. In their interview, Natalie and Declan described how much they missed their father. Both of them found their school and sporting lives fulfilling. They hoped that their parents would be together again after their father's release from prison; but they knew that, for this to happen, he would have to stop drinking, which he had not done previously.

Boys with their father in prison

Daniel (B8/10)

Daniel and his mother were interviewed separately at their home. Daniel's father was interviewed in prison.

Daniel's parents were in their early 40's. His father had first been remanded in custody, and then received a 5 year prison sentence for manslaughter following a fight with an acquaintance in his home town. Daniel had two older siblings in their early 20's, a brother aged 17; and a 16 year old sister, now pregnant and with her boyfriend. They all lived in their home town, as did Daniel's grandparents. His parents had had an 'on-off' relationship. His father had been unemployed and often away from home. Although the parents had recently divorced, his mother decided to stand by his father immediately after his arrest. He was not allowed to return to their home town, and Daniel's mother had moved with Daniel to a village nearer the prison in which he was serving the last months of his sentence.

Daniel's father had spoken to him once about his offence. Daniel missed his older siblings and the rest of his family. He seemed perplexed about his situation. His school had supported him well, although he seemed 'distracted' in the classroom. Daniel's father was now having home leaves, although Daniel did not seem sure of receiving his full attention.

Jamie (B10/17) and Oliver (B11/17)

Oliver and Jamie chose to be interviewed together, with their mother present. She was interviewed separately. Her partner was not interviewed.

As well as Oliver and Jamie, the boys' mother had two very small children, one of whom had recently been having tests for autism and speech development. The boys' mother's partner had been a self-employed builder. He was serving a 6 month prison sentence for drug offences. Oliver and Jamie had been very upset by their father's imprisonment, and had slept with their mother for some time until she put a stop to this. Her own family, who lived some distance away, had been supportive. Her partner's mother had been less helpful, although his siblings had helped with transport for prison visits. The boys' mother had contacted their school and had been pleased with their positive response, quietly supporting the boys when this was needed. Their mother had intervened decisively to deal with older boys who had been bullying them. (The bullying was not related to their father's imprisonment).

The boys had been close to their father and were counting the days until his release. Oliver talked a lot to his friends, while his brother was more guarded. Their mother had been very busy managing on her own, including prison visits with the four children. She had become more independent. While she was looking forward to his coming home, she would not tolerate a repeat prison sentence.

Luke (B12/3)

Luke's mother was interviewed first at her home, and was then joined by Luke. His father was not interviewed.

Luke's mother was in her late 20's. She had recently resumed her relationship with Luke's father, from whom she had been separated for several years. Luke had a half-brother aged about 7. He had recently moved to a secondary school with a good reputation and talked about plans to become a doctor. Luke and his mother were both very upset when his father was remanded in custody, 6 months previously. His mother had had limited support from her family; and rather more from her employers. Luke's school had been sympathetic, and had organised counselling support for him, which he found valuable. His father's trial was due in the near future.

Ben (B12/21)

Ben and his mother were interviewed at their home. Ben's father was not interviewed.

Ben's mother was in her mid 40's and lived with her son in a well furnished and decorated suburban semi-detached house. She and her husband had both been arrested 5 months previously. Her husband had been remanded in custody, first to a local prison, and then transferred to a prison at the other end of the country. Ben had been very well supported by his school and by his maternal grandmother, to whom he was very close.

Ben had had a close relationship with his father built around shared interests in sport. He was convinced his father was innocent. He recovered from the shock of his imprisonment and was enjoying life at school and his continuing involvement in sport. He accompanied his mother on the long drive to visit his father in prison, once a fortnight; and was reassured to

see his father was well. His mother thought that a less indulgent lifestyle in prison had benefitted him. She thought that Ben had not been too seriously affected by his father's period in custody, and that they had carried on their life as a normal family dealing with a difficult situation.

Caleb (B13/6)

Caleb and his mother were interviewed separately at their home. His father was not interviewed.

Caleb's mother was in her middle 30's. She was also, with her partner, full-time carer for Caleb's cousin, a girl aged 8. Caleb's parents had been separated for at least 5 years. His father had received a prison sentence for assaulting his mother. Following his release, he used his contact with Caleb to gain access to his mother's partner. He was now serving a long prison sentence for assaulting him.

Caleb had serious learning difficulties and limited speech and attended a special school. His mother described receiving helpful support from social services, from a voluntary family support agency, and from Caleb's school. The school had helped Caleb control and understand his aggressive behaviour. Caleb described learning about loss at school and related this to his experience of his father being in prison. The voluntary support agency had helped Caleb with his feelings about his father and had also arranged for him to see his father in prison and accompanied him on visits. Caleb had kept in contact with his paternal grandfather.

Mark (B13/11)

Mark and his mother were interviewed separately at their home. Mark's step-father was interviewed in prison.

Mark's mother and step-father were in their 30's. His step-father's childhood had been troubled; he had been abused by his own father and by his step-father. He left home when he was about 14 and became dependent on drugs. When Mark's step-father started his relationship with his mother she already had two children, an older girl aged 16 and Mark. Mark's step-father received an indeterminate sentence for drug dealing. His mother was pregnant at the time of his step-father's arrest; his step-brother was now 4.

Mark missed his step-father very much and may have been closer to him than to his own father. His mother found life as a single parent hard. Her father had supported her when she had moved to a new house a year previously. She said that she had talked to few people about her partner's imprisonment until recently, and she seemed not to have spoken to Mark's school. Her partner had become drug free in prison and he had used his time in prison constructively. He was using home leaves to rebuild his relationships with his family.

Harry (B14/13)

Harry and his mother were interviewed at their home. His father was interviewed in prison.

Harry's father said that he had been on bail for a year before he received a long prison sentence, which he said related to activities earlier in his life. Previously he had provided well for his family, as an electrician. His relationship to his son was very close, and Harry had accompanied him to sports venues and other events at weekends in his father's mobile burger van. Harry's parents had grown apart and separated 2 years before his father's

imprisonment. His father continued to provide for the family and remained in daily contact. Harry's mother, who had periods when she was incapacitated by back problems, supported him in prison, and made sure that Harry had regular contact with his father. She and her son experienced considerable stigma and impoverishment during Harry's father's imprisonment.

Harry was devastated by his father's imprisonment. He and his mother retreated into their home and Harry started to self-harm very seriously. He started to improve when he resumed contact with his father after a gap of more than 2 months. His mother's general practitioner arranged effective counselling support for Harry. He also received high quality support from his school throughout his father's prison sentence. His father kept in regular contact with Harry by telephone. The family could only afford monthly visits. The family expected that Harry would eventually go to live with his father after his release from prison; and the two of them had talked about working together as well.

Matthew (B15/22)

Interviews were held separately with Matthew and his mother at their home. Matthew's father was not interviewed.

Matthew's mother had disabilities which resulted from a shoulder accident during her career as a health professional. His father had had a leg amputated following a car accident many years previously. Matthew had a younger brother aged 14. The family had moved home several times as Matthew's father work had required him to move fairly frequently. The family had lived in their present home in a somewhat remote village, for about 2 years. Matthew's mother required support from agency carers. She said that they had been a close family unit and that the boys had had good relationships with both their parents. More recently their father had been employed in further education.

Following police investigations the boys' father had left home, attempted suicide, given himself up to the police, and finally been convicted of sexual assault on a 15 year old girl in Matthew's class at school. He received a 3 year prison sentence. Their mother had been distraught. She had been accused by social services of putting her husband's needs before her children's. She described the boys' school as unsympathetic and hostile. Matthew resented being subject to a school based social services' assessment. The boys were not allowed to visit their father with their mother, and refused to go without her. Matthew was intelligent and mature for his age. Although he still loved his father, he had decided to concentrate on improving his school examination grades and supporting his mother. His mother was still shocked by her husband's offence, and had been told he would not be allowed to live at home with his sons.

Joe (B17/1)

Joe's father was interviewed in prison; Joe was interviewed at home, with his mother present. His mother was also interviewed.

Joe's parents were in their late 30's. They had spent time together as children in local authority care. They were together for some 9 years and had two children, a boy aged 18 and Joe. (His mother had an older son from an earlier relationship). Joe's parents' relationship was violent. His father was frequently in prison, and his mother felt safer visiting him there. She spent periods in women's refuges. Joe spent much of his early life living with his paternal grandmother who, according to his mother, physically abused him. He may also have been abused by his uncle.

Joe had some happy memories of living with his father, and he enjoyed a positive relationship with his paternal great-grandfather. His father re-married twice and said he had

a close involvement with his current wife's four children. (He was the father of two of them).

Joe returned to live with his mother and his older brother when he was about 12. By then his father was serving a very long prison sentence for aggravated assault. Joe had been diagnosed several years previously with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. He had severe psychological problems, including extreme self harming behaviour, now controlled by medication. His behaviour and sleep patterns remained erratic. His mother seemed committed to caring for him and his older brother, who was diagnosed with autism and who already had two young children of his own. During a break in his contact with his wife, Joe's father re-established contact with his mother from prison and she resumed visiting. Joe had had very limited special education, often only one or two sessions per week. His father said he wanted to be accessible to his two sons and grandchildren. The boys had had hardly any contact with their father for many years and Joe did not wish to resume a relationship with him; he was due to be released from prison shortly.

Appendix 2

COPING Consent Form for WP2 Interviews

The COPING Research and the content of the questionnaires has been explained to me.

I agree / disagree to take part in the survey for the COPING Project.

I agree / disagree to the interview being tape recorded.

I have been informed that I do not have to reply to a question or questions if I choose not to.

I confirm that I have received a voucher to the value of £25 for taking part in the interviews.

Name / signature of child/young person.....

.....

Name / signature of parent / carer.....

.....

Name / signature of researcher or other staff member.....

.....

Date:

Appendix 3



WP2

Child-Centred Interviews: Interview Guide

Final Version: October 2010

The purpose of the child-centred interviews is to explore the impact of having a parent in prison on the child or young person (CYP), including the child's development, family life, school and education, and leisure / social life. The intention is for the interview to include all the areas covered in the guide. The order in which issues are covered can vary. Some children and young people may be reticent about issues of imprisonment. Some of them may not have talked much about these issues before. Others may start talking about key issues sooner. It is important to start where the child or young person is, and to go at her / his pace.

The child can be shown, or have their own copy of the interview guide. Children interviewed will be aged from 8 – 16 years. Younger children will be encouraged to draw a picture to describe aspects of their family life, and their experience of having a parent in prison, if they would like to.

Information about the research project will be given to children and young people before the interview. Consent will have been obtained from their parent or carer. Consent forms

will need to be child-friendly and age appropriate. The child or young person can provide written consent themselves either before or at the interview.

Some children and young people may wish to talk more about specific impacts, for example on life at school, or how their parent / carer has been affected. Although the plan is to try to cover all the areas in the guide, interviews may focus on more specific areas.

After some initial consultation, questions have been included about the child's knowledge about why their parent is in prison, and for how long. We recognise that these question may be painful or upsetting for some participants. Sensitivity will be required by the interviewer. CYP have a right not to answer if that is their wish.

The child or young person should be offered the opportunity to be accompanied by a person of their choice during the interview. Alternatively, the CYP may wish their parent to be with them, or the parent may prefer this. We know that the parent's presence is likely to have an impact on the interview. Nonetheless, the parent's presence is acceptable, and may well be helpful in some cases. The researcher should emphasise that, for this interview, it is the CYP's views that are important.

Where consent is provided, interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed. If a CYP requests a copy this will have to be considered with care, with regard to child protection and safety concerns. The possibility that there could be adverse repercussions for the child if the transcript was seen by another family member must be taken into account. The transcript would need to be delivered to the CYP securely and safely.

Introduction

1. Interviewer introduces her / himself and says where they work. Interviewer explains the purpose of the interview (as stated above) to the child / young person (CYP). Interviewer explains that the interview will include questions about family life before and after the CYP's parent was sent to prison; questions about how this has impacted on the CYP and members of her / his family; questions about the CYP's school and social life; questions about contact and visits to the imprisoned parent; and about how life could be improved for the CYP and their family.
2. Interviewer asks CYP if they are happy to go ahead with the interview. The child or young person can be asked to sign their consent at this stage, if they have not done so previously.
3. Interviewer asks if CYP is happy for the interview to be tape-recorded. Interviewer explains that this is so that there is a full record of what the CYP has said.
4. Interviewer explains that the tape-recording will be transcribed. The transcript will be seen only by members of the research team. The interviews will be analysed and will form a main part of the research report. The views of children and young people will come through strongly in the research.
5. All names, including the name of the CYP, addresses and any identifying details will be anonymised (this word will be explained to CYP as necessary).
6. Interviewer explains that everything the child says will be kept confidential. The only exception is if the CYP provides information about a child or adult being harmed, in which case the researcher has a duty to notify the police or social services.
7. Interviewer explains that the CYP has a right not to answer any question if they prefer not to do so. The CYP also has a right to stop the interview at any point, without giving reasons.
8. Interviewer explains that the research project includes interviewing the parent / carer looking after the CYP; and also, if possible, interviewing the parent in prison. These interviews will also focus on the impact of having a parent in prison on the CYP.
9. At this point, the interviewer asks the CYP if there is anything about the interview which they would like to be clarified (use age-appropriate language here).
10. Interviewer now proceeds to the main part of the interview.

Interview

Questions about family, school, and social life

- Q1 Please can you say who you are living with? If you have brothers and sisters, can you tell me their ages? Are there other members of your family, e.g. grandparents / aunts / uncles? Are there any other adults living with you? How closely have these adults been involved in looking after you?

Younger children may choose to draw a picture of their family. Older CYP may prefer to provide a genogram (interviewer to provide example of this).

- Q2 When you were growing up in your family, who mainly looked after you? Please can you describe any periods of separation between your parents or care givers?

(Prompts: mother / father / both; step-parent; grandparents; other relatives; others, e.g. foster-parents)

- Q3 Were there any changes in who mainly looked after you when you were growing up? (Interviewer to ask if the CYP has lived in more than one family). Did you have to move between different homes/ If so, how many times did this happen?

- Q4 Were either your mother or father or other carers away sometimes? Did this include either of your parents being away for periods of imprisonment? If so, how long was this for?

Q5 Please can you say what you liked or enjoyed about being with your mother or father, or other care givers / brothers and sisters?

(Prompts: having fun time together; having meals together; involved in games or sports together; going on trips / outings; going on holidays. Interviewer to draw out information about what CYP enjoyed about being with different family members.)

Q6 Was there anything that you did not enjoy about being with your family?

(Prompts: e.g. times when you or someone in your family was ill; times when your mother or father, or other care giver was away; times when members of the family did not get on so well together, including arguments or violence). Use age-appropriate language here.

Q7 Please can you say what kind of school you go to: eg primary; secondary; State school; private, voluntary or faith school? What things do you like most about your school? Is there anything at your school you do not like so much?

(Prompts: subjects / activities / sports you enjoyed / did not enjoy; friends or teachers you liked being with / did not like being with. CYP to be asked whether they have had experience of being bullied, and if so, what was the cause of this, and whether it was connected with having a parent in prison).

Q8 Are you going to school at the moment? Have you missed time at school? (Interviewer to draw out whether this has been for illness or unauthorised absence / truanting / exclusion). Has your missing school been for reasons connected with your mother or father being in prison?

Q9 Can you say a bit more about yourself? For example, do you have any special hobbies (for example *collecting things or computer games or outdoor activities*)? Which games or sports do you like best? Can you tell me about your achievements (things you have done well) or things that you are proud of?

Q10 Would you describe yourself as a fairly calm person, or do you tend to be an anxious person? How do you sleep? (Prompts: go to sleep straight away / sleep well / difficult to get to sleep / wake up sometimes / wake up a lot / often dream / often have nightmares). Has your sleep pattern changed since your father/mother went to prison?

Questions about other changes since your mother or father has been in prison

Q11 Please can you say what you can remember about the time when your parent was arrested and then taken to Court? Can you say how this impacted on you and on other members of your family?

Q12 Who is looking after you now, while your mother or father is in prison?

(Prompts: other parent / grandparents / relatives / foster-parents / other).

Q13 How have things changed since your father or mother has been in prison, for you; and for your parent / carer; for your brothers or sisters? How have you shared out roles / responsibilities? (Use age-appropriate language here).

(Important to check impact on each family member. Prompts: has there been more work to do at home, like house-work, cleaning up, making meals, washing up or

washing clothes, shopping, having to help more looking after brothers and sisters,
more work on Visiting days, more help needed for parent/carer?)

Q14 Can I ask if you know why your parent is in prison; and also for how long you think this will be?

Q15 Can I ask who else in your family knows why your mother or father is in prison?

(Prompts: everyone; just adults; other brothers and sisters).

Q16 What about outside your family? Do other relatives, or your school, or your friends know?

Q17 I wonder if you can tell me how you felt when your mother or father went to prison?

(For younger children you could use *Smiley Faces*. For older children use scale).

(Interviewer to record this)

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Very upset</i>	<i>Upset</i>	<i>Not too bad</i>	<i>Okay</i>	<i>Relieved / pleased</i>

Please could you say why you felt like that?

(Younger children to be given the opportunity of drawing a picture about having a parent in prison at this point. Older young people may prefer to write about this).

Q18 Generally, can you say how life has been for you since your mother/father has been in prison?

1	2	3	4	5
<i>A lot worse</i>	<i>Worse</i>	<i>About the same</i>	<i>Better</i>	<i>Much better</i>

Q19 What do you think about talking to other people about your mother or father being in prison? Do you think this is useful / valuable for you or not useful / valuable? Who is it most useful to talk to?

Have you been able to talk to anyone about your mother or father being in prison?

(Prompts: to your parent / carer at home; to brothers or sisters; to friends; to a teacher; to another adult e.g. youth leader, social worker; or someone else).

Q20 Were you told it was okay to talk about this; or was it a “secret”?

Q22 Has your mother or father being in prison changed things at school; or with your friends; or how much you go out?

Visiting Prison

Q22 Please can you tell me if you have been to see your mother or father in prison? Can you say how many times? Please can you say who else went with you?

(Prompts: parent / brothers and sisters / relatives / other adults / friends).

Q23 Have you visited on weekdays? Or at the weekend?

Q24 How far have you had to travel to prison? How long does it take? How do you travel there?

Q25 Please can you say how you have found visiting the prison?

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Very difficult</i>	<i>Difficult</i>	<i>Okay</i>	<i>Quite enjoyable</i>	<i>Very enjoyable</i>

Please can you say in what way?

Q26 Have you visited prison on special Family Days? How have you found these compared with normal prison visits (prompts: more enjoyable / same / less enjoyable)?

Q27 Please can you say how you think your parent / carer and brothers and sisters found visiting the prison?

Q28 Please could you tell me whether your school knows about your visits to prison?

Q29 Have you had to take any time off school for the visits?

Q30 Have you been able to talk to anyone about visiting the prison (e.g. parent / relatives / friends / teacher / youth leader / social worker / other adults)?

Other contact with parent in prison

Q31 Do you use other ways to keep in contact with your parent in prison e.g. phone / text / letters? How frequently do you use these (prompts: daily / twice or more weekly / weekly / fortnightly / less often)? How important are these ways of keeping in contact for you (prompts: very important / fairly important / not very important)? Are there are barriers for you in using these ways of keeping in contact?

POPS and other help available

Q32 Please can you say if you have had any contact with POPS (Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group) (or other NGO in Germany, Romania and Sweden)?

Have you been to the POPS (or other NGO) Office in Manchester?

Have you been to POPS (or other NGO) groups for children and young people?

Have you been able to talk to other children or young people with a parent in prison about this? If so, please can you tell me about this?

Can you say how you have found POPS?

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Very unhelpful</i>	<i>Not very helpful</i>	<i>Okay</i>	<i>Helpful</i>	<i>Very helpful</i>

Please can you say in what way? What has been helpful at POPS? What has been unhelpful?

Q33 Has any other organisation or individual been able to help you, for example youth leader / social worker / teacher / other adults / other organisation?

Q34 Please can you say what would make things better for you while you have a parent in prison?

Q35 Please can you say what would make things better for your parent/carer and your brother(s) and sister(s) while you have a parent in prison?

Q36 Do you think there is enough support for children and young people with a parent in prison? If “yes”, please can you say more about your experience of this kind of support?? If “no”, please go to Q 38

Q37 Who do you think could help?

(Prompts: other young people who have had a parent in prison; teachers / youth leaders / social workers; organisations like POPS; children’s counsellors or therapists)

General question

Q38 Overall, how much difference has it made for you having your mother or father in prison?

1	2	3	4	5
<i>No difference at all</i>	<i>Not very much</i>	<i>A fair amount</i>	<i>Quite a lot</i>	<i>A great deal</i>

Please can you say in what way?

Looking to the future

Q39 Please can you say when you think your mother or father may be coming out of prison?

Q40 When your mother or father comes out of prison, do you think they will come home?

Yes	Not sure	No
-----	----------	----

Q41 How will you feel about your mother or father coming back home?

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Not pleased at all</i>	<i>Not very pleased</i>	<i>Okay</i>	<i>Fairly pleased</i>	<i>Very pleased</i>

Q42 How would you like things to be for you and your family when your mother or father comes out of prison?

1	2	3	4
<i>Family back together again</i>	<i>Mother & father living separately</i>	<i>Prefer things as they are now</i>	<i>Other, please say</i>

End of interview

Interviewer: Thank you very much indeed. That covers all the questions I wanted to ask.

Can I ask how you have found the interview?

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Very difficult</i>	<i>Quite difficult</i>	<i>Okay</i>	<i>Fairly straightforward</i>	<i>Straightforward</i>

Interviewer advises young person about whom they can talk to about any issues they have found difficult in the interview. In the UK, ChildLine cards can be made available. Help could also be provided by POPS, or by Children's Services. (Germany, Romania and Sweden to offer appropriate suggestions).

Q43 Is there anything else you would like to say about any of the questions you have answered?

Interviewer reminds CYP that the interview is confidential.

Interviewer provides contact details for themselves for the child or young person; and contact details for professionals / organisations who are available to help the CYP if they have any concerns arising from the interview.

Interviewer explains that gift vouchers are available for the CYP as an acknowledgement for their time, and to recognise the importance of their evidence for the research. Vouchers to be handed to the CYP, and receipt obtained.

Interviewer thanks CYP for taking part in the interview.

Reference

Pridmore, P. and Bendelow G. (1995). *Images of Health: Exploring beliefs of children using the "draw and write" technique*. Health Education Journal, 51, 473 - 488

Martin Manby

WP2 Lead

May 2010

Appendix 4

Please click on logo to see attached PDF document

COPING Information Leaflet



COPING Information
Leaflet.pdf

Appendix 5

My role in the COPING Research

My role in the COPING project was to lead the qualitative research, comprising in-depth interviews with children and young people, parents and carers, and imprisoned parents. I wrote the interview guides for children and young people (see *Appendix 3*) and other participants, and these were used by researchers in the UK and in Germany, Sweden and Romania. I also wrote the information guides for the in-depth interviews which were produced in both poster and leaflet form, and used in all the interviews in the UK to provide information about the interview process (see *Appendix 4*).

At the University of Huddersfield I led a team of researchers (all white British, mixed gender) who undertook the interviews. I contributed to training Partners of Prisoners' (POPs) staff, and visited four male and two female prisons in the North of England, from which a high proportion of the children who were interviewed were recruited, to launch the research. I organised pilot interviews with children at the POPS offices in Manchester, and I completed one of these (Family 17) myself. I undertook the first two interviews (Families 12 and 16) with children and their parents/carers and the imprisoned parents myself, and made summaries and transcripts available to other researchers to provide worked examples of how interviews should be conducted, using the interview guides. From then onwards I identified, with help from a female member of the research team, which of the children who had marked on their survey questionnaires that they were willing to be interviewed, should be targeted for interview, and allocated these to members of the research team (including myself). I and the female researcher made the initial telephone contacts with families to find out if they were still willing to be interviewed. More than two thirds of the interviews were carried out by the

two of us.. I met frequently with the research team to progress all aspects of the interview work programme

The survey (for children and parents/carers) included administration of the Goodman Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). Children completing the questionnaire, mainly recruited from prison visitor centres in the north of England, were asked if they would consider being involved in the in-depth interviews. Although my aim was to recruit equal numbers of children from the *normal*, *borderline*, and *abnormal* SDQ categories, the team actually managed to interview equal numbers of children from the *normal* category, and from the *borderline* and *abnormal* categories, combined.

Children and parents were interviewed mainly at home, and almost all imprisoned parents were interviewed in prison. Where possible, female researchers were allocated to interview girls, and male researchers to interview boys. In some cases the researcher interviewed both the child/ren and the parent/carer. In others, two interviewers were allocated to a family; one of them interviewed the child/ren, and the other the parent/carer. Children involved were aged between 7 and 18.

Children whom I interviewed received shopping vouchers to the value of £25 to acknowledge their contributions. In my view, not making some such acknowledgement for children whose evidence was crucial for the research would have been unethical. The principle of offering children compensation was endorsed by the COPING project, although Romania decided not to make any acknowledgement of this kind because families taking part were generally very poor and would have seen this as an inducement (Jones and Wainaina-Wozna, 2013, p.252, 253). Research opinions on this differ. Alderson and Morrow (2004) consider that payments may bribe or coerce people to take part, or may lead children to feel that they have to divulge more than they would choose to, or to say more strongly what they think the researcher wants to hear (pp71-73). While it seemed right to me not to take children's contributions for

granted, Alderson and Morrow are right to highlight the possibility of these unintended consequences..

General authority was obtained from the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) in the North-West of England for the researchers to liaise with prisons in that area. This authority was extended to two women's prisons in the north of England. POPS played a key role in liaising with families, some of whom were already known to the organisation; and POPS staff also contributed to interviews, supervised by University staff.

As project lead for the in-depth interviews I was assisted by a consultant psychologist; and by a senior University colleague with expertise in the analysis of qualitative data. With his support, a coding framework for the interview data was developed. Transcriptions of recorded interviews were undertaken by my secretary, with additional support from a private transcription company. Transcribed interviews were coded, usually by the researcher who had conducted the interview, using the N-Vivo software package. I ensured that researchers completed summaries of all interviews as soon as possible after these had taken place in order to aid retrieval of their main content.

My role also included advice and support for research and NGO colleagues undertaking the in-depth interviews in the other three countries. I consulted with them about the interview guides and the coding framework, and training was provided in the use of N-Vivo. I took a lead role in writing the UK Qualitative Interviews research report, including writing main sections of the thematic analysis on family relationships, family conflict, children's resilience and coping strategies, communication and information sharing, and families' experience of school support. I also wrote the report summary and conclusions. I provided detailed guidance to the other three countries, including regular Skype meetings, to help them develop their research reports, which were written in English, including detailed editing of text,

as required. I also had the lead role in writing the Overview Report on the qualitative interviews for the four countries.

In 2012, the University of Huddersfield agreed a proposal from me to develop a PhD thesis using data from interviews in which I had been involved. Interviews had been completed by that stage, using the methodology which I had developed for the COPING project. The University stipulated that the thesis should be based on interviews which I had completed. These comprised 21 families. I also used data from interviews with one other family, which I coded and analysed, which was conducted by a colleague, under my supervision.

I was one of the authors of the COPING Research Report, edited by Adele Jones and Agnieszka Wainaina-Wozna published in 2013. I was lead author of an article on prison based family support services, published in the Prison Services Journal in 2013; and also lead author of an article analysing family re-appraisal of imprisoned parents and the development of family policy, in the European Journal of Social Work, in 2014.

Martin Manby

October, 2014

Appendix 6

Interviews completed by myself (MM) and other colleagues.

Case No.	Name of Child	Interviews		
		Children	Parents/Carers	Imprisoned Parent
1	Joe	MM	MM	MM
2	Eleanor	Female Researcher 1	MM	MM
3	Luke	MM	Partners of Prisoners	-
4	Natalie	MM	Female Researcher 2	-
	Declan	MM		
5	Nasreen	MM	MM	MM
6	Caleb	MM	MM	-
7	Jack	MM	Female Researcher 2	-
	Kirsty	MM		
8	Amelia	Female Researcher 1	MM	MM
	Grant	MM		
9	Becky	Female Researcher 2	MM	-
10	Daniel	Partners of Prisoners	MM	MM
11	Mark	Partners of Prisoners	MM	MM
12	Anthony	MM	MM	MM
13	Harry	MM Female Researcher 1 present	MM	MM
14	Ethan	MM	MM	MM
	Samantha	MM		
15	Piers	MM	Female Researcher 3	MM
16	Gareth	MM	MM	MM
17	Oliver	MM	MM	-
	Jamie	MM		
18	Kyle	MM	MM	MM
19	Alex	MM	MM	MM
20	Sameera	Female Researcher 2	MM	-
	Abida	Female Researcher 2		
21	Ben	MM	MM	-
22	Matthew	Male Researcher 1	Male Researcher 1	-
TOTAL		28	22	13
		MM = 20 Other Researchers = 8	MM = 17 Other Researchers = 5	MM = 13 Other imprisoned parents were not interviewed
Interview data, including transcripts, were coded by the Researcher who completed the interview, except those carried out by Partners of Prisoners staff and Case 22, where data was coded by MM				

Appendix 7

Gender Differences: factors impacting on children's well-being.

Table (a): Girls with a mother in prison - factors impacting on their well-being

Reference Child/Case	Pseudonym	Welfare	Intelligence	Behaviour	Relationship with Father	Relationship with Mother	How long In prison	Offence	School Performance	School Support
G10 / 2	Eleanor	?✓	✓	✓	?✓	?✓	7 yrs	V	✓	✓
G14 / 5	Nasreen	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 yrs	F	✓	?✓
G17 / 14	Samantha	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 yrs	NK	✓ (work)	NK
KEY										
Positive	✓									
Fairly Positive	?✓	✓ = 2	✓ = 3	✓ = 3	✓ = 2	✓ = 2	< 1yr = 0	V = 1	✓ = 3	✓ = 1
Cause for Concern	?	?✓ = 1	?✓ = 0	?✓ = 0	?✓ = 1	?✓ = 1	> 1yr = 3	F = 1	?✓ = 0	?✓ = 1
Violence	V	? = 0	? = 0	? = 0	? = 0	? = 0		NK = 1	? = 0	NK = 1
Fraud	F						m = month			
Not Known	NK						yr = year			

Table (b): Boys with a mother in prison - factors impacting on their well-being

Reference Child/Case	Pseudonym	Welfare	Intelligence	Behaviour	Relationship with Father	Relationship with Mother	How long In prison	Offence	School Performance	School Support
B9 / 14	Ethan	?✓	✓	?✓	NK	✓	2 yr	NK	?✓	Mixed
B11 / 12	Anthony	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 yr+	F	✓	✓
B11 / 16	Gareth	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	4 m	V	✓	✓
B11 / 18	Kyle	?✓	?	?	✓	?✓	8 m	D	?	?
B13 / 15	Piers	?✓	?✓	?✓	?✓ (mother's partner)	✓	6 m	A	?✓	✓
B16 / 19	Alex	✓	✓	✓	✓	?✓	14 yr	V	?✓	?✓
KEY										
Positive	✓									
Fairly Positive	?✓	✓ = 3	✓ = 4	✓ = 3	✓ = 3	✓ = 4	< 1yr = 3	D = 1	✓ = 2	✓ = 3
Cause for Concern	?	?✓ = 3	?✓ = 1	?✓ = 2	?✓ = 1	?✓ = 2	> 1yr = 3	A = 1	?✓ = 3	?✓ = 1
Drugs	D	? = 0	? = 1	? = 1	? = 1	? = 0		V = 2	? = 1	? = 1
Affray	A				NK = 1			F = 1		Mixed = 1
Violence	V						m = month	NK = 1		
Fraud	F						yr = year			
Not Known	NK									

Table (c): Girls with a father in prison - factors impacting on their well-being

Reference Child/Case	Pseudonym	Welfare	Intelligence	Behaviour	Relationship with Father	Relationship with Mother	How long In prison	Offence	School Performance	School Support
G7 / 8	Amelia	?✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 yr	D	✓	✓
G8 / 20	Sameera	?✓	✓	✓	?✓	✓	1 yr+	D	✓	✓
G11 / 7	Kirsty	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	4 m	V	✓	?✓
G12 / 9	Becky	✓	✓	?✓	✓	✓	6 m	D	?	?✓
G14 / 4	Natalie	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6 m	A	✓	✓
G14 / 20	Abida	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1 yr+	D	✓	?✓
KEY										
Positive	✓									
Fairly Positive	?✓	✓ = 4	✓ = 6	✓ = 5	✓ = 4	✓ = 6	< 1yr = 3	D = 4	✓ = 5	✓ = 3
Cause for Concern	?	?✓ = 2	?✓ = 0	?✓ = 1	?✓ = 1	?✓ = 0	> 1yr = 3	A = 1	?✓ = 0	?✓ = 3
Drugs	D	? = 0	? = 0	? = 0	? = 1	? = 0		V = 1	? = 1	? = 0
Alcohol	A						m = month			
Violence	V						yr = year			

Table (d): Boys with a father in prison - factors impacting on their well-being

Reference Child/Case	Pseudonym	Welfare	Intelligence	Behaviour	Relationship with Father	Relationship with Mother	How long In prison	Offence	School Performance	School Support
B8 / 10	Daniel	?	✓	?✓	?✓	?✓	16 m	V	?✓	✓
B9 / 7	Jack	?✓	?✓	?	x	✓	4 m	V	?	✓
B10 / 17	Jamie	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6 m	D	?✓	✓
B11 / 17	Oliver	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6 m	D	✓	✓
B12 / 3	Luke	?✓	✓	?✓	✓	✓	6 m	D	?✓	✓
B12 / 8	Grant	?	?✓	?	?✓	✓	2 yr	D	x	x
B12 / 21	Ben	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6 m	NK	✓	✓
B13 / 4	Declan	✓	✓	?	✓	✓	6 m	A	?	✓
B13 / 6	Caleb	✓	?	?	?✓	✓	3 yr	V	?✓	✓
B13 / 11	Mark	?✓	?✓	?✓	✓	✓	4 yr	D	?	NK
B14 / 13	Harry	?✓	✓	?✓	✓	✓	4 yr	NK	?✓	✓
B15 / 22	Matthew	✓	✓	✓	?✓	✓	?	V	✓	x
B17 / 1	Joe	?✓	?	?	x	✓	8 yr	V	x	x
KEY										
Positive	✓									
Fairly Positive	?✓	✓ = 6	✓ = 8	✓ = 4	✓ = 7	✓ = 12	< 1yr = 7	D = 5	✓ = 3	✓ = 9
Cause for Concern	?	?✓ = 5	?✓ = 3	?✓ = 4	?✓ = 4	?✓ = 1	> 1yr = 6	A = 1	?✓ = 5	NK = 1
Ended	X	? = 2	? = 2	? = 5	? = 0	? = 0		V = 1	? = 3	x = 3
Drugs	D				x = 2			NK = 2	x = 2	
Alcohol	A						m = month			
Violence	V						yr = year			
Not Known	NK									