

## **Parent and practitioner dynamics: Exploring practitioner roles in a secured Mother and Baby Unit.**

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### **Abstract**

This paper reports on a small-scale study of practitioners in a mother and baby unit (MBU) in a women's prison. Research was conducted using semi-structured interviews and literature was examined to gain understanding of practitioners' and female offenders' experience of frameworks, guidance and personal approaches to relationship building. The data was transcribed and coded in a thematic approach and, from that, a set of findings were critically analysed, including the role of support, multi-agency working and constraints to practice. The paper found that these factors were all consistent in responses from the practitioners, implying a shared set of working values. Support was found to be a term used by practitioners to highlight how they develop aspects of parent self-efficacy through their relationships with mothers. This varied from the use of an open-door policy to key worker meetings to build upon parental child development knowledge. Multi-agency working was also found to be a factor that can bring about support for families, from life after prison to financial help. The paper discovered that practitioners work with internal and external services to build relationships in a wider network. Lastly, constraints to practice were a dominant theme: it was found that practitioners can struggle with aspects of trying to maintain relationships, including having an inconsistent workforce in the setting and manipulation by offenders. Moreover, solution-based discourse in the paper highlights the need for effective assessments to be carried out on what works for practitioners and offenders inside the unit.

Further, the paper emphasises the importance of research in explicating relationships in MBUs with potential to significantly impact positive family outcomes, and also points out the need for further research upon release from the prison system.

**Keywords:** Prison; Women; Children; Mother and Baby Unit; Practitioner roles; Support; Relationships.

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## Introduction

Considering that an estimated 17,240 UK children were separated from their mothers as a result of imprisonment in 2010 (Prison Reform Trust, 2016), we can clearly see that this situation potentially has an impact on a huge number of families. With only an estimated 5% of children able to reside in their usual home following their mother's imprisonment, concern may arise about the potential harm to the child. This may include emotional impact, friendship and family separations, and schooling and educational changes, among other factors. Moreover, the risk of delinquent and antisocial behaviour in children almost triples following parental incarceration (Prison Reform Trust, 2016), demonstrating the potential for a very bleak reality following such imprisonment. Research to examine these pressures could be beneficial in demonstrating how services and practitioners can work towards changing such difficult circumstances, through developing an understanding of the lives of these families within practice.

The Corston Report (Ministry of Justice, 2007) reveals that 30% of mothers lose their accommodation while serving time in prison, and are also more likely to be the sole or primary caregivers to any children. In addition, the report highlights the harsher reality for women in prison, as the penal system adopts approaches to practice that are typically designed for men (Goldhill, 2015). A possible gap in practitioner support in gender-based approaches to female offenders may be of concern, in addition to the vulnerabilities women may already face with regard to childcare, housing, drug misuse and being victims of abuse (Ministry of Justice, 2007). The implications for families and mothers in this situation led to a wish to discover how practitioners and mothers work in this environment. This paper explores practitioner roles in the establishment and maintenance of relationships with mothers and their children. Relevant literature is examined to develop an understanding of the women in a mother and baby unit (MBU). Methodology and ethics are discussed, with findings leading to recommendations and conclusions.

## Research aims

The aims of the research are to explore:

- practitioner views on the way the relationship between the mother and baby develops;
- key factors that shape the rapport between the mother and practitioner;
- whether maternal and practitioner power/authority contribute to the relationships within the setting;
- practitioner understanding of their potential influence on family outcomes.

## Literature

### *Practitioner relationships with parents*

The context in which parents and practitioners have contact with each other is hugely relevant to outcomes for children and families. Within the setting, practitioner roles varied, with a project manager responsible for the setting management, including staffing, financial management and logistics. A member of the team was the senior support worker responsible for delegating to staff, assigning key workers and managing difficulties within the environment, as well as taking part in daily nursery work and planning. Lastly, support workers and casual staff roles were assigned to families to ensure continuity of practice, build rapport and establish relationships with both mother and baby within daily practice. Safeguarding is, of course, everyone's responsibility.

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) guidance (Department for Education, 2014) specifies requirements for practitioners to engage with and promote the learning and development of the child by working in partnership with parents. However, within a prison environment the needs of both the child and the mother are paramount, so practitioners are responsible for the progression of the mother's knowledge (Fettes, 2000). The wider contextual parameters of the setting may have an impact on how those relationships develop; the MBU statutory guidance (Ministry of Justice, 2014) suggests implementation of a positive practitioner/parent relationship, although the elaboration on the meaning of that is limited. The focus is on having qualified staff following the EYFS (Department for Education, 2014) and providing a Lead Practitioner to each family. Therefore, MBU practitioners are attempting to work effectively alongside mothers who are incarcerated in what is their home, which is very different to the school or nursery setting assumed.

Questions arise about the differential expectations of children's attainment between parents and practitioners. Statutory frameworks frame learning expectations and developmental goals for the children, providing practitioners with an assessment-based understanding of outcomes and milestones. However, involving parents incorporates a different understanding and interpretation of child outcomes (Cottle & Alexander, 2014), with a renegotiation within differing parental generations of what is expected in issues surrounding play, discipline and education (Jackson & Needham, 2014). Therefore, confusion and conflict may be a feature of practitioner and parental relationships, alongside those of wider family who are also involved.

Factors such as parental self-esteem and educational outcomes may also impact parental and practitioner relationships, particularly involvement in child development matters (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Indeed, Birmingham, Coulson, Mullee, Kamal and Gregoire (2006) highlight a higher prevalence of mental health issues for women in custody than those in the community; although women in MBUs have lower rates of mental health problems than the overall female prison population, there is potential for depression, poor self-worth and low self-esteem to impact day-to-day life.

Greenberg (2006, p. 167) suggests that practitioners working with families should have a strong understanding of risk and resilience factors for children and should embed them into practice, which requires the involvement of wider family members and caregivers in order to provide optimum support. However, staff within MBUs may have limited access to resources, training and staff support, and struggle in facilitating programmes aimed at family support (Burgess & Flynn, 2013). With some female offenders placing the practitioner almost as high as family members, including their own mother, in being most helpful in the 12 months after release (McNeill et al., 2005, cited in Sheehan, McIvor & Trotter, 2007, pp. 135-137), inconsistency in levels of support offered may be evident. The value placed by mothers on assistance offered, from financial to emotional well-being, provides insight into the danger of dependency on practitioners and exemplifies the need for better training in order to underpin practice with the family as a whole. Furthermore, Wood, Kade and Sidhu (2009) consider the multitude of needs offenders may have and suggest that a multi-agency approach, which provides different expertise in a responsive manner, increases the likelihood of positive intervention when considering rehabilitation.

### *Vulnerabilities and support services*

Vulnerability opens up a variety of contextual semantics. The essentialist view of vulnerability arguably stems from a societal construction of a person born with characteristics that we culturally deem as vulnerable, ranging from economic to those associated with race and gender (Calvin Thomas & Scammell, 2013). Government publications may present such constructions within their policy, further fuelling expectations of certain groups. Safeguarding policy (Office of the Public Guardian, 2015, p. 4) refers to

adults with vulnerabilities as those 'at risk', with a systematic set of classifications categorising an individual as 'at risk', such as mental capacity and those with histories of abuse.

Conversely, psychological underpinnings consider individual perceptions of vulnerability, and behaviours or predictors associated with those, as part of our own internal schemas (Carter & Glendening, 2013). This arguably shapes our interpretations and reactions, potentially contributing to our professional practice. Undeniably, however, women in custody share characteristics identified as indicating that a person is at risk. The Corston Report (Ministry of Justice, 2007) identifies these factors, which include women in prison with histories of abuse being over-represented in comparison with men, and the prevalence of mental health issues been higher than that of male prisoners, with self-harm been a significant problem.

Practitioners have a responsibility to meet the individual, complex and diverse needs of the offender. Gender-orientated services such as the Women's Community Service may provide a safe and valuable peer network that enables women to escape the stigmatisation of the offender identity and unwanted male attention, such as that received in male-dominated probation services. They are also responsive to education and training needs (Hunter & Radcliffe, 2015). Clearly, there are factors that assist in meeting the needs of women by addressing their individual vulnerabilities, which could provide practitioners with insight into successful relationship building.

Regarding women-orientated services, the Corston Report (Ministry of Justice, 2007) argues that community centres are hugely valuable for women, since women who present with certain vulnerabilities can be individually assessed and provided with the relevant assistance. Mclvor et al. (2007, p. 301) explore this recommendation and explain the need for services to be contextual to the service user and not simply redrafted services that work for men, with practitioners being fundamental to family outcomes. Halliday and Wilkinson (2009) demonstrate the importance of having practitioners with community knowledge and links in achieving access to wider services and support. Mitchell, Absler, and Humphreys (2014) found that mentor-style community relationships for those who are at risk or hard to engage with benefited from this method of intervention, with some deeming mentors to be like family members. The study also found that the mentor relationship had a positive impact on children's developmental milestones.

Although the research is limited, MBUs specifically have also been shown to impact positively on mother–infant relationships, maternal mental health and child development (Gillham & Wittkowski, 2015). This reinforces the idea of intervention and assistance for mothers with vulnerabilities, with the transition from prison to home being one of struggle (Connerty, Roberts, & Sved Williams, 2015). Specific support is needed to avoid detrimental outcomes, highlighting the importance of the practitioner roles involved.

### *Power and incarceration*

Guidance (Ministry of Justice, 2014) stipulates that six weeks after giving birth, women are obliged to comply with prison routines such as work and addressing their offending behaviour. Feminist arguments highlight the way that female offenders are oppressed by patriarchal regimes that are deemed destructive. Welsh and Rajah (2014) discuss how incarcerated mothers also face invisible punishments, such as the stigma of being an offender and the perception that being a good mother means providing adequate housing. The confines of prison and what it means to be incarcerated for women and mothers reveals numerous power issues.

Practitioner/offender relationships may be shaped and influenced by many factors. Greer (2000) discusses how interpersonal relationships between inmates and staff are described

as being both manipulative and dishonest. However, Elliott (2006) suggests that the use of manipulation can be an act of power that frees inmates from an intolerable self-perception and lack of control of their immediate environment, particularly as regards relationships with practitioners. Through the act of manipulation, the offender may be able to regain autonomy and control in an institution that controls the very routines with which they lead their lives. Rowe (2016) explores how prisoners 'suss out' practitioners and will make trivial requests in order to distinguish responsiveness, allowing for manipulation of a larger and more important request at a later time.

Offenders may also be manipulated by practitioners. Scott (2011) emphasises the role of reward and identifies that prisoners may be given more privileges by accepting their subordinate position. Conversely, practitioners can also limit privileges to those who resist. Rowe (2011) evaluates the way in which subjectivities such as class or characteristics may impact formal assessment, thus highlighting the institutional nature of the power struggle. This is further corroborated by Bui and Morash (2010), who suggest that gaining resource access may be dependent on network relationships.

Baradon, Fonagy, Bland, Lénárd, and Slead (2008) point out that the setting itself may trigger major problems in establishing bonds due to power-related conflicts and maternal power assertiveness. This, then, may not represent a true reflection of maternal and infant attachments, as behaviour is in accordance with the setting. Towe-Goodman and Teti (2008) imply that less power assertiveness is used by the mother when there is a warm relationship between herself and the child, implying that a strong emotional bond is beneficial to the mother/infant relationship. However, as noted, these women and children are considered vulnerable, and poor maternal mental health may impact on the levels of attachment between the two. Arguably, research suggests that early intervention has been demonstrated to be effective towards changing child-rearing attitudes and practices (Juffer, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & van Ijzendoorn, 2012). Therefore, within the context of an MBU there may be an opportunity within the antenatal and postnatal period to impact education, and to promote attachment through positive and reciprocal practitioner/mother relationships.

It is important to acknowledge that although the literature discussed is both broad and internationally diverse, research in MBUs and with practitioners is limited. In pursuing practitioner understandings, there may be opportunities to make links with literature and develop an insight into how practitioners' roles impact the dynamics of the relationships gained, lost and established.

## **Methods and methodology**

This research draws on phenomenology, which focuses on meanings that are derived from lived experiences of the subjects and embedded in core practices (Flood, 2010). This is relevant, as the research aims relate to practitioner personal and professional experiences. Purposive sampling was utilised to identify four practitioners within the MBU to ensure collection and analysis of relevant data (Denscombe, 2014).

Four semi-structured interviews were conducted with female staff, ranging from senior support staff to casual workers, whose roles varied from managing staff to nursery provision. Jordan (2012) points out that semi-structured interviews have been used successfully within prisons. The nature of such interviews allows for flexibility, enabling the participant to digress and speak more freely (Denscombe, 2014). In addition, the use of semi-structured interviews allows the researcher to gain clarity about utterances, and allows the participant to elaborate, thus assisting validity (Bell, 2014, p. 103).

Accessibility was a key feature in the research. Rowe (2014, p. 3) discusses the continuous processes for the researcher to consider, from moving around secure areas to negotiating

guarded practitioners. With the agreement of practitioners taking part in the research, approval forms were submitted to the prison governor and security teams within the setting to allow recording equipment to be used within the premises. Once this was completed, timings for interviews were established to ensure that the day-to-day routines of the children and mothers within the unit were not disrupted.

### *Ethics*

Ethical deliberations have been of paramount importance in this study. The BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2011) were followed and, in light of the limitations in terms of time, access and context, data was only gathered from practitioners, although, given more time, involving service users would be beneficial. It is acknowledged that an assumption was made in categorising service users as vulnerable, with which they may, of course, disagree. However, as stated, it was felt that it was better to alleviate the risk of causing harm by making such an assumption, given that no access to medical or offence history was available.

Finally, the participants were provided with an information sheet detailing their role within the research and an informed consent sheet indicating the process that follows any discussion of security-sensitive information and detailing participants' rights to withdraw.

### *Data analysis*

Interviews were fully recorded and transcribed for analysis. Braun and Clarke (cited in Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas 2013) identify the thematic approach to data analysis as 'a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data', which is the approach adopted in this study.

## **Findings and discussion**

### *Supporting mothers and babies*

A recurrent theme across the data was the role of support, with each participant commenting on the way they aim to achieve a supportive role as a practitioner. The literature on support is vast and varied. For example, the role of social support is suggested to provide relationships that are beneficial to the user, but differences arise in context (McKenzie, 2010). Therefore, the practitioners' role can differ, while being individually tailored to meet the needs of the person. Practitioner 4 pointed out that:

They're encouraged to spend time in nursery, do activities with the child, spend a lot of time with the child. They can ask members of staff for information on what they should be doing when, when we have the key worker meetings we'll discuss what the child's enjoyed in nursery and encourage the mother to develop on that.

Albarran and Reich (2014) explain that a mother's understanding of child development is paramount to developing parental self-efficacy and the knowledge that contributes to that. Evans (2012) notes that continual support alongside early intervention may be the most successful strategy for combating issues faced by new mothers, including postnatal depression. There is value placed on support workers and the potential for positive impacts upon family life through sharing expertise and education. Practitioner 1 gave their explanation on how to maintain a mother/practitioner relationship as:

You're there to listen to them, you're there to give them advice and support when they need it.

Despite the growth in parent-enhancing provision in women's prisons globally, there is a significant lack of empirical research of their success (Burgess & Flynn, 2013). Therefore, it is difficult to determine the effectiveness, or not, of such needs-led support.

Another aspect of support arising in the data was the lack of practitioner dominance in relation to parenting choices, as Practitioner 3 explained:

I don't judge them, I don't tell anybody what I think they should do, I support people in their decisions, and obviously ensuring the safety of the child is of paramount importance, but you do need to give them that opportunity because we're all, all human beings, aren't we?

Leahy-Warren, McCarthy and Corcoran (2012) suggest that parental self-efficacy is the belief that the parent has the capacity and full capability to carry out and perform tasks concerning the raising of a child. Moreover, support such as early interventions and parental resources, amplified through aspects of social learning theory such as modelled behaviour and positive feedback, may assist in parental outcomes (Cowley & Whittaker, 2012). This supports approaches that focus on promoting mothers' control of their own parenting styles, provided the needs of the child are being met. When practitioner domination is minimal, mothers are supported to parent their own child, albeit in an institution that has strict controls for them. Interestingly, Pösö, Enroos and Vierula (2010) find that children residing in prisons with their mothers provided support in itself and contributed to positive changes in lifestyle choices. Similarly, a US study explains that pre-school children who have resided with their mothers in prison also have positive outcomes, with recommendations for correctional facilities to promote the supportive role that environments such as MBUs provide (Goshin, Byrne and Blanchard-Lewis 2014).

Discussing how the team work with the mothers on the unit, practitioners said they had an open-door policy, enabling mothers to use and vacate the space when they wished to. Arguably, this could be deemed problematic: Craig, Gannon and Dixon (2013) explain that programme effectiveness is dependent on offender responsiveness, and that it is essential for internal responsiveness to be met with a needs-based approach to developing offender provisions. Therefore, simply allowing a mother to come and use space may be beneficial to one mother, but detrimental to the next. Furthermore, guidance (Ministry of Justice, 2014) stipulates mothers must take part in parental enhancement programmes, although these may not be tailored to everybody. While this project, for example, did not reveal whether provision specifically caters for mothers in terms of mental health, apart from the provision of a key worker, questions remain about gaps in provision caused by gaps in assessment of need. Furthermore, as Van Tongeren and Klebe (2010) point out, there is significantly less research on female offenders than on male offenders, and, equally, there are clear differences in behaviour between genders. Consequently, there may be a lack of knowledge of female offenders, particularly those in MBUs, and more needs to be done to assess the support systems that work, and equally those practices that fail to meet needs.

### *Multi-agency working*

Another significant theme in the data was the varying levels of multi-agency working. The ways in which practitioners liaise with and incorporate numerous agencies into their daily regimes, including the internal Offender Management Unit (OMU) or external social work team, was acknowledged. The number of agencies varies between families, but the role of the nursery support staff is to include these where relevant. Before a woman enters the MBU, relevant agencies gather to assess whether she is suitable for a place on the unit. As Practitioner 2 stated:

They'd have to sit the board and the decision would be if it's beneficial to them, will it make a change to their life and the child's life, and is it a possibility to stop them re-offending, and then all different services attend, so you've got your OMU worker, you've got your [name of organisation], you've got the head of the unit and they all sit together and make a decision.

The aim is to work in the best interests of the child by securing attachment bonds with the mother (Ministry of Justice, 2014), but also with caregivers or wider family members. Murray, Bijleveld, Farrington and Loeber (2014) point out that intervention to reduce harmful effects on children during parental imprisonment should be paramount and evidence based, but also concede that evidence is limited. Evidence-based practice encourages the use of multi-agency working and the provision of a mentor to promote stable arrangements and caregivers that provide consistent care. If all agencies and the mother work together to establish a strong network, both consistency in care and the best interests of the child may be met through the use of the unit.

Research has found that parental explanations of effective multi-agency working directly corresponded to varying government initiatives such as Every Child Matters (Department for Education, 2003). The focus has included aspects of relationship status such as trust, sharing and dialogue (Carter, Cummings and Cooper 2007). While Every Child Matters is no longer in use, the underpinning evidence for early intervention and support for parents (Department for Education, 2003) remains relevant. This may also be considered a factor in the shaping of the rapport between the mother and practitioner. An example of this includes facilitating contact with benefits agencies for the mother. Practitioner 1 stated:

So, take for example tax credits, if we, because as it is tax credits can take, you can be on the phone for forty minutes before you can get through if we, if sometimes it's just not possible to, to spend forty minutes so we might refer them on to Job Centre Plus.

In doing so, the needs of both the mother and the child are being met, providing the mother with funds that enable her to be self-sufficient and meet her child's needs, as required by guidance (Ministry of Justice, 2014). Arguably, multi-agency liaison enables the mother to meet the basic needs of the child, particularly by providing healthy food and adequate facilities for comfortable sleep (Maslow, 1943, cited in Beddoe & Giant, 2013). Moreover, it could be argued that multi-agency working is an aspect of a child's meso-system, an aspect of environment that impacts the family (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, cited in Palaiologou, 2012, pp. 26-27), particularly within the context of a prison.

Halliday and Wilkinson (2009) discuss the importance of practitioners providing access to external services such as children's centres, and data revealed this as a factor deemed appropriate for the continuation of support. Practitioner 1 explained:

When the mums are due to leave us we will refer them to their local children's centre... If the mums didn't have the continued support when they leave, I do think... some mums would... they would struggle.

A study by O'Brien and Leem (2007) highlights the impact of support services outside of prison. Out of 100 women, 94% required help with vocational and income support, while 80% required some form of physical or mental health support, thus validating that support-based services are of paramount importance in transitions from prison. While this research does not specify whether the women were part of an MBU, having a baby or toddler would potentially require even more support in transitions from prison. Equally, the transition into prison may prove difficult for practitioners and families alike. Practitioner 1 explained:

They may already come in with a child, so the child may be maybe four months old when they come into us so we don't always initially see it from birth.

This demonstrates the flaws in services being able to accurately assess and work with mothers to observe attachment. There can be limitations to findings if there has been limited time for different services to attempt to work with parents.

### *Constraints to practice and solutions*

Practitioners identified a range of difficulties faced while working in the MBU. Practitioner 1 highlighted how conflicts occur between mothers somewhat more often than with staff:

It's quite intense at times so, a little conflict could, between mothers can be started off because they haven't emptied the bins.

Thus, the confinement of the MBU can impact the daily routines, situations that officers deal with routinely.

Research has pointed to varied personal and professional standpoints about care-based practice, and what it means to care. Tait (2011) suggests practitioners identified as 'caring' feel secure and confident in their jobs and at ease with relationship building with offenders. Moreover, these practitioners may be subject to bullying behaviour from other staff who feel they do too much for prisoners. Daily routines and shift changes mean the officer presence differs, therefore consistent practice in terms of managing conflict has the potential to vary. Arguably, this may constrain practice, as mixed messages from officers could fuel tensions. Practitioner 4 pointed out:

We're not on on the weekends and we might have different staff members, and the women might speak to that staff member, and that staff member might not know that that's right or wrong or what to do about that situation and won't pass it on. So that's quite hard to establish relationships with mums when we've not got the full multi-agency support system working quite right.

Arnold, Liebling, and Tait (2007) point out that offenders are rarely asked what they require from a good prison officer, but when they have been, a strong emphasis is placed on relationship building and communication skills.

Further constraints were identified by Practitioner 3, who explained:

They can have quite a strong personality... sometimes they question absolutely everything that you're doing, and that can feel sometimes quite intimidating as a member of staff.

Literature highlights the presence of manipulation, and this was an aspect of this author's experience of how power in the setting affects everyone in the MBU. Kilty (2008) describes how behaviour that can be seen as a way to manipulate, for example self-harm, may lead practitioners to construct their perceptions of women in custody as attention seeking, deceitful and calculating. Such perceptions may shift attention and, as a consequence, fail to treat the issues responsible for the behaviour, but instead, punish it, particularly if the practitioner has an authoritarian approach to conduct.

Some practitioners provided solutions and gave examples of what they considered useful approaches. Practitioner 3 emphasised the importance of working together.

If we have got an issue or we feel that, you know, prisoners maybe be sort of over-stepping that little mark we, with questioning another member of staffs' practice to another member of staffs', and we'd discuss it as a team.

Unless it is an immediate safeguarding concern, there is a plan to discuss and value each member's contribution. West (2012) implies that staff must feel valued against the fate of the team they are a part of, with recognition of their contributions. Practitioner 3 indicated this by considering the positive approaches to working that assist decision making.

In addition Practitioner 1 discussed the use of parent forums within the MBU. Again, literature is limited on the effectiveness of parent forums within the prison context, although there is wider evidence to show the benefits of group parent education or discussion. Campbell and Palm (2004) suggest that the role of the parent educator and parent are difficult to define; however, the enhancement of practice may stem from the focus on building meaningful relationships. Moreover, the use of parenting programmes within prison have been on the contemporary policy agenda, and research conducted in the US demonstrates the differences within settings in terms of the provision of numerous educators and practitioners from varying agencies within these programmes (Loper & Tuerk, 2006).

## **Conclusion**

There are limitations to this study, although the clear consistency in responses has led to the identification of shared working values. Support is a dominant theme and practitioners explained how they individually interpret and put a supportive role into practice. The interlocking theme of multi-agency working explains how this is beneficial to both the service user and the child before they even enter the unit. However, multi-agency working and also constraints to practice explore the barriers to this way of working, highlighting the methods, consistency and challenges to relationship building within the setting. The nature of the relationship dynamic comes across as being diverse and fairly individual, shedding light on the importance of team work to support each other and the families on the unit.

Research on female offenders and practitioner roles within this context is relatively limited, particularly within the specific MBU setting. As the literature within this study suggests, more needs to be done to discover what works, particularly with regard to gender-responsive practice and also the incorporation of children so that practitioners are able to underpin their practice on more than the EYFS (Department for Education, 2014) and offender guidance. The setting is not mainstream, and pursuing further research both with mothers who are in and those who have left the MBU would be beneficial in terms of gaining their perspectives and realities.

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