

**‘Sins of our fathers’:
The lived experiences of children and young people with
a parent in prison**

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Statement of authorship and sources

This thesis contains no material that has been extracted in whole or in part from a thesis that I have submitted towards the award of any other degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety Committees (Appendix G).

I declare that the final draft of this thesis has been externally edited for conventions of grammar, spelling and punctuation by Jayne Aylen Access Editing.

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Abstract

With the rising numbers of prisoners in Australia and the recognition of prisoners as parents across policy and academic domains, an increased interest in children affected by parental incarceration has emerged. Such interest focuses on three areas of inquiry: psychological impacts of parental incarceration on children and young people; links to intergenerational crime; and current responses to children and young people with a parent in prison. Much of this research about children has been undertaken with adults; it is often unclear whether researchers spoke with children and young people about the issues they reported on. Where children and young people have participated in research, it generally focused on data collection from surveys and other measurement tools. Research that explored children and young people's experiences of parental incarceration, as perceived by them, is limited. A small number of international studies, predominantly from the United Kingdom (UK) and United States of America (US), have spoken with children directly about this issue; however, there is a considerable gap in research that considers the Australian context, particularly the Australian Capital Territory (ACT).

This study aimed to fill this gap. It explores the self-reported experiences of children and young people living in the ACT who have or have had a parent in prison. All participants experienced paternal incarceration; three experienced maternal incarceration. This thesis analyses the results of qualitative interviews with children aged 8–18. Employing a childhood studies framework, this research highlights the voices of children and young people, emphasising their own perspectives and meaning-making. A reference group comprising five young people provided guidance at the commencement of the study. Sixteen children and young people participated in semi-structured interviews. Participants were recruited from a range of services across Canberra, including prison, statutory child protection services, youth work services and other non-government services. Data were

analysed using an interpretative phenomenological analysis approach. This approach illuminated the complexity of the meanings children and young people placed upon their experience of parental incarceration. This analytical method also ensured that children and young people stayed at the forefront of the findings.

The findings highlight that, when a parent commits a crime, the adult criminal justice system institutes a process in which the children of prisoners may, or may not, actively participate. From the point of arrest to the release of their parent, children and young people describe how their everyday lives were influenced by the criminal justice system and how they in turn managed and responded to the challenges that arose. Children and young people spoke about a diverse range of experiences at different points across the criminal justice process, which lasted for different periods of time.

Children and young people described how the adult criminal justice system frequently created or exacerbated experiences of instability and uncertainty across specific life domains. They reported challenges with family relationships, housing, caring responsibilities, finances and education. They also described distinct differences in the types of relationships they had with their parent before, during and after incarceration. Consistent with childhood studies, children and young people described how they would meet these challenges and work to change them.

Children and young people also experienced a range of emotions. Feelings of loss, stress, disconnection, shame and stigma were present for many participants. The feelings they described were not necessarily associated with the level of involvement they had with their incarcerated parent.

In exploring children and young people's understanding of parental incarceration, this research adds to the emerging body of work about children of prisoners in the Australian context. Children and young people's participation has allowed their experiences of parental incarceration to be considered beyond the criminological and developmental psychology perspectives that have traditionally dominated much of the research in this field.

This thesis provides a theoretical contribution by considering the tensions that exist in how children enact agency and the way they influence and are influenced by the social process and structures around them. In better understanding the experiences of children and young people, this thesis makes an important contribution to the development of sensitive and appropriate policy and practice within social work and more broadly so that children with a parent in prison may be better responded to.

Key terms and abbreviations

ACT	Australian Capital Territory
Centrelink	Part of the Commonwealth government Department of Human Services, Centrelink delivers social security payments and services to a range of individuals across Australia.
Child protection services	Governmental agencies responsible for responding to reports of child abuse or neglect. In the ACT, the <i>Children and Young People Act 2008</i> is the legislative framework that guides the statutory services providing child protection.
Children	People up to the age of 12.
Criminal justice system	The adult criminal justice system, defined in this research as a series of government agencies and institutions whose goal is to identify, punish and rehabilitate individuals who have committed crimes. The primary institutions of the criminal justice system in this study are the police, courts and prison.
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
Incarceration	Any criminal detention setting, including remand and sentenced settings.
Parent	Either the mother or father of the child or young person.
Young people	Young people refer to people aged 13–18.

Chapter 1: Introduction – researching children of prisoners

The sins of the father are to be laid upon the children.

William Shakespeare, *Merchant of Venice*

1.1 Introducing the thesis

Much global attention has been paid to reducing the number of individuals entering the prison system; yet recent Australian data illustrates that each year a substantial and growing number of Australians remain affected by incarceration (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2015). The awareness that prisoners may also be parents has only recently been recognised by policymakers—subsequently, the broader consequences of parental incarceration, particularly on children and young people, are now being made visible (Mumola, 2000; Sheehan, 2011). Much of this research highlights the ‘unintended consequences or collateral damage’ of imprisonment, such as the social and economic changes experienced by families when a parent goes into prison (Christian, Mellow, & Thomas, 2006). Yet our understanding of the experiences and needs of children and young people with a parent in prison is limited.

Much of the current knowledge about children of prisoners has been established through international studies from the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK) (Cox & Wallace, 2013; Travis & Waul, 2003; Western & McClanahan, 2000). These international studies highlight that the effects of parental incarceration are not identical across all youth populations, nor across the wide-ranging social contexts in which children experience parental incarceration (Turney & Wildeman, 2015). Further, much of the research about children’s experiences of parental incarceration has been undertaken with adults (usually parents or service providers) who may or may not have spoken with children about how

they experience everyday life with a parent in prison (Al Gharaibeh, 2008; Lewis, Bates, & Murray, 2008; Tomaino, Ryan, Markotic, & Gladwell, 2005).

Based on current research, it is clear that a paradigm shift must occur in the study of children impacted by parental incarceration. Understanding children and young people's experiences of parental incarceration in the contexts in which they live is critical if outcomes for the children of prisoners are to be improved. This thesis aims to address this gap by considering the experiences of children and young people when a parent is in prison. It aims to provide an understanding of children and young people's needs and, in turn, how they are responded to in the current policy context. This thesis makes an important and timely contribution by considering the experiences of parental incarceration for children and young people living in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT).

1.2 PhD thesis with publication

This research project is presented as a PhD thesis with publication. A PhD thesis with publication is a unified body of work that has the same parts as a conventional thesis but consists of a number of publications and framing text that links these papers together. It has the same purpose as a conventional PhD thesis—that is, to situate the research in the context of previous research in the field, establish the research problem and clearly highlight the contributions of the research to the field of study.

This PhD thesis with publication provides five published manuscripts which focus on the study design and the findings of the thesis. The five manuscripts were published in a book chapter and in international and Australian peer-reviewed journals, including *Australian Social Work*, *Child and Family Social Work*, *Law in Context* and *Children and Youth Services Review*. These publications were selected as they provide important fora for the

debate of key ideas and research in social work as well as inform social work practice and policy.

Appendix A1 provides a list of publications included in the thesis. Where the published manuscripts identify co-authors, the contribution of each author is clearly articulated (Appendix A2). For ease of reading, the publications are also inserted in a form consistent with the non-published sections, and a single reference list is included before the appendices. Published manuscripts are provided as appendices in the format they appear online (appendices B, C, D, E and F). Appendices A3 and A4 provide other outputs related to this thesis.

Where important information has not been included in a publication, traditional thesis chapters and appendices have been incorporated to ensure that a robust and full account of the study is provided. This means that the reader is required to sometimes re-engage with information specifically related to the research literature and methodology when reading individual publications or a traditional thesis chapter.

It is also important to note that, due to the timing of the publications, the published manuscripts presented in sections 4.4 and 4.5, which focus on the methodology and conceptual framework (appendices C and D), do not reflect the total number of children and young people interviewed for this study. Publication 3 also refers to parents of children who were interviewed for a separate study that ran parallel to the research for this thesis. Further guiding information about the structure of the thesis is found in section 1.9.

1.3 Introducing this chapter

This chapter provides the background and an introduction to the study. The research context, the personal and professional factors influencing the study and the reasons for exploring children and young people's experiences of incarceration are discussed. The significance and utility of the study are made clear. The chapter concludes with an outline of the thesis structure and summary of the chapters.

1.4 Origins of the research

The ways in which children and young people may best participate in research about issues that affect them has been at the core of my work as a social researcher over the past 15 years. The foundation of my thesis stems from a small research project involving parents and children of prisoners, which I undertook as a researcher with the Institute of Child Protection Studies at the Australian Catholic University in Canberra, ACT. This project was commissioned by SHINE for Kids (a not-for-profit organisation that supports children of prisoners)¹ and considered the needs of children and young people who had experienced parental incarceration when living in the ACT.

At the same time as undertaking this study for SHINE for Kids, I decided to commence my doctoral thesis. The 12 children and young people participating in the SHINE for Kids project provided consent for me to use the data collected from these interviews for my thesis work. This enabled me to undertake a reanalysis of data from the children's interviews for Publication 1, presented in Chapter 3, and to supplement the data that I aimed to collect after the SHINE for Kids project finished. While I had hoped to engage

¹ SHINE for Kids works with and for young Australians affected by family members' involvement in the criminal justice system. It is based in New South Wales (NSW), Victoria and the ACT.

approximately a further eight participants, I was only able to interview a further four participants. Hence this thesis is based upon the accounts of 16 children and young people. The challenges I experienced in recruiting children and young people are outlined in under Recruitment, page 107.

It was evident within the research literature considered for this project that much of the focus on children and young people with regard to their parent's imprisonment was reported on from an adult's perspective. It was unclear in the literature as to whether these identified 'adult' concerns related to what children and young people perceived to be important. The adult-focused research literature emphasised the concern about the intergenerational transmission of crime (Halsey & Deegan, 2012) and the need for the already incarcerated parent to maintain or develop significant family relationships, with the aim of reducing recidivism (O'Brien, 2001; Sandifer, 2008). While these studies positioned children and young people in the lives of parents in prison, they did not provide any understanding of the needs or experiences of children when a parent is in prison.

This perceived gap in knowledge about children's perspectives on parental incarceration was also of particular relevance in the ACT, where I live and work. The ACT is located in south-east Australia and has one main city, Canberra. Canberra is the capital of Australia, positioned between Sydney and Melbourne. The population of the ACT at the time of the 2016 census was 397,397, with approximately 1.5% of the population identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2017). The majority of the ACT population lives in Canberra. The ACT is a self-governing territory with independent systems of police, courts and community correction services. However, prior to the commencement of this thesis, the ACT had recently commissioned a new prison and detention centre, the Alexander McConachie Centre. Before this prison was

built, all sentenced prisoners were detained in New South Wales (NSW).² Subsequently, my interest in understanding more about children's perspectives of parental incarceration was mixed with a desire to ensure that policy and practice responses developed in the ACT for children and young people were informed by their insights.

1.5 Research context

The existing research about children of prisoners has encompassed three broad areas of inquiry: (1) the impact of parental incarceration on children and young people, (2) the links to intergenerational crime and (3) the current responses to children and young people with a parent in prison (Flynn, Bartlett, Arias, Evans, & Burgess, 2015). Each of these existing areas of inquiry is explored in detail in chapters 2 and 3, respectively. Each of the publications in chapters 6 and 7 present further literature relevant to the specific focus of the paper. A brief discussion is provided here to establish the context for the present study.

An increasing number of Australians are affected by incarceration each year, with the most recent figures released reporting another rise in Australian imprisonment rates (ABS, 2017). Prison numbers have increased for the sixth consecutive year, representing a 6% increase from 30 June 2016 to June 2017 (ABS, 2017). The recognition of prisoners as parents has drawn the attention of researchers and policymakers alike. Previous criminological research has focused on the relationships in prisoners' families, reducing recidivism and the intergenerational links to offending behaviours for children and young people (Howarth & Rock, 2000; Murray & Farrington, 2008). The most recent Australian prisoner health survey reports that 46% of prisoners had children who depended on them for their basic needs, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait prisoners (54%) more likely to

² NSW is a state that borders the ACT. It has a population of approximately seven million (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

have children than non-Indigenous prisoners (43%) (AIHW, 2015). This survey also reports that prisoners often have more than one child, with 9% of prisoners with children having four or more dependent children (AIHW, 2015).

The ‘collateral consequences’ (Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999) of imprisonment, including direct and indirect negative effects on family, have been acknowledged for some time now, with research from the 1960s highlighting the emotional and social concerns for children with a parent in prison (Zalba, 1964). It is estimated that 5% of children in Australia will experience parental incarceration in their lifetime, although precise numbers are uncertain (Dennison, Stewart, & Freiberg, 2013). While Australian prisons do collect data about prisoners’ children (ACT Health, 2010), this data is not systematically collected across Australia, nor is it routinely available. Similar to international studies, Australian researchers continue to identify the need for comprehensive data to be collected about children of prisoners (Dennison et al., 2013; Flynn et al., 2015; Quilty, Levy, Howard, Barratt, & Butler, 2004).

Despite the lack of data, increasing international academic interest about children of prisoners has been noted in the current literature. Much of the literature about children of prisoners is generated from the US and UK and, increasingly, from other European countries. There is comparatively less known about this population group in Australia. Further, much of the international literature has tended to be based on traditional criminological and developmental psychology perspectives, and the impact of parental incarceration has been usually examined from the perspectives of carers, parents and professionals (Aaron & Dallaire, 2010; Arditti, 2012; Dennison et al., 2013; Murray & Murray, 2010).

This research highlights that the consequences of parental incarceration appear to be profoundly detrimental for children. Negative outcomes for children and young people include: internalising problems such as depression and anxiety (Murray & Farrington, 2008); increased risk of homelessness (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2014); disruption to children's care arrangements (Trotter, Flynn, & Baidawi, 2017); increased risk of antisocial behaviour (Murray, Farrington, & Sekol, 2012); financial instability (Geller, Garfinkel, & Western, 2011); and poorer educational outcomes (Foster & Hagan, 2009).

Considerable methodological and conceptual concerns to building knowledge about this population group are identified within the literature (Flynn et al., 2015) with small non-representative samples being used, including the use of datasets which do not specifically focus on this population group, such as the US Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing data (Wildeman, 2010). Further, considerable gaps remain in how we understand parental incarceration and the impact it has on children and young people. In particular, the literature is marked by an absence of children's perspectives. Sociologist William Corsaro argues that "children are the best sources for understanding childhood" (2005, p. 119). At the commencement of this research, the Australian literature that incorporated children and young people's perspectives on parental incarceration could only be identified in government and non-government reports, a doctoral thesis (Flynn, 2008) and one academic article providing insights from children and parents (Flynn, 2011). Studies in international literature including children's perspectives were also limited (Boswell, 2002; Chui, 2010; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Sack & Seidler, 1978).

Researchers are increasingly stressing the importance of understanding children's views and perspectives (Green & Hogan, 2005; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998). Contemporary child researchers are now able to draw on a range of frameworks to guide and inform their research. These new and innovative methodologies are closely connected to the social

changes that have occurred over the past two decades in how society views children and young people. The image of the child as an object has largely been replaced as one of subject or, most recently, participant (Christensen & James, 2015). This is due to some degree to the capacity of researchers to look beyond the developmental trajectory of childhood and embrace a more reflexive relationship with their subject, as well as to consider the contexts in which children live (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2008).

Studies that have utilised such methodologies in this field and within the social work context are limited. Understandings of parental incarceration that emphasise the social context and that seek children and young people's perspectives will allow us to examine children and young people's experiences of parental incarceration from a broader perspective and may uncover wider impacts than have traditionally been considered in criminological and developmental psychology fields.

1.6 Research question

In response to the limited research undertaken within Australia about the experiences of children with a parent in prison, the established gaps in knowledge, and the need to better understand how to effectively support children and young people who experience parental incarceration, the following research question was adopted:

- ***What are the experiences of children and young people who have or have had a parent in prison?***

In answering this question, the thesis contributes to children's perspectives about parental incarceration. In addition, in responding to this question, children and young people frequently provided an account of their lives prior to and after their parent was incarcerated. These insights also provide a greater understanding about the lives of

children and young people both before and after a parent was incarcerated. Consistent with the impetus for the study and my social work research values (Australian Association of Social Workers [AASW], 2010; Mullaly, 1997), these insights will be used to consider how service system responses to children and young people may be further developed.

Prior to the commencement of the research, ethics approval was obtained from the Australian Catholic University Human Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix G). This committee complies with standards and expectations required under the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (National Health and Medical Research Council [NHMRC], 2007).

1.7 Researcher position

This study arises out of the intersection between personal and professional identities that are shaped and informed by principles of social justice as discussed in the Australian Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (AASW, 2010) and from my commitment to anti-oppressive practice which is shaped by principles of consciousness-raising and empowerment (Mullaly, 1997). It is argued that, when undertaking research, researchers need to be aware of and take into account the interactions that occur between them and the research participants in the co-production of knowledge (Bradbury-Jones, 2007). The influence of the self, personal experiences and beliefs can impact on the questions researchers ask and how they understand and present the data (Berger, 2015).

While this is not inconsistent with other types of research, to ensure the quality of qualitative research and to minimise harm to those being researched, qualitative researchers use reflexivity as a way to reflect, observe and understand how their position may influence the research process and outcome (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2010).

Reflexivity is commonly viewed as the process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher's positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome (Berger, 2015, p. 220).

Undertaking such a process aims to enhance the credibility and rigour of the research (Attia & Edge, 2017).

In writing my research proposal for this thesis, I reflected on my personal and professional identity and experiences and considered how this may influence and impact on the research process and outcomes. Providing this brief overview now makes evident my values, beliefs, knowledge and preconceptions to the reader and highlights my conscious and deliberate effort to be attuned to how the research narrative is constructed (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2010).

Professional interest

As acknowledged in section 1.4, having worked at Institute of Child Protection Studies for a number of years, my passion and professional focus has been on ensuring that children and young people are given the opportunities to talk about the issues that affect them and to highlight the strengths and challenges that they identify as being important. This commitment to hearing children's voices and responding to the issues that they identify as central to them is a significant part of the reason I decided to undertake this doctorate.

This commitment was further reinforced in undertaking a literature search on the issues concerning 'children of prisoners.' At first glance, one might have presumed that children and young people had been integral to this research field. Much of the research concentrates on issues such as the impacts and effects of incarceration on children as well as key issues that include the care and placement of children when a parent is incarcerated,

the incidence of mental illness in children who have a parent in prison and the predication of intergenerational crime. However, further investigation revealed that children's voices were not evident in any of these studies. These studies were about adult perspectives of children's experiences (Al Gharaibeah, 2008; Lewis et al., 2008).

The knowledge that, from an adult's perspective, parental incarceration is so considerably deleterious for seemingly already vulnerable children and young people led me to question why there has ostensibly been so little research conducted to examine how children and young people understand and experience parental incarceration. Reflecting on the diversity of the current research, I very quickly realised that contemporary research about children of prisoners reflects earlier ideas of childhood, paternalistic constructions of children that do not acknowledge their competence or rights (James, 2007; Qvortrup, 2001). Children and young people are represented as the 'objects' of the research, reinforcing old perceptions that children do not have something salient to contribute.

My aim for this research is to acknowledge the important and valuable contribution that children and young people make and to incorporate in this research new discourses that identify children not as objects of research but as participants and therefore researched "in their own right" (James & Prout, 1990, p. 8). This research will primarily focus on their experiences 'in the here and now' rather than in relation to their future adult 'becomings' (Qvortrup, Bardy, Sgritta, & Wintersberger, 1994). In line with current thoughts about children and childhood, I aim to present an understanding of parental incarceration from a child's perspective—a perspective that suggests possibilities that may not otherwise have been considered.

Personal context

My personal desire to explore this topic stems from two pivotal moments in my life. The first happened in 1988 as part of my training as a student nurse. As a first-year student nurse, I spent time at Pentonville Prison in London, England to gain an understanding about health care in the justice system. Pentonville Prison was built in 1842, with the capacity to remand approximately 1,300 males over the age of 21. I remember walking around the prison and being struck by a morbid curiosity at seeing these men locked in cells or constrained behind a large white net that separated those on remand from those who were sentenced.

Walking away from the prison left me with mixed feelings. I felt glad that such places existed, that the community could be kept safe. However, I was also angered at how these men had been treated during our visit. I felt uncomfortable at how they had been on show for us to come and observe, how they had been spoken to by prison guards and how they been spoken about by the people who had shown us around the prison. The families who were visiting had also been treated with apparent equal disdain and lack of regard. The lack of dignity and respect that was so evident in the interactions between the prison guards and detainees made me reflect on notions of justice and rights. It made me rethink a system that I had previously believed in.

The second moment came many years later, when I began working for a foster care agency in Canberra, Australia. This job involved placing children in temporary family care while their parents, usually their mother, tried to address the issues in their life that prevented them from being able to care for their child. At this time I was given an autobiography (Barnacle, 2001) to read about a woman who had been incarcerated while pregnant and who had won the right to keep her child in prison with her, beyond the age of one. This

remarkable life story represented so many of the experiences of the parents and children that I had been working with at the time. It illustrated the challenges of drug and alcohol use, child abuse, mental illness, homelessness and social disconnection.

However, this life story also represented a side of the birth parents' experience that was often lacking in mainstream discourse. This story represented the love of a mother living in the midst of chaos and addiction. It highlighted to me that, despite all the difficulties and issues this woman experienced in her life, she loved her child and was being the best parent she could be at that time. It challenged not only the way I worked with and thought about birth parents but also what I had previously understood about incarceration. While the safety and wellbeing of a child would always be paramount, this life story gave me insight into an often disempowering and oppressive system and the affect it had on both the people inside it and those who vicariously lived with them—that is, their children.

1.8 Significance of the study

This study will fill an important gap in knowledge about children and young people's experiences of parental incarceration. This thesis focuses on the experiences of children who have experienced a parent in prison as described by children and young people themselves. As noted in section 1.5, there is a growing field of international research in relation to the families and children of prisoners; however, few studies are available within Australia about the experiences of these children, and our understanding of their emotional and social support needs is limited.

To address this gap, the study employed semi-structured interviews to explore how children and young people experience parental incarceration and to identify their perceived support needs. Interviewing children and young people directly is essential if we are to

understand their viewpoints and develop valuable and pertinent interventions to support their wellbeing (Hart, 2013). This study contributes to the knowledge about children of prisoners by adding Australian children and young people's voices to our understandings of what it means as a child or young person to experience a parent in prison. In exploring children's own understandings and experiences of parental incarceration, this thesis makes an essential contribution to the development of appropriate and sensitive practice within the multiple systems that this group of children engage with.

This study makes an important theoretical contribution. Childhood studies offers a valuable lens to explore the agency (and vulnerability and risk) that children and young people have within families where parents are incarcerated. Children's agency is almost always contingent on the social processes and structures that govern their interactions with adults (Davies, 2014). By drawing on children and young people's accounts of parental incarceration, this study illustrates how children frame their self-determination within the social and cultural contexts in which they live with a particular focus on the structural constraints of parental incarceration.

This research will result in benefits for not only those who participate in the research but also at a broader community level. By undertaking this research with children and young people, it is hoped that the findings of this study will contribute to the increasing awareness of the social justice issues experienced by children and their families as a result of incarceration. Building on the work of Paulo Freire (1970), Bob Mullaly (1997) argues that consciousness-raising encourages individuals to gain insights into their circumstances with a view for change. It is also anticipated that the findings of this study may be applied to guide social workers and other professionals who work with children and young people who experience parental incarceration to better identify and respond to the needs of children of prisoners and their families.

1.9 Outline of the thesis

The thesis is presented as a PhD thesis with publication and therefore is a hybrid thesis, structured to incorporate five published publications as well as unpublished work. As noted in section 1.2, Appendix A1 provides a list of publications included in the thesis. The structure of the thesis takes into consideration the need to provide the reader with a clear understanding of the entire research project. Each of the publications is inserted in a form consistent with non-published sections, and there is a single reference list at the end of the thesis. Published manuscripts are provided as appendices in the format they appear online (appendices B, C, D, E and F).

Chapter 1 sets out the background and context of the thesis, providing a rationale and understanding for the reader. The research question and the study's aims are outlined. The significance and utility of the study are discussed and the structure of the thesis is explained.

Chapter 2 presents an unpublished review of the literature, which provides a robust foundation for the research by considering the key areas relevant to this study. The chapter begins with a description of the local context, including the human rights framework that guides the operation of the ACT prison. The chapter continues with a discussion of Australian and international literature on parental imprisonment, with a specific focus on the impact of incarceration on children and young people.

Chapter 3 presents a published publication, which considers why—despite the available research describing the negative impact of parental incarceration on children—these children and young people remain practically invisible to policymakers and social programs. Using a combination of policy analyses and findings from interviews with

children and young people, it is argued that the way children of prisoners are currently constructed and the way they believe they are responded to by the systems that surround them are problematic if children's needs are to be responded to effectively.

Chapter 4 outlines the conceptual framework and methodology adopted by this study. The chapter begins as a traditional thesis chapter, outlining the scaffolding of the research design (Crotty, 1998). Two published research papers are then presented. The first publication outlines the theoretical approach underpinning the research and the methods employed to collect the data. The second publication discusses the use of an ethical reflexive approach which guided the research analysis. The chapter concludes with a section designed to present a coherent understanding of the approach to data analysis and also to give the reader an idea of the scope of the PhD research, which is not achieved by simply reading the publications alone. The publications (Flynn & Saunders, 2015; Saunders, McArthur, & Moore, 2015) are incorporated into the thesis in sections 4.4 and 4.5, respectively; they are also presented in their published versions at appendices C and D, respectively.

Chapters 5, 6, 7 provide detailed presentations of the findings using both published and unpublished material. Each of the key themes described by the children and young people about the impact of parental incarceration is reviewed, and children and young people's perspectives are explained.

Chapter 5 presents an unpublished chapter which provides an overview of the findings from interviews with children and young people. The chapter provides context to the children and young people's lives as described by them. It discusses the practical, social and emotional needs of children and young people when they have a parent in prison and how this relates to their day-to-day experiences.

Chapter 6 presents findings from the research focusing on the contact between children and young people and their incarcerated parent. These findings have been published (Saunders, 2017) and are incorporated into the thesis in section 6.2 and Appendix E. This publication considers the quality of relationships; children and young people's participation in decision-making; the challenges and benefits of contact; and the practical issues in maintaining relationships between children and their incarcerated parent. The publication highlights how maintaining contact can present particular challenges and how continuing contact with an incarcerated parent is a key issue.

Chapter 7 presents a published paper regarding how children and young people with a parent in prison experience stigma (Saunders, 2018). This publication focuses on how stigma manifests in children and young people's lives in different and distinct ways. These include direct instances, such as bullying and harassment, as well as more indirect consequences, such as in how children and young people anticipate judgement because of their parents' behaviour. Despite these differences, children and young people describe three key strategies to manage the stigma that they experience: maintaining privacy and withholding information; self-exclusion and self-reliance; and managing peer relationships. This publication is incorporated into the thesis and also presented in its published version (section 7.2 and Appendix F).

Chapter 8 positions the findings in the context of the wider literature and draws the thesis together. It highlights the ways in which the findings of the study support or challenge the current knowledge about the impact of parental incarceration on children and young people. The chapter discusses the implications of the findings for policymakers and practitioners working with children and young people with a parent in prison as well as for those working with the families of prisoners and the prisoners themselves. The chapter

concludes with my reflections on the strengths and limitations of the study and recommendations for further research.

1.10 Chapter summary

This chapter has explained the context and rationale for the present study and highlighted the significance and utility of the study. It has set out the positioning of the researcher and presented an overview of the structure of the thesis. The next chapter expands on the research context and provides a comprehensive understanding about the construction of children and young people in the policy context.

Chapter 2: Literature review

Social suffering ... a collective form of bad luck, that attaches itself like a fate, to all those that have been put together in those sites of social relegation, where personal suffering of each is augmented by all the suffering that comes from coexisting and living with so many suffering people together ... and more importantly, of the destiny effect from belonging to a stigmatised group.

Bourdieu, 1999, p.64

2.1 Introducing the chapter

Over three decades ago, academic interest about children of prisoners was only beginning to emerge; just a small number of studies described the possible impact of parental incarceration on children. This research was important, as it highlighted the vulnerability of, and risks to, children and young people when a parent was sent to prison. After being neglected for decades, how children and young people are affected by parental incarceration is now being studied with increasing frequency. Over the last half decade, there has been an increased interest by academics about the impact of parental incarceration, although the scope of this research and the empirical data have differed widely.

This chapter provides an overview of the available academic and grey literature about what is known about parental incarceration and the impact of this on children and young people. The chapter is divided into three sections. Beginning with what is known about the extent of parental incarceration in the international and Australian context, the chapter will then outline the many different challenges related to parental incarceration identified across the research literature. These sections are structured according to the key issues identified across this literature. This chapter will also highlight findings relating to both maternal and

paternal incarceration. The chapter then provides an overview of the limited research undertaken with children and young people. The chapter concludes with a discussion about the limitations of, and gaps in, the current literature and the differences between research that seeks children's views directly and research that draws conclusions about their experiences from adults such as parents and professionals.

2.2 Scope of international parental incarceration

As noted in section 1.5, much of the research undertaken about the impact of parental incarceration has emerged from the US, the UK and Europe. These contexts provide important insights to understanding the impact of incarceration on children and young people. With that said, it is important that researchers are aware that the impact of parental incarceration may also differ for children, depending on the socio-economic, cultural and political contexts in which they live (Murray, Janson, & Farrington, 2007; Jones & Wainaina-Woźna, 2013).

Currently, the US is described as experiencing mass incarceration rates (Rodriguez & Turanovic, 2018). Wildeman and Wakefield (2014), citing data from the Fragile Families survey, estimates that about five million children (approximately 7% of all children) have experienced the incarceration of a residential parent at some point during their childhood.

The UK also reports estimates of 200,000 children affected by parental incarceration, and it is estimated that across Europe 800,000 children have a parent in prison (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010; Manby, 2014; Williams, Papadopoulou, & Booth, 2012). It is unclear how many children and young people experience parental incarceration in China or across Asia, although journalist reports estimate that approximately 600,000 children under the age of 18 in China experience parental incarceration (Fan, 2006).

Scharff Smith (2014) notes that there are considerable differences for children living with the consequences of mass imprisonment in the US compared with those living with parental imprisonment in Scandinavian welfare states. He argues that children in Scandinavia may fare better because Scandinavian states have family-friendly prison policies combined with a welfare oriented justice system that provides extensive social support.

2.3 Scope of parental incarceration: Australia

Australia comprises eight states and territories, and each of these is responsible for the administration of its own criminal justice system. Each state and territory has independent systems of police, courts, prisons and community correction services. State and territory governments provide corrective services directly or through contracted arrangements with private agencies, and the operation of these services is considerably influenced by other areas of the criminal justice system, such as the police and courts. While the safekeeping of prisoners is central to all corrective services agencies, the responsibilities of agencies vary widely and may be managed differently across the jurisdictions (Productivity Commission, 2017). Accordingly, each state and territory government will vary in its recognition of and response to children of prisoners.

Within Australia the numbers of adults entering the criminal justice system continue to grow, with the total prisoner population increasing by 6% from 2016 to 2017 (with 41,202 individuals incarcerated) (ABS, 2018). At the commencement of this study, 29,383 individuals were incarcerated, on 30 June 2013. In 2017, males accounted for 92% of all prisoners (37,905 prisoners) and females the remaining 8% (3,299 prisoners). The numbers of both men and women entering the prison system across Australia continue to rise, with the proportion of women being incarcerated also increasing (ABS, 2018).

The high incidence of incarceration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is well documented (Corrigan, 2018; Cunneen, 2008; Kenny & Lennings, 2007). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the first peoples of Australia, and Aboriginal individuals aged 18 and over make up about 2% of the total population. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have, since colonisation by European settlers, disproportionately experienced considerable disadvantage and intergenerational trauma under government policies of assimilation. Until 1970, policy allowed for the forcible removal of Aboriginal children from their families, and the profound impact of this is still felt today (Funston & Herring, 2016; Rossiter et al., 2017).

The over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons in the criminal justice system has long been acknowledged. The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1987–1991) was undertaken in light of the high numbers of deaths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in police custody. The incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continues to be of concern; in 20 years, prison rates have increased from one in seven prisoners being an Aboriginal person to one in four (AIHW, 2015). The 2017 National Prisoner Census data indicates that there has been a 7% increase in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the criminal justice system since June 2016, and that just over one-quarter (27%) of the total prisoner population identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (11,307) (ABS, 2018).

While this census data does not tell us anything about children of prisoners specifically, it does suggest that, with the increase in the number of prisoners and the increase in the number of women being incarcerated, there is a considerable likelihood that the number of children affected by incarceration has also risen. Further, it is extremely worrying that the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly Aboriginal mothers (Wilson, Jones, & Gilles, 2014), continues to increase and that Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander children continue to experience family separation and the loss of their parents as they grow up.

Little is known about the number of children and young people affected by parental incarceration, as there is a lack of formal data within Australia. Similar to other countries, most jurisdictions do not routinely collect data about prisoners' children (Quilty et al., 2004; Pridmore, Levy, & McArthur, 2017). Estimates undertaken in 2004 approximate that 38,000 Australian children experience parental each year and that 145 000 children in Australia under the age of 16 have experienced parental incarceration at some point in their lives (Quilty et al., 2004).

A more recent prevalence study undertaken in Queensland estimated that 0.8% of children aged 17 or younger experienced the imprisonment of their father in a one-year period (Dennison, Smallbone, Stewart, Freiberg, & Teague, 2014). Dennison et al. report that this resembles Quilty's (2003) national estimates that 0.5% of children, 15 years or younger, have a father in prison. Dennison et al. (2014) also found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were nine times more likely to experience paternal imprisonment in one year and four times more likely to experience paternal imprisonment in their lifetime compared with non-Indigenous children. It is important to note that these numbers are estimates; with the increasing number of individuals entering the prison system, it is likely that higher numbers of children are affected.

Data about prisoners as parents has been included in the two most recent AIHW Prisoner Health Surveys (2013; 2015). The 2015 Prisoner Health Survey (AIHW, 2015) reported that, between them, the 1,011 prison entrants who participated in the survey had a total of 1,117 children who were dependent on them for their basic needs. The data illustrated that about one-quarter (26%) of the youngest prisoners aged less than 25 had dependent

children, compared with about one-half (49–51%) of older prisoners. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander entrants (54%) were more likely than non-Indigenous entrants (43%) to have dependent children. The proportions for men and women were similar. Prisoners' children tend to be quite young, with various Australian studies indicating that the majority of children are below the age of 12 years at the time of their parent's incarceration (Quilty et al., 2004; Woodward, 2002).

The local context

Similar to other jurisdictions, the number of adult prisoners in the ACT continues to increase (ABS, 2017). The number of adult prisoners in the ACT in June 2017 was 449. This is an increase of 2% from 2016. Three-quarters of prisoners had previously been imprisoned under sentence, and the ACT has the largest proportion of re-offending prisoners compared with any state and territory (the national average is 57%). The ACT also has a higher percentage of female prisoners than the national figures, with 9% of prisoners being female. The number of male prisoners has decreased between June 2016 and June 2017 (408 prisoners). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people account for 21% of prisoners in the ACT.

The most recent ACT Detainee Health Survey (ACT Health, 2016), which collected data from 98 individuals, reports that 71% of prisoners identified being a parent, although the number and age of children was not reported. Ninety-seven percent of parents surveyed reported that they were upset about being separated from their children, and 76% reported being concerned about their children's welfare. Sixty percent of respondents identified that the other parent was caring for the child, with 17% of respondents reporting that extended family members, including grandparents, were caring for their child.

An earlier survey of 135 ACT prisoners, conducted in 2011, identified 57% of respondents having between one and five biological children, combining to a total of 218 children. The report argued that, if these results were extrapolated to the whole of the prison population, a total of more than 400 ACT children were potentially impacted by parental incarcerated at the time of the study (ACT Health, 2010).

The ACT human rights context

The criminal justice system has an important position in counteracting and addressing the distressing effect of crime on victims as well as protecting the broader community. Yet such actions can have a deleterious effect on individuals and their families who frequently are already disadvantaged. In 2009, the ACT Human Rights Commissioner expressed in a conference paper to the Community Justice Coalition and International Commission of Jurists concerning human rights for prisoners that “the power of government is at its greatest where residents are detained in closed institutions by the state” and that incarcerated individuals are “extremely vulnerable to abuses of power, and this power imbalance imposes a continual moral duty on authorities and officials to act justly” (Watchirs, 2009, p. 2).

Watchirs (2009) highlights that, paradoxically, prisons were established in the UK as a progressive measure, removing punishment such as hanging and flogging. The notion that “People are sent to prison as punishment not for punishment” (Patterson, 1951 cited in Scott & Flynn, 2014) highlights that prisoners are entitled to be treated humanely and to be cared for safely in the time that they are punished. The United Nations Human Rights Committee highlights that prisoners should experience all rights set out in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), subject to “restrictions that are unavoidable in a closed environment” (United Nations General Assembly, 1966). A right of particular importance to prisoners and their children is the right for connection with family. This right

is provided in Article 23 of the ICCPR, which states “The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State” (United Nations General Assembly, 1966).

Until fairly recently, the ACT has depended on NSW to provide full-time correctional facilities for prisoners from the ACT. The first prison in the ACT to provide full-time detention and remand facilities was commissioned in 2009. This prison, the Alexander McConachie Centre, provides accommodation for all security levels and is the first prison in the country to be purpose built to meet human rights obligations and be run in accordance with human rights principles. This means that the prisoners detained at the Alexander McConachie Centre have a number of rights and protections explicitly recognised under the *Human Rights Act 2004* (ACT). Prisoners have the right to:

- be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person (section 19 of the *Human Rights Act 2004* and paragraph 7(c) of the *Corrections Management Act 2007*);
- the protection against torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (section 10 of the *Human Rights Act 2004* and paragraph 9(d) of the *Corrections Management Act 2007*);
- the protection of family according to part 3, section 11 of the *Human Rights Act 2004*. This right also refers Article 23 of the ICCPR, which states “The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.” (United Nations General Assembly, 1966).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was ratified by Australia in 1990 (United Nations, 1989). The convention has specified a number of obligations to protect children and prevent harm, and which are guided by the “principle of best

interests”. It recognises the important function of the family in caring for and protecting children but also provides the state the responsibility of protecting children from abuse or neglect and preserving a wide range of children’s rights, including “the right to development and the right to know and be cared for by parents” (United Nations, 1989). The criminal justice systems in Australia have been found to have inadvertent but considerable detrimental effects on families and children. It is argued that the individual and social costs of crime that are fundamentally endured by children as well as the broader community may be reduced by recognising and supporting the rights of children (Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders [VACRO], 2006).

2.4 The impact of parental incarceration

One of the key questions that the literature raises is to what extent parental incarceration might produce or encourage negative outcomes for children and young people. Although a number of studies are able to suggest an association between parental incarceration and certain outcomes for children, much of the literature highlights the difficulties in distinguishing the impact of parental incarceration from the effects of other risk factors faced by children of prisoners and other disadvantaged children more generally (Geller, Cooper, Garfinkel, Schwartz-Soicher & Mincy, 2012). In other words, the attribution, causality and contribution of parental incarceration to increasing the likelihood of adverse outcomes remains unclear.

Understanding how the effects of parental incarceration translate across countries and jurisdictions is an important consideration. Markson, Lamb and Lösel (2016) highlight that children of prisoners are not a homogenous group and that “there are many individual and environmental factors that may influence how they experience parental imprisonment” (p. 326). Yet, despite such influences, it is evident within the literature that there are a number of similarities of experiences found across the available research studies, which

indicates that there are some fundamental challenges inherent to the phenomenon of parental imprisonment. These identified challenges will now be discussed.

Emotional and behavioural challenges

Most empirical research about children of prisoners has focused on the behavioural and mental health outcomes that children and young people are more likely to exhibit. While a small number of studies are conducted using theoretical perspectives of attachment (Poehlmann, 2005; Poehlmann, Dallaire, Loper & Shear, 2010) and loss and bereavement (Arditti, 2012; Bocknek, Sanderson & Brittner, 2009), most studies are conducted from developmental psychology perspectives (see Dallaire, Arditti, Poehlmann, Lösel, & Murray).

These studies highlight that children display a range of behavioural and developmental problems during and following the imprisonment of a parent (Dennison, Foley, & Stewart, 2005), with the trauma of imprisonment not just exacerbating existing behaviour problems but creating new ones (King, 2005). This includes regressive behaviours such as bed-wetting; disruptive and aggressive behaviours such as hostility and difficulties with social integration; the use of drugs or alcohol and engagement in antisocial activities; and withdrawal-type behaviours such as daydreaming, unwillingness to engage in play, school avoidance and nightmares (Besemer, van de Weijer, & Dennison, 2018; Kjellstrand, Yu, Eddy, & Martinez, 2018). Developmental problems include impaired parent–child bonding, impaired socio-emotional development, developmental regressions, impaired ability to face future trauma, and poor self-concept (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2013). These problems can contribute to patterns of intergenerational offending, which is discussed in the next section.

Behavioural difficulties and developmental outcomes have been linked in part to the loss of family relationships, the lack of stability of care, and the neglect of a child's developmental, bonding and attachment needs caused by the separation of a child from their parent or parents, with this separation resulting in the disruption of normal developmental stages and growth milestones as well as long-term attachment, mental health and psychosocial difficulties (Flynn, 2011; New South Wales Standing Committee on Social Issues [NSW Standing Committee on Social Issues], 1997; Quilty et al., 2004; Woodward, 2002). This is particularly evident when a child is separated from their mother, who is more likely to be the child's primary carer; therefore, the separation often results in greater disruption (Woodward, 2002). A recent Australian study found that almost two-thirds of children with a mother in prison were displaced from their home, often into unplanned and unstable childcare arrangements (Flynn, 2011). Children of female offenders are more likely to be exposed to risk factors such as maternal substance abuse, socio-economic disadvantage, violence and trauma, which contributes to child maladjustment and perpetuates the cycle of intergenerational offending (Davis & Shlafer, 2017; Frye & Dawe, 2008).

A number of studies have looked at the physical and mental health consequences of having a parent in prison, with some studies identifying that these problems often lead to long-term health concerns (Arditti, 2012; Gaston, 2016). Sheehan and Levine (2006) found in their study of children with a parent in prison presenting at the Children's Court that one-third of children below school age and almost one-quarter of school-aged children were experiencing health problems, with health concerns being raised regarding malnourishment, chest problems, severe nappy rashes, poor hygiene and insufficient clothing. Even among children who do not come to the attention of statutory child protection services, health problems are prominent, with children of prisoners facing a higher occurrence of problems such as learning difficulties; hyperactivity; substance abuse

problems and exposure to illicit substances and alcohol in utero; sleep problems; eating disorders; and contact with infectious diseases such as hepatitis B and C and airborne infections (Bearse, 2008; Dennison et al., 2005; Purvis, Ward, & Willis 2011; Quilty et al., 2004; Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity, 2004; Turanovic, Rodriguez, & Pratt, 2012). This is also due in part to the poverty and deprivation often suffered by the families of prisoners even prior to the imprisonment of a parent, with families of prisoners frequently coming from among the most disadvantaged of backgrounds in modern society (Murray, 2007).

Many of the worries children experience appear to originate from a lack of knowledge and understanding about their parent's imprisonment. Studies from the UK and US identify that caregivers frequently withhold information from children or provide only limited accounts about the parent's imprisonment. Some parents and caregivers have provided alternate reasons for the parent's absence: that parents were away because of military duty, returned to school or were visiting a relative (Dallaire, 2007; Katz, 2002). Instead of this comforting children, Katz (2002) found that if children were provided with limited information about their incarcerated parent then they frequently envisaged situations which were far more frightening than the reality of their parent in prison. Children imagined that their parent had abandoned them or "was in a dungeon or in a terrible hospital or army" (Katz, 2002, p. 19).

While much of the research considers the negative impacts of parental incarceration on children and young people, a small number of studies are now beginning to consider childhood resilience and coping strategies used by children of prisoners. The recent study *Children of Prisoners: Interventions and Mitigations to Strengthen Mental Health* (the COPING study) looked at the mental health needs of children of prisoners across four European countries. It found that, while children were seen to experience similar psychological and social challenges across the four countries, access to interventions or

services that are aligned with their needs considerably contribute to strengthening their resiliency (Jones & Wainaina-Woźna, 2013). Further, the ways that children coped were influenced by the views assumed by the adults around them, and by how issues of parental imprisonment are discussed in their families (Mandby, Jones, Foca, Bieganski, & Starke, 2015).

Coping strategies of children with an imprisoned parent were also considered in a recent systematic review that reviewed 11 studies of children's self-reported coping strategies (Heinecke Thulstrup & Eklund Karlsson, 2017). The results of this study indicated that there was heterogeneity of coping strategies across the studies with children using distracting activities, support from organisations, mentoring programs and educational support. Individual coping strategies used by children were also identified and included minimising or lying about their situation and keeping secrets.

Trauma and emotional harm occur both from the separation of a child from their incarcerated parent and from the experiences of children over the whole course of the justice process: arrest, remand or bail, trial, sentencing, imprisonment and reunification (Arditti & Savla, 2015). While the effect that having a parent in prison has on a child is dependent on a number of factors—such as age, gender, their position in the family, their relationship with the absent parent, and the contact they have with the parent children with imprisoned parents as a group are at a significantly greater risk of suffering mental health difficulties than children who do not have parents in prison (Jones & Wainaina-woźna, 2013; Rosenberg, 2009). Overwhelmingly, parental incarceration has been found to result in a range of negative emotional and behavioural responses that, without adequate assistance and support, can develop significant long-term emotional, behavioural, developmental and physical health problems (Bocknek et al., 2009; Kinner, Alati, Najman, & Williams, 2007; Murray et al., 2012).

Emotional responses of children to parental incarceration can include feelings such as fear and anxiety, uncertainty, sadness, guilt, anger, confusion and shame (Manby, 2014; Tasca, Turanovic, White, & Rodriguez, 2014). Trauma can arise from being witness to a parent's arrest, particularly if the use of force is involved or if the arrest is unexpected or violent, exacerbating fears for a parent's wellbeing and leaving children distressed and in shock (Cunningham, 2001; Dallaire & Wilson, 2010; Tomaino et al., 2005). Also potentially traumatic is the uncertainty preceding trial, the changes in and dislocation of family during imprisonment, the child's experiences of visitation, and the readjustments of the family following release (King, 2005). Parental imprisonment often gives rise to certain highly upsetting fears and worries: that the child is somehow responsible for their parent's imprisonment, concerns for their parent's safety and welfare, that they are a burden upon the person caring for them while their parent is in prison, and a preoccupation with the uncertainty and instability of living arrangements (Cunningham, 2001; Gursansky, Harvey, McGrath, & O'Brien, 1998). Factors that mitigate the emotional trauma of parental incarceration include giving the family time in which to prepare for arrest and imprisonment, such as putting in place secure childcare plans, and supporting appropriate planning for reunification (Flynn, 2011).

Intergenerational offending

It has been argued that parental incarceration has a substantial effect on intergenerational criminal behaviour (National Crime Prevention, 2000; Miller, 2006; Murray, 2007). One of the key themes found across the available literature is that parental incarceration is a strong predictor of future criminal behaviour and association with the juvenile justice system, with some studies reporting that between 33% and 54% of prisoners have a family history of imprisonment (NSW Standing Committee on Social Issues, 1997; Seymour, 1998; Sheehan & Levine, 2006; Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity, 2004; Toohey, 2012; VACRO, 2000; Woodward, 2002). A figure of "six times

more likely” is regularly cited in the literature as well as by organisations working with these children (Tomaino et al., 2005; Miller, 2006). Murray and Farrington (2008) estimate that children of incarcerated parents have a three times greater risk of antisocial-delinquent outcomes than their peers (Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2008).

According to Flynn (2013), knowledge about intergenerational offending has been developed primarily in two ways: firstly, through self-reports from detainees about their family histories of offending and imprisonment and, secondly, through the examination of patterns of offending using large community datasets. Through these research studies, a number of risk factors have been identified.

Murray and Farrington (2008) suggest that separation between parent and child has considerable implications for the risk of children also entering the criminal justice system. Their study found that nearly half of boys who were separated from their parents between birth and 10 years because of parental incarceration were imprisoned as an adult. This compared to only a quarter of boys who were separated for other reasons (Murray & Farrington, 2008). This and other studies have also concluded that the antisocial behaviour of boys across their life is predicted by parental incarceration (Murray, Janson, & Farrington, 2007; Murray & Farrington 2008).

Parental incarceration has also been associated with mental health issues in males. Travis, McBride and Solomon (2003) identify that key developmental tasks are interrupted when there is a traumatic separation from parents, resulting in issues such as poor attachments, traumatic stress reactions, developmental delay or setbacks, poor boundaries and an altered capacity to manage future trauma. Such issues have also been found to be key risk factors for adult and juvenile offending (Farrington & Welsh, 2008).

While the processes of intergenerational disadvantage are complex, comprehending the impacts of parental separation under traumatic circumstances may go some way in helping to explain intergenerational criminal behaviour. A study by van de Weijer, Bijleveld and Blokland (2014) further considers intergenerational criminal behaviour and the separation of children and parents by divorce. Van de Weijer et al (2014) highlights that, for parents who have committed non-violent offences and are divorced, there is an increased risk that a child will be more likely to be convicted of a similar crime. On the other hand, van de Weijer et al (2014) report that, where parental offending has been violent, intergenerational offending is only evident in children whose parents did not divorce.

More recent research has begun to consider the environments and attributes of children of prisoners who have not offended in order to understand the factors that may protect children from offending later in life. Lösel and Farrington (2012) considered the protective factors with regard to the development of youth violence. They looked at individual and social factors and highlighted the protective nature of factors such as above-average intelligence, an easy temperament and pro-social attitudes, a close relationship with at least one parent, and clear parental supervision. Lösel and Farrington (2012) also indicated that a good relationship with school and non-offending peers, and a close neighbourhood environment were factors that mitigated any involvement in youth violence.

The parent–child relationship

Much of the research into the maintenance of family relationships during imprisonment focuses on the role of family cohesion in recidivism and offender management (Mills & Codd, 2008; Sharratt, 2014; Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity, 2004; Toohey, 2012). What is often overlooked is the importance of the parent–child relationship during the imprisonment of a parent and how this contributes to the wellbeing of children. The maintenance of strong ties between prisoner parents and their

children has been associated with not only reduced offender recidivism but also positive outcomes for the children and their families (Lösel, Pugh, Markson, Souza, & Lanskey, 2012; Miller, 2006; Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2008; Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity, 2004; Toohey, 2012; Travis, 2005). These include reduced rates of involvement with the juvenile justice system, decreased family trauma and stress, more positive experiences of reunification, and improved developmental outcomes.

The formation of bonds between parent and child is particularly important when the children are very young and when the imprisoned parent is a primary carer (usually the mother), with separation of a young child from a primary carer in the early years of life placing the child at higher risk of developing attachment difficulties (Bowlby, 1984) and subsequent social, emotional and behavioural problems (Miller, 2006; Murray, 2007; NSW Standing Committee on Social Issues, 1997). A 2010 US study on infants co-residing with their prisoner mothers for a 12-month period showed that these infants displayed higher levels of healthy and secure attachment behaviour compared to those who were separated from their mothers; in fact, these infants displayed secure attachment at rates comparable to healthy children in the general community, reducing their risk for the development of child psychopathy (Byrne, Goshin, & Joestl, 2010).

More recent research has begun to look at the role that contact with the incarcerated parent has on outcomes for children and young people. There is evidence that maintaining frequent contact between children and their incarcerated parent may be beneficial in reducing the deterioration of the parent–child relationship and mediating adjustment problems for the child (Lösel et al, 2012; Schlafer & Poehlmann, 2010). However, when a parent is incarcerated it is reported that parents and children and young people frequently

face significant emotional and practical barriers to maintaining contact (Ardiiti & Few, 2006; Flynn 2014).

When a parent is imprisoned, their parenting role changes considerably; subsequently, their identity as a parent undergoes changes (Toohey, 2012). Active parenting responsibilities, such as daily physical care and providing emotional and financial support, become difficult or impossible to maintain from prison, leaving prisoner parents struggling to redefine their relationship with their children. Tudball (2000) states in their review on the needs of families of prisoners that particular recurring concerns of prisoner parents include the prisoner's loss of parental authority, inability to protect their children, emotional distancing due to physical separation, and inability to participate in decision-making regarding their children. It is unsurprising that many prisoners struggle with parenting roles, considering the high proportion of prisoner parents having had parents who were themselves incarcerated (Dennison et al., 2005; Purvis et al., 2011; Quilty et al., 2004; Woodward, 2002). These challenges to the stability and nature of the parent-child relationship can jeopardise family cohesion and lead to the breakdown of family relationships, resulting in a greater likelihood of the child engaging in criminal behaviour and the perpetuation of the cycle of intergenerational offending (King, 2005; Toohey, 2012).

An important consideration in the maintenance of the parent-child relationship during imprisonment is that of enabling and facilitating appropriate contact. Prison visits, telephone calls and other forms of contact are an important means by which prisoners and their children can maintain family ties; however, a number of serious obstacles can prevent regular contact (Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity, 2004; Toohey, 2012). In order to visit prisoners, their families must have the financial means to transport themselves to the correctional facility, with many families relying on expensive

and inconsistent public transport or the assistance of friends or extended family (Flynn, 2014). Even if the family manages to visit, the location and nature of prison visits are often inadequate to facilitate quality contact between a parent and child (Christian, 2005; Ronay, 2011).

Other research also highlights that children also experience difficulties when visiting their parent. Commonly reported problems with children visiting their parents include a lack of child-friendly visiting facilities; unwelcoming or disrespectful treatment by correctional officers; intimidating security requirements, such as searches and drug detection dogs; and the time and emotional demands of visiting places on families (Flynn, 2014; Tomaino et al., 2005; Toohey, 2012; VACRO, 2006). These experiences can be frightening and traumatic for children and may result in reluctance to visit their parent (Toohey, 2012), while the imprisoned parent may also be reluctant for their child to visit due to their shame and embarrassment at being in prison and their concern for the impact of the prison environment on their child's emotional wellbeing (Tomaino et al., 2005). Telephone calls are an alternative to visits; however, calls to prisons are often expensive, restricted and difficult to facilitate. A report by Rosenberg (2009) states that contact can be further complicated by the relationship status between the two parents, with prisoner fathers' contact with and involvement in their children's lives largely being determined by their relationship with the children's mother and her willingness to facilitate contact. A US study by Roy and Dyson (2005) on contact between incarcerated fathers and their children found that almost half of the men in their study reported that the mothers of their children had actively discouraged their involvement. This was often due to these fathers' histories of substance abuse, violence or unpredictable engagement with their family.

Caregiving arrangements

While children's experiences of care vary substantially depending on whether their mother or father is imprisoned, it is argued that all children generally experience upheaval and instability in their care arrangements when a parent goes into prison (Sheehan & Levine, 2006; Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity, 2004; VACRO, 2006; Trotter, Flynn, & Baidawi, 2016). As mothers who are imprisoned are more likely to be primary or sole carers of their children (Healy, Foley, & Walsh, 2001), the imprisonment of a mother frequently results in more significant changes to care. A New York based study shows that 20% of children with a mother in prison were in foster care compared to 1% of children with a father in prison (Hirschfield et al., 2002 cited in VACRO, 2006). Statistically, children with a father in prison are most likely to be cared for by their other parent or step-parent, while children with a mother in prison are more likely to experience a diversity of care arrangements and a higher level of transience in living circumstances; these children's care arrangements may involve grandparents, extended family such as aunts, uncles and cousins, friends, foster carers and residential care units (Healy et al., 2001; Sheehan & Levine, 2006). A New Zealand study by Kingi (1999) indicates that one in five children with a mother in prison have more than one carer during their mother's imprisonment and one-quarter of children are placed with strangers; sibling groups are frequently separated during this process. Whether due to the incarceration of a primary caregiver or changes in finances that necessitate the relocation of a family, the experiences of children of incarcerated parents commonly involve multiple placements, relocation outside of the child's existing community, unfamiliar caregivers, or the loss of the family home (Tudball, 2000).

When children are able to be cared for within their family the majority of the time, the responsibility of their care rests with either the non-custodial parent or with the (usually maternal) grandparents (Dallaire, 2007; VACRO, 2006). This is a highly demanding role,

with the strain of the financial, physical and emotional responsibilities for the children often compounded by the family's typically limited resources and their struggle to also support the incarcerated parent (Comfort, 2008; Turanovic et al., 2012). When these care arrangements break down, or if there are no family members who are able to assume the responsibility of care, it is usually foster carers who take on these responsibilities. Children who enter out-of-home care usually do so only when placement with family members has either failed or is not considered to be in the child's best interests; nevertheless, the experiences of children in out-of-home care are frequently characterised by disruption to and instability of living arrangements (VACRO, 2006).

An earlier report on foster care in Victoria (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2003) found that, of the children in foster care during the study, 75% experienced more than one placement and 32% experienced more than four placements. A recent study by Uliando and Mellor (2012) indicated that children in out-of-home care are at a substantially higher risk of maltreatment than those who are not, both by individual perpetrators and by the child protection system. It is not surprising that so many parents have negative views of child protection services, with a number of studies indicating that parents would often rather place their children into unstable and unpredictable arrangements with family and friends than child protection services even when placement with family and friends is inappropriate for the child (NSW Standing Committee on Social Issues, 1997; Woodward, 2002). Reasons for this were generally related to distrust and fear of child protection services, with examples cited including fear that they would not be allowed to take their children back after release from prison, or that foster carers would be reluctant to return a child due to them being seen as bad parents.

More attention has been given to continuity of care for young children due to the need for the formation of healthy attachment; however, as can be seen by the number of placements

experienced by children in the foster care study by the Victorian Department of Human Services (2003), this may not be translated into practice as often as it should. Frequently, appropriate case-planning regarding the care of these children does not take place, and children may end up in the care of child protection services when parents are arrested unexpectedly or find themselves facing an unanticipated sentence of imprisonment with little time to make alternative arrangements (Healy et al., 2001). This lack of formal planning often leads to fragmented living circumstances (Sheehan & Levine, 2006). When a child's care arrangements change, they must adjust not only to unfamiliar caregivers and a new home but frequently also to a new and unfamiliar community and school, which can result in a loss of existing support networks (VACRO, 2006). This loss, which would be devastating enough to a child in any circumstance, is made particularly difficult when a child is also dealing with the separation from and imprisonment of a parent. These children find themselves at a greater risk of coming into contact with the juvenile justice system, of developing mental health or relationship problems, and of poor educational and employment outcomes (NSW Standing Committee on Social Issues, 1997; Sheehan & Levine, 2006).

An Australian study interviewed 151 primary care parent prisoners across NSW and Victoria to consider the care-planning for their children at the time of arrest, sentencing and imprisonment (Trotter et al., 2016). This study found that only a third of parents had discussions regarding the care of their children at the time of arrest and imprisonment and that there was considerable variation in the stability of the care provided to children. Those children placed in out-of-home care services experienced the most instability. Unsurprisingly, parents described feeling more satisfied with their children's care arrangements when there was more stability and when they had felt involved in the decision-making process.

Engagement in education

A meta-analysis by Murray et al. (2012) found that studies of parental incarceration and academic outcomes had varied results, showing an association but no clear causal patterns between parental incarceration and poor school performance. A number of smaller studies report that children with a parent in prison frequently have significant health and wellbeing problems which impact negatively on their educational outcomes and academic performance (Sheehan & Levine, 2006). These include issues such as language and literacy delays; aggressive, hypersensitive or sexualised behaviours which impact on peer integration at school; and a tendency towards asocial acts such as stealing from other children. Sheehan and Levine (2006) remark that, for the children in their study “it is clear that the combination of learning difficulties were compounded by behavioural problems and social integration into school life” (p. 70). Of the 87 school-aged children in the study, over half were receiving therapeutic services through their school (pp. 70–71).

Children with a parent in prison are likely to have problems with school attendance (Johnson & Easterling, 2012). This could be from a failure on behalf of a parent or carer to get a child to school (Sheehan & Levine, 2006), relocation and subsequent disruption of schooling due to altered care arrangements, or truancy and school avoidance (Cunningham, 2001; VACRO, 2006). As incarceration of a parent may result in a change of care arrangements or family relocation, this often necessitates a change of schools, which can result in not only significant disruption to a child’s education but also a loss of peer and teacher supports (Cunningham, 2001; Toohey, 2012; VACRO, 2006). This is particularly evident when a mother is imprisoned, as shown in a study by Flynn (2011) on children of women in prison, in which over two-thirds of the children involved in the study were displaced from their home due to maternal incarceration. Sheehan and Levine (2006) found that some children had not begun to attend school until they were placed in foster care. Older children may also find themselves shouldering the adult responsibilities of

care for younger siblings (Woodward, 2002), increasing their vulnerability to educational disruption.

Children with an incarcerated parent frequently experience bullying and teasing at school from their peers due to the stigma and shame surrounding imprisonment (NSW Steering Committee, 1997). Unfortunately, the stigma and shame experienced by children of prisoners can be reinforced by teachers and educational staff, who may unintentionally stereotype children (Woodward, 2002). Conversely, studies have also shown the critical and beneficial effects that appropriate school and teacher support can have upon children of prisoners. Howard and Johnson (2000; 1999), in their research into childhood resilience, state that at-risk children are more likely to reveal resilient characteristics if they attend a school where teachers are more caring and show interest in students, and remark that teachers can be an important influence in children's lives. Dennison et al. (2005) noted from interviews with carers that, although the participants frequently avoided informing schools of the imprisonment of a parent due to fear of stigma, when participants did inform teachers they reported them as being "very helpful and understanding", and put into place ways to manage disruptive behaviour in the classroom (p. 55). Similarly, VACRO's 2006 study found that when schools are informed appropriately the response is usually "extremely helpful" (p. 78) and can often be the only source of support and/or counselling available to these children. No formal procedures exist, however, to advise schools that a child's parent is incarcerated, and consequently many teachers are unaware of the student's situation (VACRO, 2006; Woodward, 2002).

While many of the studies report on negative schooling outcomes for children of prisoners, a small number of studies have identified that positive family relationships can have a mediating effect on school performance (Hagan & Foster, 2012). Some form of contact or written communication with an incarcerated parent has been found in particular to be of

benefit. For example, Trice and Brewster (2004) found that weekly contact between young people and their incarcerated parent led to them being less likely to drop out or be suspended from school. Dallaire et al. (2010) found that children's behaviour usually improved when they had received a letter from their incarcerated parent.

Further research that considers the mechanisms required to support children's academic achievement (Nichols, Loper, & Myer, 2015) highlights that school and family connectedness are important factors in school success. This study also highlights that a smaller school size and access to mental health services also promote successful academic outcomes.

Community and social support

As mentioned in the report by the NSW Standing Committee on Social Justice Issues (1997), the burdens placed on children of incarcerated parents are often exacerbated by “a lack of understanding and sympathy from friends and community” (p. 53). The shame and stigma associated with having a parent in prison serves only to further isolate an already vulnerable group of children (Cunningham, 2001; VACRO, 2000; Woodward, 2002); in fact, Flynn (2011) highlights that children of prisoners are isolated “both directly, in the active silencing they endured, and indirectly, in the lack of acknowledgement of their loss by teachers/schools, as well as the broader community” (pp. 11–12).

Children of prisoners are often expected by family or carers to conceal the fact that their parent is in prison for fear of stigma and ostracism from peers and the wider community. The stress of keeping a parent's imprisonment a secret, however, can contribute to the social and emotional distress already being experienced by a child, as well as isolate them from potential supports (NSW Standing Committee on Social Issues, 1997; VACRO, 2000; Woodward, 2002). Should a child's situation be disclosed, the child often fails to

receive support from their community but instead faces social exclusion, discrimination and the loss of existing social supports. This is particularly the case if there is media coverage surrounding the parent's crime, trial or sentencing (NSW Standing Committee on Social Issues, 1997; VACRO, 2000; Woodward, 2002). Conversely, social capital in the form of connections to friends, family and community has been shown to improve the prospects of prisoners and their families and act as a protective factor in mitigating the negative impact of incarceration (Mills & Codd, 2008).

Due to the limited public awareness of the problems faced by families of prisoners, there is also very little public sympathy provided with regard to the challenges these families face (Woodward, 2002). Children of prisoners can frequently find themselves associated with the offending behaviour of their parent, "contaminated in some way by the deeds of the offender" (Cunningham, 2001 p.37) and stereotyped as delinquents by the belief that prisoners are intrinsically bad parents and "breed criminals" (Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity, 2004, p. 6). These children experience the loss of a parent and the accompanying trauma and grief but are denied the sympathy of friends and community; their loss is unrecognised as valid or significant (Arditti, 2005; Toohey, 2012). Instead, they are often shunned not just by their peers through bullying and teasing but also by adults such as the parents of friends and schoolmates, who may avoid the child of a prisoner out of fear that the child will somehow pass criminality onto their own children (NSW Standing Committee on Social Issues, 1997). Children as young as 8 have reported an awareness of discrimination due to stereotyping (Murray, 2007; Spears Brown & Bigler, 2005; Toohey, 2012), and children's experiences of stigma can result in internalised stereotyping and low self-esteem as well as poor mental health, physical illness, academic difficulties, anger and defiant behaviours (Murray, 2007; Toohey, 2012).

Due to negative community attitudes and stigma, families may withdraw from existing support networks and can be reluctant to even try to access community resources. This can also mean reluctance to disclose changes in circumstances due to imprisonment to service providers such as entities providing social welfare payments, housing departments, schools and childcare centres, further complicating the family's access to support (Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity, 2004). Families are left with fewer resources, and women in particular are left to rely on friends and extended family members for financial and material support after the imprisonment of a partner (Granja, 2016). This often strains their remaining support systems and compounds the family's social exclusion (Turanovic et al., 2012).

Economic challenges

One of the greatest and most frequently experienced hardships that arises when a parent is imprisoned is that of reduced household income (Arditti, 2016; Datchi, Barretti, & Thompson, 2016). Families with a parent in prison tend to be disadvantaged prior to imprisonment, and as such when a mother or father is incarcerated the subsequent loss of income exacerbates the family's financial difficulties. A US study by Bearse (2008) indicates that children with parents in prison are 80% more likely to live in a household with economic hardship. A qualitative Australian study by Dennison and Smallbone (2015) found that carers of children with parents in prison self-reported high levels of financial stress to the point where their health was impacted. The decrease in finances impacts children considerably, both by reducing family resources and aggravating the social stigma that already accompanies imprisonment (Murray, 2007; Toohey, 2012).

The imprisonment of a parent impacts a family's financial situation differently depending on which parent is incarcerated. If the incarcerated parent is a primary carer or a breadwinner, this can substantially reduce the income of the family. This loss frequently

results in the remaining parent being left to take on additional roles and responsibilities in their partner's absence (Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity, 2004; Tomaino et al., 2005; Turanovic et al., 2012). As fathers are most likely to be the primary source of income for their household, the imprisonment of a father can cause severe hardship, with the mother left to assume the responsibility of the resulting financial pressures as well as childrearing responsibilities. Toohey (2012) found that, when this occurs, mothers are often required to depend on family and friends for assistance, and may be forced to relocate the family due to financial strain and an inability to pay mortgage or rental payments. When a mother is incarcerated, however, it is most often extended family who are left to shoulder the dual responsibilities of childrearing and finances due to the much higher numbers of women in prison who are primary or sole carers (Miller, 2006; Rosenberg, 2009). Grandparents who assume a custodial role usually do so informally, and consequently receive little or no additional financial assistance (Turanovic et al., 2012).

As well as the reduction in household finances due to loss of income, parental imprisonment is associated with an increased number of new expenses. These include the provision of money to the prisoner, phone calls, and visiting and transport costs, with some families living significant distances from the prison in which the parent is incarcerated (Rosenberg, 2009; Turanovic et al., 2012). Families can also find their finances drained through legal costs, putting them into debt prior even to sentencing and imprisonment. Further, in some cases the imprisonment of a father means the cessation of child support payments, thereby depriving his children's household of funds for the duration of his imprisonment (Shaw, 1987 cited in Woodward, 2002). Even after a prisoner is released and returns to the community, the stigma of imprisonment often impacts the prisoner's ability to find employment (Mills & Codd, 2008; Murray, 2007). The drop in household income combined with the costs of supporting and visiting a parent in prison can leave

children who are already facing the stigma of having a parent in prison burdened by the additional stigma of poverty (Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity, 2004; Toohey, 2012).

Access to support services

The ACT Legislative Assembly's 2004 report into families of offenders (Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity) reviewed the services available for the families of people in custody in the ACT and found them "grossly insufficient" (p. 22). The report also stated concerns that the only service funded to provide targeted support in 2004—that is, Prisoners Aid—had insufficient resources to meet demand. The scarcity of appropriate and accessible services for children of prisoners is also highlighted by studies Australia-wide, highlighting the lack of specialist services or interventions available to these children despite the significant increase in the number of children affected (Flynn, 2011). Tomaino et al., (2005) state that, of the small number of services that do exist, most are of limited scope or reliant on unpredictable funding arrangements.

Families of prisoners are able to access mainstream services such as mental health services, maternal and community health services, or government-supported playgroups and childcare; however, it is evident from a number of studies that children of prisoners have unique and specific service needs which require specialised services (Seymour, 1998; Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity, 2004; Woodward, 2002). Tudball (2000) found in interviews with prisoners that stigma and lack of understanding from service providers around the prison system and culture often prevented families from accessing mainstream services, while the NSW Standing Committee on Social Issues (1997) suggested that this arises due to fear or suspicion on behalf of caregivers towards child welfare services, and the belief that engaging with these services could lead to the removal of their children. In a review of prison-based parenting programs in Australia,

Newman, Fowler and Cashin (2011) suggest that providing parenting services inside correctional centres is a way to optimise the health and development of children of prisoners while avoiding the stigma and fear surrounding engagement with mainstream services. A number of studies have investigated the practicalities and efficacy of such programs (Rossiter et al., 2017; Rossiter et al., 2015; Zucker & Beatriz, 2016).

Prisoners identify a number of service requirements for their children and families. Prisoner parents interviewed by Tudball (2000) suggested a requirement for services such as family relationship counselling, prison-based child development education, and programs which give prisoners the opportunity to interact with their children in a more normal environment. Prisoners and their families also express the need for appropriate reunification planning and support (Flynn, 2011), as well as a strong need for somebody independent with an understanding of the prison system with whom they could speak. Many studies identified a shortage of information provided to prisoners, their families and children during arrest, sentencing and incarceration (Bloom & Philips, 2017; Katz, 2017), with far-reaching consequences should, for example, a lack of awareness of prison rules and policy result in the denial of a visit or the severance of contact (Hairston, 2003), or a lack of knowledge of support services or available resources result in unnecessary hardship. In a review of the literature, Woodward (2002) identified a lack of services available for children and families through which they could address the impact of imprisonment upon their lives, including possibilities such as support groups for children and caregivers, and specialised counselling.

2.5 Children's perspectives

While many studies are interested in children's perspectives of having a parent in prison, few researchers have been willing to speak to children directly, usually due to ethical concerns and difficulties in obtaining consent from parents or carers (Flynn & Saunders, 2015). Many carers believe that asking children to speak about their experiences will be

traumatic for them, and have no desire for their children to re-live the trauma of their experiences (Al Gharaibeh, 2008; Boswell, 2002; Loureiro, 2010). Some carers keep the parent's imprisonment a secret from the child or give alternative reasons for the parent's absence, believing that this will be easier for the child. Others are afraid that their confidentiality will be breached and worry that an interview will lead to involvement with child protection services or correctional facilities (Dallaire, 2007).

As has been identified, most studies on the needs and experiences of children of prisoners involve speaking to carers, parents or service providers rather than the children themselves, and while this does provide data on the issues and problems that children of prisoners face, children's direct experiences and perceptions can differ from adults' perceptions of their experiences, with children often having different worries and concerns to those of their carers (Dallaire, 2007; Mackintosh, Myers, & Kennon, 2006; Woodward, 2002). Children are able to express a strong desire to have their voice heard and for adults to understand the impact that imprisonment has on them (Loureiro, 2010), and many are both willing to discuss the painful topic of their parent's imprisonment and capable of articulating their experiences (Sack & Seidler, 1978).

As noted earlier, only a limited number of studies were identified that engaged children and young people in research about parental incarceration. Apart from Flynn (2008), the remaining studies that involve children and young people's self-reported experiences were conducted in an international context (Sack & Seidler, 1978; Boswell, 2002; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Chui, 2010; Moore, Convery, & Scraton, 2011). An early US study by Sack and Seidler in 1978 consisted of interviews with 22 children from 13 families about paternal incarceration; Boswell's 2002 study of paternal incarceration consisted of interviews with 17 UK children, at home or in prison waiting rooms; a study by Beck and Jones (2007) included qualitative interviews with 19 children about death row in the US;

Nesmith and Ruhland's (2008) interviewed 34 US children; Bocknek et al. (2009) interviewed 35 children who had a relative in prison and were taking part in a mentoring program; Chui's (2010) Chinese study consisted of parent and child interviews, of which 10 participants were children aged between 3 and 18; and Moore et al.'s (2011) Northern Irish study including focus groups, of which 14 participants were children.

In addition to these studies, a number of other studies, predominantly from the US, used standardised measures with children to assess factors such as affective and cognitive dimensions of young people's relationships with parents and friends (Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010), internal and external behaviours (Shlafer, Poehlmann, Coffino, & Hanneman, 2009) and perceptions of warmth and acceptance related to children's behaviours (Mackintosh et al., 2006).

Two doctoral theses were also included in the literature in order to expand the discussion about children's perspectives, by Flynn (2008) and Manby (2014). The grey literature that included children and young people's perspectives about parental incarceration comprised the following reports: a UK study by Brown, Dibb, Shenton and Elson (2001), who interviewed 53 young people across four regions of the UK; Cunningham and Baker's, (2003) study focusing on maternal incarceration, with a survey of 45 mothers and interviews with six children and one young person; a Scottish study by Louiero (2010) in which 11 children young people aged 4 to 15 were interviewed; and a UK study by Lösel (2012), who interviewed 68 children at two points in time about the risk and protective factors in the resettlement of imprisoned fathers with their families.

Most recently, the University of Huddersfield in the UK released a report on the COPING project, a pan-European research project which considered the characteristics and resilience of children with a parent in prison across four countries (Jones & Wainaina-

Woźna, 2013). This report includes the findings of interviews with 161 children undertaken in the UK, Germany, Sweden and Romania. Similar to many other studies, the majority of parents in prison were fathers. Findings from this study have very recently begun to be published (Manby, et al., 2015; Manby, 2016; Robertson et al., 2016).

The findings across the published and grey literature that include children's perspectives relate to a number of recurring themes: children's thoughts about their parent when they are absent and their need to maintain connections with them while they are in prison; their feelings of isolation and disconnection from decision-making processes at the point of arrest to the release of their parent; their fears and worries about their parent being in prison; their access to adequate and age appropriate information about their parent; and their experiences of shame and stigma perpetuated by their peers at school.

Children's firsthand accounts described in an early US study by Sack and Seidler (1978) highlight the challenges children have in accepting the fact that their parent is in prison. The interviews with children revealed that children frequently reassessed their perceptions of their parent, sometimes having to adjust their understanding of 'who' their parent was now. Nonetheless, children in this study described the importance of maintaining contact with their incarcerated father. Sack and Seidler point out that this need for contact may be due to the fact that these children needed to maintain this parent-child relationship as few children had relationships outside of the family, and they reported having limited or no friends that they could rely on.

A later UK study by Boswell (2002) which considered children's perspectives of paternal incarceration also found that children wanted to continue a meaningful relationship with their incarcerated parent. Boswell asked children about their likes and dislikes of visiting their incarcerated parent. All the children in the study described that the contact between

children and their incarcerated parents was mostly positive, despite their mixed feelings on the existing prison facilities. Children communicated with their incarcerated parent via a range of methods, including phone calls, photographs, letters and cards, with each of these being identified as important as the next.

A US study by Bocknek et al. (2009) which focused on the issue of ambiguous loss when a parent was imprisoned also describes the importance of relationships between children and their parents in prison. The children interviewed in this study viewed their incarcerated parent as an important person in their network of social supports. This was also evident for children who had limited contact with a parent or where contact was described as unpredictable. Further, many of the children anticipated some form of later reunification with their parent. A study by Chui (2010) that considered the broader consequences of incarceration in the Chinese context found that children who were not able to maintain a connection with their incarcerated parent compared it to the loss of a parent through death, with Bocknek et al. (2009) also drawing similarities between the two events.

The COPING project reported findings on a range of issues, including family relationships, contact between children and their incarcerated parent, and services and interventions, including findings in relation to the adult criminal justice system (Jones & Wainaina-Woźna, 2013).

A report on behalf of Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People and Families Outside (Loureiro, 2010) described that the children and young people interviewed frequently experienced feelings of powerlessness and a desire to have their opinions and experiences heard. The children and young people in this study fervently believed that their opinions and feelings should be taken into account by the criminal justice system, particularly when their parent was sentenced. They further described that

the impact of parental imprisonment on their lives was not taken into account, and they conveyed the need to be given the opportunity to share their opinion in situations concerning them. Chui (2010) also reported that children's experiences of parental incarceration were marked by a sense of powerlessness, and that these feelings of powerlessness were particularly with regard to children's involvement in decisions around having contact with their parent while in prison.

Feelings of powerlessness and helplessness were not the only feelings that impacted on children's wellbeing. A number of studies have illustrated that children express many different worries and anxieties around their parent's incarceration. Bocknek et al. (2009) report that children fear that they will also be arrested. Boswell (2002) describes that children express fears that the parent will never be released from prison, or that when they are they will return to old habits.

Child participants in Boswell's study (2002) described that they would prefer being told the facts about their parent's imprisonment, and in other studies children and young people articulated their confusion and frustration about the lack of information provided to them (Bocknek et al., 2009; Sack & Seidler, 1978). Bocknek et al. (2009) also found that children who had been provided with more information about their parent's incarceration were more at ease with discussing it. Sack and Seidler (1978) also observed in interviews with both parents and children that children who had been provided with the opportunity to see their parents in prison had any worries that they previously had experienced alleviated by the visit. For the most part, these children described visiting their parent as a positive experience.

Finally, stigma and secrecy was another theme found across the literature. Jones et al. (2013) highlight that the loss of status and the discrimination experienced by children due

to having a parent in prison can lead to children feeling shame. This emotion was also found to be associated with negative mental health effects for children and young people.

Nesmith and Ruhland (2008) describe how all the children and young people who participated in their study reported worries and concerns about whether to disclose to friends and teachers that they have a parent in prison. Children and young people revealed that they were acutely aware of the risks that resulted from providing this information to peers. Subsequently, many children reported that they did not provide this information and preferred to keep their information private. Boswell (2002) also reports that the child participants in this study expressed a need to keep their parent's incarceration a secret due to the fear that this information would have negative consequences.

Some of the negative consequences described by children in international studies about parental incarceration include bullying, isolation, limited friendships and relationships that were troubled (Boswell, 2002; Chui, 2010). Many of the children across the studies describe being bullied by their peers more often than they spoke about friends as being a source of support (Bocknek et al., 2009; Flynn, 2011; Lösel et al., 2012; Loureiro, 2010). Interestingly, in one study there were a small number of young people who had disclosed to peers that their parent was in prison. These children reported positive experiences such as a new friendship and feelings of camaraderie (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008).

Other studies have also found that children demonstrate an awareness of, worry about or even responsibility for adult needs as well as the caregiving parents' stressors and practical needs. Children in these studies speak of feelings of guilt and of self-blame (Boswell, 2002; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Chui (2010) also reports that children identify feelings of worry about being a burden to their caregiver, particularly in relation to the reduction in domestic income and the family's ongoing financial needs.

2.6 Gaps, limitations and summary of the available literature

In considering the research literature about children of prisoners, I have found that the research about children of prisoners, remains predominantly located in the US and European contexts. Much of this research has focused on the measurement and understanding of emotional wellbeing and the behaviour of children and young people and is located in the criminological and developmental psychology literature. This literature considers these issues from the perspective of identifying and managing the risks of future criminal behaviour.

The literature about children of prisoners has also taken a particular focus on other risks for children and young people, related to mental health and academic achievement. For example, research about school attendance and school support has considered how to better support children of prisoners; however, the majority of these studies involve stakeholders who are not children. More recently, gendered perspectives of maternal and paternal incarceration have been considered. Again, this research is usually undertaken with adults and with a focus on intergenerational offending and developmental risks.

While much academic literature has begun to recognise and record the impact of incarceration on children and young people, it remains evident from this research that they remain invisible to the systems that surround them. Emerging research from Europe and Australia involving self-reported experiences of children and young people highlight the lack of visibility children have in the adult criminal justice system (Jones & Wainaina-Woźna, 2013; Flynn et al., 2015). While research has found that this may in part be due to parents and caregivers' decisions to not disclose information about parental incarceration (Chui & Yeung, 2016), there is little robust analysis about why this population remains invisible at a policy level.

As evident throughout Chapter 2, few studies have included the self-reported perspectives of children and young people. Poehlmann et al. (2010) highlight that speaking to children and young people about their experiences is a “key next step in this line of research” (p. 595). The small number of international studies that have been undertaken highlight the difficulties children and young people experience with visiting their parent, the lack of knowledge or information they have about their parent’s imprisonment, and their experiences of stigmatisation. Within Australia, similar to the international context, there has been a growing interest about children of prisoners. Flynn (2008) has led the way with a number of important publications outlining the impact of incarceration for children and young people in Victoria. Other Australian research conducted in Victoria, Queensland and NSW about children of prisoners has largely been undertaken with adult stakeholders or using file data. While these studies provide important understandings of the impact of parental incarceration, they do not provide, from a child or young person’s perspective, a complete understanding of the process of arrest, incarceration and release. They also do not consider the impact of multiple instances of incarceration across the life of the child or young person.

In acknowledging the gaps and limitations in the current research, this thesis will adopt a sociology of childhood approach, where children are viewed as competent actors who have capacity to share their experiences and perspectives of parental incarceration. This thesis will seek to understand a more holistic perspective of children and young people and their experiences of parental incarceration.

2.7 Chapter summary

This literature review has presented a body of research that considers the impact of parental incarceration on children and young people. It included discussions of international and Australian research from a range of disciplines, including criminology,

developmental psychology, health and social work. Considerable academic interest has been taken in this group of children over the past two decades. However, research that seeks the self-reported experiences of children and young people remains limited.

Chapter 3 will consider how children of prisoners have been responded to. While much attention and research has been focused on identifying risk factors for children and young people related to their parent's incarceration, this research has also highlighted the invisible nature of this population group. The next chapter will consider why this is the case.

Chapter 3: Children of prisoners – constructing children in policy

*Onto the child we heap the thwarted longings of decaying societies and
try to figure something better. It's a hard burden for children to carry.
Surely they should be their own future; not ours.*
Burman, 2001 (p.11).

3.1 Introducing the chapter

Chapter 2 established that there is an extensive body of literature from the UK and the US that describes the impact of parental incarceration on children and young people. Few studies have been undertaken within Australia that speak directly with children and young people. In addition, the focus of the research that does exist is largely on developmental theories and quantitative methodologies. The previous chapter further established that, despite the available research describing the negative impact of parental incarceration on children and young people, children of prisoners remain a largely invisible population to the systems that surround them.

Continuing with the issue of children of prisoners remaining largely invisible, Chapter 3 presents a publication that considers why children and young people remain neglected by policymakers and social programs. This chapter includes the views of children and young people who participated in this research study as well as an analysis of relevant publicly available ACT policy documents. This publication is included in this section of the thesis to illustrate how social policies play a key role in the lives of children yet their position within society has meant that their particular needs and concerns can remain hidden and often unacknowledged (James & Prout, 2015). The publication included in Chapter 3 provides a brief overview of the methodology and methods employed for this thesis, which are discussed more comprehensively in Chapter 4. Informed by the theoretical perspectives

of social constructionism and childhood studies, the publication reviews how children are constructed and responded to in social policy.

Social constructionism is a useful way to examine and understand children and childhood. This perspective allows the researcher to both question and dispense assumptions that underpin what is known. Rather than assuming that what we know is a 'biological given' or 'social fact', social constructionism permits that the knowledge that we create is interpreted and defined through processes of social action (Corsaro, 2015). Social constructionism contends that what we know, can be different based on the context and the events surrounding the time period in which they exist. Moreover, the way we construct or understand such taken for granted realities such as childhood is related to the ways in which individuals and groups participate in the construction of their perceived social reality. Subsequently, while that reality is knowledge that guides our behaviour, we all have different views and understandings of it.

Using a social constructionist perspective, this chapter considers the influence of the dominant paradigms of how we construct childhood and children of prisoners in social policy. The policies and interventions designed for children are important spaces for the way in which childhood and adult-child relations are organised and constructed. In implementing such policies social workers become key agents for reinforcing and defining childhood and appropriate adult-child relations within the broader society.

This chapter considers how present-day cultural norms and institutional policies position children so that they frequently need to rely on adults to petition for them. However, it is evident that adults continually fail to provide the opportunities required for many children of prisoners to flourish. The publication concludes that the systems that surround children

need to commit to viewing children holistically, to ensure that children are supported in ways that meet their needs.

3.2 Publication 1 – ‘Representing children of prisoners in the public domain: Comparing children’s views and policy documents’

Saunders, V., & McArthur, M. (2018). Representing children of prisoners in the public domain: Comparing children’s views and policy documents. *Australian Social Work*, 1–13. DOI: 10.1080/0312407X.2018.1492623



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Representing Children of Prisoners in the Public Domain: Comparing Children’s Views and Policy Documents

Vicky Saunders & Morag McArthur

Abstract

Australian adult prisoner numbers continue to rise to what have been described as unprecedented and unsustainable levels. Research highlights that there are wide-ranging consequences of incarceration for families and particularly for children. Despite the available research describing the negative impact of parental incarceration on children, it has been argued that these children remain virtually invisible to policy makers and social programs. Using a combination of policy analyses and findings from a research project undertaken in the ACT aimed at identifying the needs of children who have a parent in prison, we examine how this group of children are constructed and responded to by the

systems that surround them. It is argued that it is only when children are seen in a more holistic way can systems respond more collaboratively to effectively support children.

Implication statements

- Children of prisoners have needed to rely on adults to recognise the problem of parental incarceration and petition for them.
- It is time for those who inform and develop social policy to consider the impact of current policies on children.
- It is only when children are seen in a more holistic way that systems can respond more collaboratively to effectively support them.

Keywords

Children of prisoners, children, social policy, children's rights

Introduction

Global prison rates are on the rise, with both the number of people incarcerated worldwide and the global rate of incarceration continuing to increase in every region (Allen, 2015).

Australia has not been immune to this and has also seen an increase in the imprisonment rate in most states and territories (ABS, 2016). Recent Australian research highlights that when we imprison adults, we are frequently imprisoning parents (AIHW, 2015) and over a decade ago, it was estimated that 5% of children in Australia experience parental incarceration within their lifetime (Quilty, 2005). With rising incarceration rates it is likely that this number is higher now. Unsurprisingly, this has wide-ranging consequences for the families and children of those incarcerated (Flynn & Saunders, 2015) and research highlights the multiplicity of problems experienced by children with a parent in prison (Arditti, 2012; Flynn, Naylor, & Fernandez Arias, 2015).

The United Nations identified children of prisoners as one of the world's most vulnerable groups of children (Jones & Hirschfield, 2015). Yet despite this international recognition and a national call to better understand and respond to this group of children (VACRO, 2011), it is argued that there has been a limited policy response across Australia (Eriksson & Flynn, 2015) and that children remain invisible. This paper begins by considering the different constructions of children and young people commonly found in social policy discourse (Hendrick, 1997; Wyness, 2012).

We then aim to answer the research question 'how are children of prisoners constructed and responded to by the systems that surround them'? We do this in two stages: firstly, drawing on publicly available ACT and national policy and legislation we explore how children of prisoners are discussed, framed and their needs identified in publically available documents. Of particular interest is whether children of prisoners as a group have become recognised or not and therefore responded to and addressed by social policies.

We then provide an analysis, from a study, conducted in the ACT, with a sample of children whose parents have been incarcerated to explore how they experience the systems that surround them. By comparing how children of prisoners are evident or not in policy documents to how children experience the service systems sheds light on how well systems are developed to meet this groups' specific needs. We argue that the way children are constructed generally and children of prisoners specifically, effects the policy response. This policy response is problematic if children's needs are to be responded to effectively.

Constructing children in policy

Social policies play a key role in the lives of children, yet their position within society has meant that their particular needs and concerns can remain hidden and often

unacknowledged (James & Prout, 2015). James, Jenks and Prout (1998) have been influential in broadening the scope of childhood to a sociological level which defines childhood as a social category. Childhood theorists have reflected on the varying constructions or understandings of childhood within society over the centuries and how these understandings have influenced the theoretical and political positioning of children (Hendrick, 1997; Wyness, 2012). Depending upon the prevailing perspective, children are viewed in ways that may or may not contribute to their visibility (Skevik, 2003). The following section describes the key ways children can be constructed in policy.

Understanding such constructions will provide a framework to analyse the question of how children of prisoners are constructed in policy and how they have been responded too.

Children as appendages of parents

Mayall (2006) argues that the rhetoric of social policy in Western developed countries has led to children being understood mainly within the parent–child relationship. There is an assumption that children are essentially the property and responsibility of the parent and children’s rights and welfare are seen to be subsumed under those of their parents (Doyle & Timms, 2014). The ambivalence about children’s separate needs and interests to those of their parents can be linked to the supposed relationship between the family and the state (Foley et al., 2003). Within Western developed countries, the family remains the key institution in which children are in theory both provided for and protected. Social policy aims to support parents rather than to undermine their authority and intervention is deemed as legitimate only where children are at risk of significant harm. Where families experience disadvantage, it is assumed that children’s interests are the same as their parents, and therefore policy and service responses tend to be geared towards parents with the intent that children will also benefit by a trickle-down effect.

Children at risk

Where parents are no longer able to care for their children it then becomes the responsibility of the state to ensure that they are looked after. However, Ellis (2015) describes that interventions designed for children are largely based around conflicting notions of childhood. In social welfare policies, children are frequently constructed as either being ‘at risk’ of abuse or as ‘risky’ and out-of-control and dangerous (Morrow, 2011). The notion of children being constructed as victims or ‘at risk of abuse’ is underpinned by the prevailing idea that children are inherently vulnerable, defenceless and have limited capacity to foresee, negotiate and overcome ever-present dangers (Sorin, 2005; Scott et al., 1998).

Construing children as vulnerable may result in an overemphasis on ‘rescuing’ children, leading to responses that may protect children from harm but also prevents them from “acting with agency in favour of the adult who knows best” (Sorin, 2005, p. 13). This has led to children increasingly becoming the subjects of both explicit as well as covert regulation and governance (Cobb, Danby, & Farrell, 2005). Rose describes:

Childhood is the most intensively governed sector of personal existence ... the focus of innumerable projects that purport to safeguard it from physical, sexual and moral danger, to ensure its ‘normal’ development (Rose, in James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998, p. 7).

The category of ‘at risk’ has also been used to describe or identify young people who engage in particular behaviours or who are ‘troubled’ by disadvantage or particular social problems such as crime, homelessness, substance abuse and early pregnancy (Bessant, 2001). These groups are thought likely to fail to achieve a satisfying and fulfilling adult life, and while still understood as vulnerable, are also constructed in ways that require more punitive social control (Wyness, 2012). The assumption that the

individual young person is central to ‘the problem’ (of, for example, crime, homelessness or substance abuse), means that disciplinary policy interventions by ‘the state’ are then legitimised (Bessant, 2001).

Children as rights holders

More recently theories of childhood have focused on recognising that children have separate needs and interests from those of their parents and that they have the right to have these needs and interests responded to. The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child promotes social justice and empowerment for children, and it helps to make children’s interests visible to government and other institutions (Freeman, 2011). When the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child came into force in Australia in 1990, children were recognised as rights-bearers for the first time. Apart from its ethical and moral force, the convention is a legal document which sets out standards, and assigns responsibility for ensuring these standards are met. By ratifying the treaty, Australia has obligations to realise the rights in the convention for children. The increased recognition that children are rights-bearers has influenced in some policy domains a growing commitment towards the participation of children in decision-making processes.

Children as future adults

Policy and legislation concerning children is frequently developed to ensure that children are equipped for a successful adulthood. For example, the job of schooling and youth development is to build and support the individual competencies and characteristics most strongly associated with adult success. Further, much of our nation’s economic health is linked to investment in strategies that help equip children with the skills and knowledge to fully contribute to society as an adult. This way of responding to children emphasises children as ‘becoming’ adults which infers the ‘incompetent’ and ‘incomplete’ notion of the child and child as one who must be developed (Uprichard, 2008).

Identifying the key ways children can be constructed in policy: as appendages of parents, at risk, as rights holders or, as future adults, provides a framework to analyse the question of how children of prisoners are constructed in policy and how they have been responded too. Before providing this analysis, the broader research project that aimed to identify the needs of children of prisoners in the ACT is described.

Methods

To answer the question of how children of prisoners are constructed and responded to by the systems that surround them in Australian policy two sources of data were considered: an analysis of national and local policy documents and interview data from children who have a parent in prison to explore how they experience the service system.

Policy analysis

An analysis of national (Australian federal government) and local (ACT) legislation and policy documents that have been released over the last decade was completed. Documents included reports, government publications, census data and program documentation from the policy domains of child welfare, education, criminal justice, and Indigenous and youth affairs. It would be expected that these are the policy domains that may identify this group of children who have a parent in prison. The search strategies included searching online databases, journals, Google Scholar and ACT and federal government websites. Initial search terms used were combinations of the following:

- child*
- mother
- father
- family/families
- parent*
- prisoner*
- incarceration
- needs

To ensure an accurate search of the issues other terms used included: policy, interventions, under 18 years of age, programs, experiences, reunification, case conference, transition, social connectedness; inclusion, exclusion, primary carer, care plan. Many keywords used were interchangeable, such as prisoner/inmate/offender, incarceration/imprisonment, and reunification/resettlement.

Children's study

The data analysed for this paper was collected by the authors for a study commissioned by SHINE for Kids, an advocacy and support service for children of prisoners. This study aimed to understand children's experiences of parental incarceration, their social emotional and psychological support needs and how these were currently being responded to (or not). The study was carried out in the ACT and was conducted with the approval of the Australian Catholic University Human Research Ethics Committee.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 children and young people aged between 8 and 18 years of age. Practical and ethical challenges associated with identifying and recruiting children of prisoners in research are well documented in the literature and this study had similar difficulties (Lewis et al., 2008; Al Gharaibeh, 2008; Tomaino et al., 2005). This subsequently led to a smaller group of children being interviewed than originally anticipated.

Consent was obtained from each participant and parental or guardian consent was obtained where possible. Interviews lasted approximately an hour. All children and young people interviewed had experienced the incarceration of their father; three children had also experienced their mother imprisoned.

Data reanalysis

The original children's study's research question was 'what are the experiences and support needs of children with a parent in prison?' The question asked in the reanalysis was 'how are children of prisoners constructed and responded to in social policy?' This type of qualitative secondary analysis "transcends the focus of the primary data from which the data were derived" to consider "new empirical, theoretical or methodological questions" (Heaton, 2004, p. 39). It involves the researcher re-engaging with the data through re-reading transcripts and documents and listening to audio recordings again. It is critical that the researcher try to be "freshly open to what could be going on" and to consider the data in new ways (Wästerfors, Åkerström, & Jacobsson, 2014). Informed by a literature review about how children are constructed in policy, a deductive analytic approach was undertaken. Children and young people frequently described how they felt they were perceived by systems or individuals which could potentially offer support. These concepts, words and phrases were identified within each of the transcripts and were subject to thematic analysis using NVivo, a computer assisted data software package.

A key limitation to this study was that the findings cannot be considered as representative of other states and territories in Australia, as only national and ACT policy and legislation were analysed. In addition, these analyses were reliant on documentation publicly available and accessible online.

The results of the data-gathering process are presented in the following sections. First the findings from the policy analysis are provided followed by the thematically analysed interviews with children and young people.

Findings

Children of prisoners: Legislation and policy

Children's interests span across a broad scope of social policy domains including health, education, welfare, and housing. The principle system that impacts this group of children however is the criminal justice system.

The criminal justice system

Within the criminal justice system in the ACT, legislation including the *Bail Act 1992*; *Children and Young People Act 2008*; *Crimes (Sentence Administration) Act 2005*; *Human Rights Act 2004* and *Corrections Management Act 2007* were examined. Similar to findings from other Australian jurisdictions (Flynn et al., 2015) children of prisoners in the ACT are not explicitly responded to by the criminal justice system. As Flynn and colleagues (2015) report, in respect of other states in Australia (Victoria and NSW), there is a "systemic predisposition to ignore children" (p. 15) within the adult criminal justice system. No direct references are made to the welfare of children of prisoners in the legislation except in decision-making about whether or not a child may reside with a female parent in the ACT prison.

The *Corrections Management Act 2007*'s Corrections Management (Women and Children Program) Policy 2015 does acknowledge the harm that children may experience due to the loss and separation of a parent when incarcerated. This policy makes provisions for children under the age of 4 to reside in the prison with their mother. The policy states that the best interest of the child is the primary consideration when applying this policy (ACT Parliamentary Counsel, 2015). To date no application has been approved for a female prisoner to care for her child in the prison although there have been three applications from 2010 to 2014 (Watchirs, McKinnon, Costello, & Thomson, 2014).

In the *Crimes (Sentence Administration) Act 2005* section 116ZF the needs of a family are taken into account when a voluntary community work order is made for a fine defaulter. In regards to the *Bail Act 1992* there are a range of considerations taken when determining eligibility of bail for an offender. In the *Bail Act 1992* section 22, the criteria for bail includes a subsection, which allows the officer of the court to have regard to the likely effect of a refusal of bail on the person's family or dependents. Other than this section, there is no reference to children where the primary carer has been incarcerated.

Two ACT Government reports have been released, one in 2004 (Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity, 2004) and another in 2008, that specifically consider children in the ACT affected by parental incarceration (ACT Government, 2008). Both documents highlight the lack of support children experience when their parent is incarcerated and both make a number of recommendations, which include the need for better data collection concerning children of prisoners, and the need for future research and the review and development of protocols within Corrective Services regarding children of incarcerated parents. The standing committee (2004) also recommended as a matter of priority that the government appoint a children's officer within ACT Corrective Services to promote the needs of children when they have a parent arrested and subsequently incarcerated so that appropriate responses can be made to ensure their safety and wellbeing. Currently this appointment has not been made.

Other policy domains

Outside of the criminal justice system most ACT social policy documents that may relate to children of prisoners give broad directions for service providers and government who work with 'vulnerable' client groups. While strategic documents are often broad frameworks, internal policy and procedure documents of the departments within the ACT Government which work with these target groups also lacked detail about children of

prisoners. The policy review found it difficult to publicly access documents, such as policy directives, and existing internal documents were not available freely, unlike in other jurisdictions in Australia, such as Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia. It would appear that there is very little information available in the ACT about children of prisoners, whether about, for example, their needs, strengths or ways of including them in the systems in which they move around and operate within.

Responding to children: What children say

While studies conducted over the past few decades are interested in the impact of incarceration on children and young people, researchers describe that they frequently find it difficult to speak to children directly, often due to ethical concerns or difficulties obtaining consent from parents or carers (Loureiro, 2010; VACRO, 2006; Saunders et al., 2015). Subsequently few studies have based their assessment of need on the voices of children themselves. While data collected from carers, parents or service providers highlights issues and problems children of prisoners face, it is acknowledged that children's direct experiences and perceptions can differ from adult's perceptions of their experiences, with children often having different worries and concerns to those of their carers (Dallaire, 2007; Mackintosh et al., 2006).

Considering how children perceived the ways in which they were responded to by the different systems they interacted with provides some indication of how they are currently constructed in both local and broader level policy reflecting the lack of acknowledgement of the issues they face. In re-examining the interview data it was evident that the children in this study were concentrating on managing the day-to-day issues, including their relationship with their incarcerated parent. They experienced a range of challenges across all life domains and regularly collided with systems, such as those of adult criminal justice, child protection, education, housing and income support.

Criminal justice system

Children described how they were not considered or responded to by any part of the criminal justice system. From the time of the parent being arrested to the time of the parent's release, children spoke about the challenges they experienced and how their needs were frequently ignored. The challenges that children described were dynamic in nature, often being present at different periods of their lives and occurring for different lengths of time. Children spoke about their experiences of the criminal justice system as a process, involving a series of steps beginning with their parents' arrest and ending with their release, and as frequently commencing again when conditions were breached or new crimes were committed. They described that some of the issues affected them only at the time of arrest and others were linked specifically to incarceration. Other new unexpected issues were also identified when parents were released.

Children highlighted that throughout this process there was no-one to support them or inform them of what was going on, and that there was a need to rely on family members, friends and media to access information and support.

No-one told me or anyone I know. I went to my friend's house on Tuesday I think ... and I didn't hear from him or I didn't know he [dad] was in jail till Friday, I didn't see him until about a month later, yeah, a month. I found out through the internet ... I didn't even get told, I had to look it up myself which I ended up finding a big article on dad and I'd never been told by anyone, I didn't never get contacted (Max, 14 years).

Children also spoke about other interactions with the criminal justice system where a number of young people had had to report crimes to the police that had been perpetrated against them. Police had responded to them as 'future criminals' by connecting these

children to their incarcerated parent through surnames or addresses leaving children feeling discriminated against and further stigmatised.

Child protection

A small number of children that participated in the study had been placed into out-of-home care as a result of their parent's offending behaviour and because of parental incarceration. Children in care reported that decisions made about whether contact occurred with their incarcerated parents, and the frequency of this contact, were subjective and often dependent on the caseworker or the court.

Children also described how this system failed them and their families in that it often did not understand or meet their needs. Moreover children described feeling disempowered and unsafe.

No, they don't actually keep me safe and even if their definition of safe—like taking me from a place and putting me in another—I'm just going to do what I want to do. There's nothing they can actually do, they're just annoying, if anything they're wasting their time, they don't even bother with me anymore (Natasha, 14 years).

Education

All children described difficulties with school. They highlighted that the distress and extra responsibility they experienced when a parent was incarcerated severely impacted their ability to achieve the academic success they aspired to.

Few children felt confident enough to let teachers know about their parent's incarceration due to the shame associated with this. Therefore, the support that children received at school was dependent on the relationships they had with teachers. If young people did not

trust the teachers, then they were unlikely to seek any assistance. Where they did seek extra support they were sometimes met with unhelpful judgements about their situation.

He just started telling me stories about children ... in the drug world and yeah I was just like, 'Is that how you see me, is that like what you're visualising me as?' I didn't really know how to take it so yeah; it was just awkward, very awkward (Jessie Claire, 17 years).

Housing

A number of young people described having to live with friends or boyfriends or in refuges due to no longer being able to live with one parent when their other was incarcerated. This was often due to the stressful relationships that children had with the other parent. Such decisions were often made within the privacy of the family; however, these children described receiving no support from child protection because of their age (15 and above). Subsequently, while children were put in contact with support services, they were expected to then negotiate and navigate the service system alone, leaving them more vulnerable and confused.

I would go to a refuge, but personally I think they're scary. I know there is good people in them, but it's the bad people that scare me, people who've come from a background like mine but even worse. So they've come from domestic violence at home and all that stuff, it just scares me. I don't really want to be associated with scary people (Sarah, 15 years).

Income support

A number of children reported how the imprisonment of a parent impacted significantly on family finances. For those who described themselves as homeless this was particularly problematic. While a number of participants described coming from families that already had low incomes, nearly all stated that the incarceration of the other parent either reduced

joint incomes or inhibited the remaining parent's capacity to work. Low incomes also prevented some young people from accessing services and other social opportunities. It also meant that young people were put in the position of having to ask for financial support in order to participate in regular school activities.

Discussion

The objective of this article was to explore how children and young people are currently constructed and responded to in policy when a parent is incarcerated by examining policies, legislation and the direct experiences of children affected. Using the key ways that children are currently constructed in policy; as appendages of parents, at risk, as rights holders, or, as future adults, we can begin to develop a more nuanced understanding of their positioning in social policy.

It is evident from the policy and legislation analysis in the ACT, and from the interviews with children, that the criminal justice system does not see itself as being responsible for the children of prisoners. Similar to other jurisdictions, the focus of the ACT adult criminal justice system is on the rehabilitation and reform of the individual prisoners' criminogenic behaviour rather than working more holistically with the family. This 'individualised' construction of prisoners creates what Wallis and Dennison (2015) describe as "a kind of blindness" (p. 96) within the criminal justice system to the effects of incarceration on children. The focus on seeing criminals as 'individuals', alongside a 'tough on crime' approach, promotes a powerful discourse that essentially overshadows the needs of children of prisoners. Children as rights holders remain invisible to this institution, despite the obligations that the Convention on the Rights of the Child places on institutions such as the criminal justice system to ensure that children's separate needs and interests are met. Social work's commitment to social justice and human rights makes it essential for the professionals working within in this system to address this.

Where children are ‘recognised’ in the criminal justice system it is because they have been reduced to being seen as an appendage to their parent and are then responded to accordingly. The findings from this study highlight that children may (or may not) have their needs met through being involved in interventions that focus on their incarcerated parent. An example of this is found within the ACT policy and legislation, which provides opportunity for some parents to be able to continue caring for younger children while in prison. The nature of incarceration also inherently removes the amount of responsibility a parent can maintain to care for their child. The data in this study highlights how the child’s position then changes to one of ‘at risk’.

Such and Walker (2005) argue that in policy, parents “are the providers of care and are responsible for children’s moral upbringing” (p. 54). Yet when state intervention removes the parent and their capacity to care for a child, the question remains as to whose responsibility it is then to ensure children’s rights are promoted as well as protected. It is apparent from the interview data from children that having a parent incarcerated frequently positions children as ‘being at risk’—at risk of harm and at risk of doing harm. Children’s interview data highlights the potential of intergenerational criminality and that children with a parent in prison are frequently responded to as future criminals. Uprichard (2008) argues that the construction of the ‘becoming’ child places importance on that which the child will be rather than that which the child is, which may omit or neglect children’s present needs. Providing children with early interventions that meet their present needs may reduce the experiences of intergenerational offenders.

Such examples as identified in this article demonstrate how the different constructions of children shape the responses offered to them. At best children are seen as appendages to their parents with the hope that there is a trickle-down effect from interventions; at worst

we see constructions that fail to acknowledge that children and young people have unique needs and challenges that are separate from their incarcerated parent.

From the analysis of current policy and legislation and the interviews with children, children of prisoners have needed to rely on adults to recognise the problem of parental incarceration and petition for them. In doing so adults have traditionally asked other adults about children's experiences and in doing so have constructed and responded to them in the following ways: as children 'at risk', as appendages to parents and as future adults or future 'criminals'. While these categories provide some level of response for children, they fail to promote children's rights or always recognise their separate needs and interests.

Conclusion

The evidence concerning the needs of children affected by parental incarceration is growing, yet the uptake or recognition of this remains limited in policy. Children experiencing parental incarceration deserve, and undeniably have a right to receive adequate support and assistance wherever possible to ensure their safety and wellbeing and to reduce some of the negative impacts that they have endured as a result of having a parent incarcerated. How policymakers and professionals such as social workers respond to such issues though is challenging. Given social work's mission to work with and on behalf of society's most vulnerable it is time for those who inform and develop social policy to consider the impact of current policies on children generally, as it is only when children are seen in a more holistic way that systems can respond more collaboratively to effectively support them. Little progress can be made until policy processes allow for more holistic characterisation of social problems to occur.

[END]

3.3 Chapter summary

This chapter presented a published manuscript which illustrated that there is growing concern about the needs of children affected by parental incarceration yet the social recognition and response to this remains limited in social policy. This chapter emphasises that children with a parent in prison are constructed and responded to in the following ways: as children ‘at risk’, as appendages to parents and as future adults or future ‘criminals’. While these categories provide some level of response for children, they fail to promote children’s rights do not necessarily recognise their separate needs and interests.

The following chapter presents the methodology and conceptual framework guiding the research. This chapter incorporates two publications and a written account to provide a complete account of the methods for conducting the research, ethical considerations and the process for data analysis.

Chapter 4. Methodology

4.1 Introducing the chapter

In the preceding chapters, the concerns about the impact of parental incarceration were discussed, along with the lack of qualitative insights from children and young people about their experiences or needs when they have a parent in prison. Drawing on that foundation, this chapter outlines the conceptual framework and methodology for the study to answer the research question identified in Chapter 1:

- *What are the experiences of children and young people who have or have had a parent in prison?*

The chapter begins with a review of the research approaches that I have drawn on and which comprise the conceptual approach to this study. No empirical investigation can be successful without theory to guide its choice of questions (Crotty, 1998), and stating my conceptual approach not only forces me to be explicit about what I am doing but also provides a scaffold within which strategies for the research design can be determined, the data collected and meaning made (Crotty, 1998).

The chapter then presents two publications which have been published for the purpose of this thesis and with the intent of disseminating knowledge derived from this study (sections 4.4 and 4.5). These publications combined provide a theoretical explanation of the intent of the research, what the research seeks to achieve and how it did this (Leshem & Trafford, 2007; Liamputtong, 2006).

While these two publications provide a robust description of many of the aspects of the theoretical approach, methodology and research methods used in this study, understandably there are some elements of the research design that have not been included

within the broader thesis. To ensure a complete and thorough account of the methodology and research design is provided, this chapter will also include a description of the characteristics of the sample of children interviewed and an overview of methods utilised for analysing the interview data.

A review of the research approaches that I have drawn on and which comprise the conceptual approach to this study will now precede the presentation of both publications.

4.2 Conceptual framework

To address the research questions, the study used a qualitative methodology to gain an in-depth understanding of children and young people's experiences of parental incarceration and to understand what their needs are when they have a parent in prison. The conceptual framework, including the guiding epistemology and theoretical perspectives, brings attention to the importance of children and young people's perspectives.

Crotty highlights that there is a distinct hierarchical level of decision-making in the research design process (1998). Epistemology, theoretical perspectives, methodologies and research methods are conceptually distinct and yet integrally related to one another (Crotty, 1998). Underpinning the entire research process is the epistemology, or the stance of the researcher (Crotty, 1998). The chosen epistemology conveys philosophical assumptions about what constitutes knowledge and informs the choice of theoretical perspective (Burr, 1995). The theoretical perspective will be implicit in the research questions and subsequently influence the choice of methodology. Lastly, the chosen methodology will define the research methods (Crotty, 1998).

Crotty recognises that he omits ontology from the research process, as epistemology and ontology are not only mutually exclusive but also problematic to distinguish conceptually:

“to talk about the construction of meaning (epistemology) is to talk of the construction of a meaningful reality (ontology)” (Crotty, 1998. p. 10). The research design process for this study is illustrated in Figure 1 and expanded upon with reference to Crotty’s (1998) four research design elements.

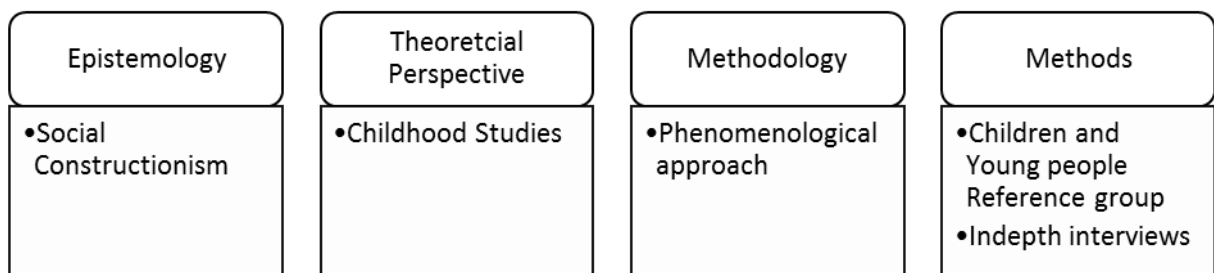


Figure 1: Research design scaffolding

Social constructionist epistemology

Epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge, “how we know, what we know” (Crotty, 1998, p. 3) and provides an understanding about what kinds of knowledge are possible. To understand the individual experiences of children who have experienced parental incarceration, a social constructionist approach is utilised.

Guba and Lincoln (1998) argue that constructivist research is relativist, transactional and subjectivist. Adopting a relativist position considers that there are no absolute truths that exist in the world and that a diversity of interpretations may be existent. This approach recognises that truths arise from individual experiences which are influenced by those discourses which are culturally available to the person and defined by their interactions with people and systems around them. Subjectivist research positions the world of an individual as unknowable and the role of the researcher as interpreting and constructing an understanding of the individual’s world as they see it (Ezzy, 2013).

In line with these concepts, this study focused on providing an account of children's experiences of parental incarceration which considered the social structures of children's environments and the historical and cultural contexts in which they live. It did not expect to provide a definitive account of children's experiences of parental incarceration or a single understanding of their needs. Rather, this study endeavours to offer new and differing insights from the multiple realities of children and young people participating in this study.

The theoretical lens of childhood studies

Crotty contends the theoretical perspective of the research design as "the philosophical stance informing the methodology" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). In line with a social constructionist epistemology, childhood studies provides the theoretical lens for this study. A childhood studies approach views children and young people as competent social actors and privileges children's own voices in attempts to understand their lives (Morrow, 2011). This approach provides the impetus for this research and the chosen research methods, which are described in Publication 2, 'Research with children of prisoners: Methodological considerations for bringing youth in from the margin'.

Methodology: A phenomenological approach

Identifying an appropriate methodology was the next stage of the research design. As Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) argue, this is not so much a matter of choosing "the tool for the job" but a question of identifying "what the job is" (p. 43). Quantitative methods are not intended to understand or get to the heart of a person's lived experience (Richards, 2009). Qualitative paradigms offer the opportunity to develop an understanding of research participants within their social reality (Bryman, 2016). As identified in Chapter 1, the aim of this research study is to understand the experiences of parental incarceration as

perceived by children and young people. This requires an approach that captures the perceptions and meanings of children's experiences of having a parent in prison.

Phenomenology is concerned with the question of how individuals make sense of the world (Bryman, 2016). This is particularly important for this research, where the aim was to understand and describe children and young people's experiences of parental incarceration, without, as much as possible, the addition or layering of my own knowledge about this issue. The development of phenomenological ideas are attributed to a number of philosophers, including Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre (Smith et al., 2009). Phenomenology searches for the meaning, or the 'essence', of an individual's experience rather than trying to measure or explain it (Smith et al., 2009). The basis of a phenomenological approach is the development of a dialogue between the researcher and the data which can afford researchers the opportunity to explore in more detail the lived experience of the research participants (Alase, 2017). In this study, this required talking with children and young people and seeking access to their life worlds, to listen to their descriptions of parental incarceration and to describe what they perceived as central to this experience.

One of the reported challenges of undertaking a phenomenological approach is the unavoidable interpretation that a researcher applies to the participant data (Moustakas, 1994; Padgett, 2008; Smith et al., 2009). It is important to recognise that within a phenomenological approach there is a movement away from a simple descriptive interest to a necessarily interpretative one. As such, the researcher becomes "engaged in a double hermeneutic because the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them" (Smith et al., 2009 p. 3). Consequently, the descriptions elicited from the participants in this research also need to be understood within the context and "the shared, overlapping and relational nature of [an individual's]

engagement in the world” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 17). In trying to understand and make sense of children and young people’s experiences, it was important for me to identify and keep in check any preconceived beliefs or knowledge I had about parental incarceration. Within a phenomenological approach there is an emphasis on undertaking a reflexive stance (Padgett, 2008), which is discussed further in the second paper included in this chapter (section 4.5 Publication 3 – ‘Not seen and not heard: Ethical considerations of research with children of prisoners’, p. 122). The ethical considerations of conducting research are also discussed within this paper (Responding to ethical and methodological issues, p. 131).

In my attempt to interpret or make sense of what was happening for children and young people, I was aware of my role as researcher in this process and my commitment to an understanding and presenting the child or young person’s point of view. Although, in order to acknowledge and put aside my own preconceptions and knowledge, as much as I could, I chose to employ an interpretative phenomenological analysis of the data.

For the reason that the ethical considerations, recruitment strategies and methods employed to undertake this study are discussed in detail within Publication 2 and Publication 3. To avoid repetition for the reader, the interpretative phenomenological analysis will now be discussed.

Data analysis: Interpretative phenomenological analysis

In line with the epistemological and theoretical underpinnings of the study the qualitative data analysis needed to ensure that the rich accounts of the experiences of parental incarceration were captured effectively (Padgett, 2008). As noted in the previous section, the study included the use of the data analysis method of interpretative phenomenological analysis. Developed by British psychologist Jonathon Smith (2009), this approach has been

applied to a range of research studies where significant life experiences are seen to impact and shape identity (Braun & Clarke, 2013). IPA is particularly suited to social work research (Braun & Clarke, 2013) and Houston and Mullan-Jensen (2012) argue that IPA can bring new depth to social work qualitative studies – providing “psychological depth” into the individual’s experience of an issue, and “sociological width”, by highlighting the role of discourse and societal structure in social life (p. 268).

The application of interpretative phenomenological analysis commences with staying close to participants’ accounts, before finally incorporating conceptual interpretations from the researcher. This research began with collecting concrete descriptions of lived experiences from each participant. These conversations provided first person accounts and in language used by the children and young people to describe their experience to the researcher. These conversations were recorded and later transcribed. I undertook later analysis of these descriptions, taking into account the context of the children’s lives, allowing social processes and structures to be also considered (Smith et al., 2009). This recognition aligns with the epistemological and theoretical stances of this thesis. The distinct steps of IPA allowed me to work methodically and purposefully through each case (Smith et al., 2009). These steps, and how they were applied in the present study, are outlined below.

Coding

The coding of each transcript was based on a standard template, highlighted in the work of Smith et al. (2009). Each of these templates were uploaded to NVIVO a computer assisted data software package. The template included columns which provided space for me to write descriptive, linguistic and conceptual comments as I read through each of the transcripts line by line.

Descriptive Coding The initial coding of the interview transcripts involved re-reading each transcript word-by word, and line-by-line. Instead of looking for particular occurrences, this process requires the researcher to identify “anything and everything of interest or relevance to answering your research question, within your entire dataset”, only becoming more selective later in the analytic process (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 206). Reading and re-reading transcripts while making copious notes enabled me to completely immerse myself in the participants’ worlds and to identify the emergent themes. The descriptive comments incorporated my first impressions of what I believed the child or young person was describing. These ideas were informed by what I knew about the child from what they had told me and the knowledge I had already gained from the literature review. This process allowed me to focus on the experiences and meanings that were central to each of the participants, ensuring that all participants’ transcripts were provided with the same consideration and that those who perhaps were more articulate about their experience were not privileged over others (Hood, 2016).

Linguistic Coding: The second column of my template allowed for me to comment on the linguistic aspects of the interview. Linguistic comments were provided by listening to the recordings again while reading the transcripts and noting the participant’s tone of voice, their silences, and their depth and feeling of voice and sound, including expressions of emotions such as laughter and seriousness (Smith et al., 2009; Spyrou, 2016). This process also provided an opportunity to consider participants’ choice of language, use of metaphors and non-verbal communication and activities that children and young people may have engaged in when describing particular issues.

Coding for Conceptual Comments : The penultimate stage of the coding process involved a process of providing conceptual comments, which were the foundation of incorporating my thoughts and reactions to particular events or language used by children and young

people across the interviews. This level of interpretation also allowed me to further incorporate my knowledge of the research literature and apply the information that I had previously acquired through the reference group. The process of providing conceptual comments allowed me a deeper understanding of the data that not only acknowledged the individual's description of parental incarceration but also afforded a contextual understanding of what was occurring in the lives of children and young people (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Smith et al., 2009).

Developing themes

From this analysis, emergent and superordinate themes were developed (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Smith et al., 2009). Smith et al. (2009) highlight that emergent themes reflect both the voices of children and young people and the interpretations made by me, as the researcher. Reliant on my notes made about the transcript, but still grounded in the voices of children and young people and the detail they provided, this level of analysis enabled a higher level of abstraction.

Emergent themes: Understanding the emerging themes gives an opportunity to identify and highlight the key issues and themes found in each transcript. In accordance with IPA conventions, these themes reflected both the child's experience and my own initial interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). Emergent themes included both issues relevant to some of the parts of the child's narrative as well as issues which emerged after considering the whole transcript.

Superordinate themes: Superordinate themes were developed in the final level of analysis. This involved the consideration of connections and links between the emerging themes. After a detailed examination of each case, the analysis considered similarities and differences across the cases (Smith et al., 2009). To do this, I collated all of the emergent

themes and started to allocate them into broader superordinate themes (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Smith et al., 2009). This involved me reflecting and considering how they fitted and related to each other. Themes were then grouped under common headings. A list of emergent themes and superordinate themes was developed for each child which allowed for the final stage of the coding to be as transparent as possible.

Themes across the research study: The transcripts, notes, emergent themes and superordinate themes were entered into NVivo, a computer qualitative research software program (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). This software allowed me to more easily access check and group the themes according to the conceptual similarities and to identify and clarify the tensions which existed within the themes for each of the participants. Viewing the frequency of the themes, and being able to highlight text enabled me to analyse the information and the use of key words or phrases, which was particularly useful in checking the key themes.

Qualitative data analysis is essentially a systematic and taxonomic process of sorting and classifying the data that has been collected into themes. Throughout Chapter 5 and the publications presented in chapters 6 and 7, the quotes of children and young people are presented to ensure that the reader can hear and understand children and young people's experiences of parental incarceration. In addition, the superordinate themes are presented at the beginning of chapter 5.

Reflexivity: Strategies to encourage researcher reflexivity (outlined in Publication 3) were used throughout data collection and analysis to check the effect I was having on the research. The models of reflexivity discussed by children's researchers (Moore, 2012;) adopted in this study, supported the reliability and credibility of the study. The co-reflexive activities which I undertook in this process highlighted the dynamics which existed

between adult researchers and child participants, as well as the challenges and beliefs that I held and which influenced the research process.

My commitment to reflexivity was further supported by writing about critical moments and noting insights as I spoke with children and young people, their caregivers and the services that worked with them. There were a number of key moments in recruiting children and young people that challenged how I thought and understood parental incarceration. Engagement in supervision with my supervisors and through critical discussions with colleagues allowed me to consider my role and position.

Participants

The participants of this study included 16 children and young people aged 8 to 18 who had experienced a mother or a father being imprisoned. Table 1 below outlines the demographic characteristics of the child or young person at the time of their interview. Further information about children and young people are provided at the commencement of each publication.

As noted earlier, the ethical considerations, recruitment strategy, establishment of a children's reference group, research methods, and data analysis are discussed in each of the publications. Further information is provided in the appendices: ethics approval (Appendix G), reference group plan (Appendix H), recruitment pamphlet (Appendix I), children and young people's consent form (Appendix J), interview questions (Appendix K) and examples of children and young people's activities (Appendix L).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants

Demographic characteristic number (N=16)	
Characteristic	Number
Cultural background	
▪ Aboriginal	4
▪ Caucasian	12
Gender	
▪ Female	8
▪ Male	8
Age	
▪ 8–10	3
▪ 11–14	3
▪ 15–18	10
Gender of incarcerated parent	
▪ Female	3
▪ Male	16
Living arrangements	
▪ Living with mum and stepdad	7
▪ Living with other family member	3
▪ Residing in out-of-home care	4
▪ Homeless	2
No. of times parent has been incarcerated	
▪ Once	2
▪ More than once	14

4.3 Overview of publications

The first publication in Chapter 4 (Publication 2) ‘Research with children of prisoners: Methodological considerations for bringing youth in from the margins’, begins with a discussion about the current thinking and prevailing approaches to research with children and young people. Such approaches described in this publication underpin the conceptual approach and intent of this thesis. This publication also provides a critique of the research methods employed in this study that were adopted in order to ensure the ethical and meaningful participation of children and young people. The publication concludes with a focus on a number of challenges I experienced across the life of the study and the lessons learnt for future research with this population of children.

The second publication in this chapter (Publication 3), ‘Not seen and not heard: Ethical considerations of research with children of prisoners’, describes the ethical complexities associated with involving children in sensitive research. This publication discusses the study context and the interrelated ethical and methodological challenges I observed when designing and undertaking this research with children and young people.

4.4 Publication 2 – ‘Research with children of prisoners: Methodological considerations for bringing youth in from the margins’.

Flynn, C., & Saunders, V. (2015). Research with children of prisoners: Methodological considerations for bringing youth in from the margins. In S. Bastien & H. B. Holmarsdottir (Eds.), *Youth ‘at the margins’: Critical perspectives and experiences of engaging youth in research worldwide* (Vol. 4, pp. 219–239). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.



Introduction

This chapter draws from the authors’ independent experiences of two research projects with Australian children whose parents had experienced incarceration. The chapter is grounded in a discussion of current thinking and prevailing methodological approaches to research with children. Current approaches to research with children of imprisoned parents are critiqued and examined in relation to current suggested practices. The chapter concludes with a focus on utilising the authors’ research experiences to outline how meaningful research with marginalised children/young people can be constructed and

implemented in ways that ensure an ethical and empowering approach to the incorporation of children's voices.

Children of imprisoned parents: understanding the context

An ongoing 'binge' in incarceration has been described in the US, with growth noted in prison populations on all five continents (Walmsley, 2013). Australia, where both authors are based, has seen increases in most states in recent decades (ABS, 2013). In Victoria and the ACT, where our research has been conducted, most recently we have seen some concerning trends emerging. The ACT had one of the highest growth rates in the country in its prison population between 2011 and 2012 (ABS, 2013). While the growth in Victoria's prisons did not feature so significantly during that particular period, recent policy shifts towards a 'tough on crime' approach, combined with the political decision to embark on one of the biggest prison expansion programs in the state's history (Butcher, 2013) have seen burgeoning prison numbers.

Limited official data is collected in Australia, or in most other jurisdictions, regarding both the numbers of parents who are incarcerated and the number of children who are affected by parental incarceration. While some prison systems ask adult prisoners at reception if they have children, such data-gathering is not systematic or widespread, nor is this information widely available or well utilised. In a recent Australian survey of prisoner health and wellbeing 28% of prisoners reported having at least one dependent child (AIHW, 2013). Other estimates are higher, and accurate numbers remain unclear. What is clear is that whichever way that numbers are estimated, no data are collected about these dependent children.

The need to gather formal data on (but not necessarily from) the children of prisoners has been recommended in a number of jurisdictions, but follow-through has been poor. As

such, researchers and service providers alike rely heavily on estimates in attempting to gain some sense of both the scope and nature of the experience of being a child of a detained parent. In Australia, somewhere in the region of 5% of children are estimated to experience parental incarceration in their lifetime (Dennison et al., 2013; Quilty, 2005), with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's risk being considerably higher. Estimates from the other countries, such as the UK and US, are even higher. This is a concerning issue requiring focused but global attention to address increasing parental absence as a result of incarceration during critical periods of childhood, including the transition to adulthood.

Nevertheless, this is not a new problem. Acknowledgement and concern about the impact of parental imprisonment on children has circulated since the 1960s (eg see Morris, 1965; Zalba, 1964). Research has consistently described a range of problems for these children: isolation, behavioural difficulties at school, anxiety, insecurity, withdrawal, mental health concerns and antisocial behaviour (see Murray et al., 2012). Despite this research, some five decades on our understanding of the needs of such children and how best to respond remain poor. Currently, in Victoria and the ACT, there is no formal accounting for the welfare of children when sentencing and imprisoning their primary caregiver. No systematic data is collected on or from these children. Nor is there any feedback on or monitoring of their placements, progress or outcomes. This paucity of knowledge is shaped by the very fact that these children and their current circumstances are not the responsibility of any specific statutory body, in any international context. Meanwhile, no public policy recognises their potential vulnerability. This scenario is also shaped by the lack of involvement of children in the majority of research conducted, which purports to examine and understand their experiences. This renders this population largely invisible, as their views and experiences are not routinely sought or heard.

Prevailing methodological approaches to research with children

Historically research with children has been dominated by methodologies that focus ‘on’ children and have been framed in discourses of vulnerability and incompetence (Coyne, 2010). While similar patterns have been noted with other ‘vulnerable’ groups, including women in days past (Oakley, 2002), any further comparison is beyond the scope of this chapter. Such beliefs however have been, and continue to be, disputed and challenged by researchers and practitioners working and researching with children and young people (Danby & Farrell, 2004; Greig, Taylor, & MacKay, 2013). Over recent decades the literature regarding research with children and young people has grown exponentially and illustrates that there is now an established body of evidence that promotes children as able and competent research participants (Alderson & Morrow, 2005; Barker & Weller, 2003; Christensen & James, 2008; Farrell, 2005; Kellett, 2005; Solberg, 1996; Tisdall, Davis, & Gallagher, 2009).

Understanding children as competent and as capable of participating in research studies in their own right is largely due to the influence of sociological studies about childhood and the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child. The associated childhood studies paradigm stems from a constructivist approach that conceptualises children as social actors who have the ability to shape their own lives and participate in the construction of their own childhood (Greig et al., 2013). This approach contends that children have distinct capabilities to understand and explain their experiences. This paradigm has questioned the appropriateness of adults representing children’s understandings, and it has encouraged researchers to rethink the ways in which perceptions of children are constructed and the ability of young people to meaningfully participate in research gauged (Greig et al., 2013; Solberg, 1996).

The widespread acknowledgement of children's rights has also played an integral part to the inclusion of youth in research (Alderson, 2005; Hill, 2005). Indeed the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child have created:

a research space and a culture that emphasizes children's and youth's competencies and the importance in providing them with the opportunity to give voice to their own experiences, meanings and interactions
(Trussell, 2008, p. 166).

The most important considerations for consultation and participation are highlighted in articles 12 and 13 that state a child's right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them and for their rights to be listened to and given due consideration (United Nations, 1989).

Children's active participation in research has also been shown to have a range of benefits that go beyond the traditional. Children's participation enhances the quality and integrity of the research by providing a more 'whole' account of an issue (Kirby, 2004). Children may have different perspectives about issues than adults and as a consequence researchers may develop understandings that would have not been considered before (Tisdall et al., 2009). Further, by incorporating children's views about issues that affect them, policymakers and service providers alike are better able to develop and implement more effective responses that better meet the needs of children (Cockburn, 2005).

Involving children in research also has benefits on a more individual level. Some have argued that participation in research can be a transformative practice in itself.

Nieuwenhuys (2004) describes how children's participation in research can be seen as a process of empowerment and consciousness-raising, as well as an opportunity to develop

knowledge and skills that will not only contribute to their development as individuals, but also increase their self-esteem.

Yet despite these well-established arguments, children frequently continue to be the objects of research rather than its subjects (Christensen & James, 2008). Children are widely viewed as more vulnerable than adults and more at risk of exploitation and abuse in research than adult participants (Gallagher, 2009). It is argued that children are disadvantaged due to their subordinate role in society and in both cultural and legal structures; hence there is continued hesitation from some about the inclusion of children in research (Gallagher, 2009).

Within Australia, the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) (2007) highlights that research involving children and young people raises particular ethical concerns that are different to those of other groups. Key ethical issues discussed in the literature focus on children's capacity to provide consent, the protection of children, power relations, anonymity and confidentiality, and payment of research participants (Alderson & Morrow, 2011; Hill, 2006; Lindsay, 2000). It is not possible in this chapter to fully address the debates concerning each of these issues, however researchers emphasise that ethical research with children is more than a 'to do list' or a codified set of principles. Ethical considerations when researching with children are of an ongoing nature, researchers need to be aware of possible ethical issues that may arise throughout the entire research process through ongoing questioning, acting and reflecting (Gallagher, 2009; Moore, 2013).

It is argued that ethics and effective methodology go hand in hand (Thomas & O'Kane, 1998). Whatever the different ontological, epistemological and methodological positions a childhood researcher might take, the research and its methods should be appropriate for the children or young people participating in the research (NHMRC, 2007). In designing

ethical research with children, researchers have turned their attention to developing qualitative methodologies and methods that ‘hear’ children’s voices, including the need to be aware of the impact of our own adult (‘parentist’) language on children’s participation (Solberg, 1992 cited in Oakley, 2002). They have sought to promote children’s rights and support their capacity to express their ideas and experiences (Christensen & James, 2008). Such methodologies are often referred to as ‘participatory research methods’ and are geared towards planning and conducting the research process with the children whose life worlds and meaningful actions are being explored. The term:

‘participatory research with young children’ has many different interpretations; however, most would agree that it has to involve listening to children and hearing their voices (Levy & Thompson, 2013, p. 3).

However it is also important to note that a number of childhood studies have also criticised participatory approaches as often being tokenistic rendering of children’s experiences, for children particularly when it come to the analysis, interpretation, and use of research findings. Indeed, Gormally and Coburn (2013) state that “there needs to be a conscious effort that participation in research is real and useful, not simply consultative and tokenistic” (p. 15).

Consequently, if childhood researchers are to be sincere about accessing the voices of children, then they must also be resolute about ensuring that the methodology and methods they use allow for this to be fully realised (Levy & Thompson, 2013). Children’s participation should be regarded explicitly as an underlying value base in researching their lives.

Current approaches to research into the experiences of children whose parents are in prison

Such a value base, however, has been slow to be realised in researching the lives of children who experience parental incarceration. While a growing body of international research has described the characteristics of the children of prisoners over the past 50 years, what is known about these children has been gleaned largely from research conducted from the parent or caregiver perspective (Bloom & Steinhart, 1993; Kingi, 1999; McGowan & Blumenthal, 1978; Tomaino et al., 2005; Tudball, 2000; VACRO, 2006). Research, as noted previously, appears to have been challenged by how children are conceptualised and subsequently dichotomised, as either invisible or vulnerable. As such, much of the research has either failed to comment on the lack of data from children, or it describes avoiding including children as study participants. As alluded to earlier, this was typical of broader research 'on' children's lives in past years.

While there has been considerable development in research with children since this time, meaningful participation and having a voice remains problematic for this specific group of children. When considering the lives of children who experience parental incarceration, it would seem clear that to understand any problems experienced by children more fully and to formulate helpful responses, there is a need to expand the data sources on which there is current reliance. Depending solely on the reporting of incarcerated parents and/or the children's caregivers may provide a skewed view of family relationships and the experiences and needs of children.

Reliance on parents and carers

An underestimation of children's problems has been one outcome of relying on data solely from adults to examine the impact of parental incarceration on children. This has been acknowledged by researchers who have included imprisoned parents (Baunach, 1985;

Henriques, 1982; Sack, Seidler, & Thomas, 1976) and caregivers (Kampfner, 1995). More recent research by Catherine (Flynn, 2008) expands on this and finds that beyond a simple estimation of problems and their severity, there is a more widespread disjuncture between the views of children and their imprisoned mothers across many areas of their lives. By way of example, in her study, when mothers described family life prior to imprisonment, they described the chaos that is typically reported in previous research, while children described a more ‘normal’ scenario—spending time with friends and going to school. This disconnection is explicable in a number of ways: children may be simply unaware of broader family problems (perhaps being ‘protected’ by their parent/s), or unwilling to expose these family problems to a researcher. Either way, children express a different understanding of their family life and circumstances. It is a viewpoint we need to engage with and understand if we are to influence and ground policy decisions (Couch, Durant, & Hill, 2012) that meaningfully intervene in the lives of these children and families.

Including children

Few authors internationally have commented on their reasons for excluding children from research. Two studies facilitated by VACRO (Tudball, 2000; VACRO, 2006) cite a lack of specialised resources and skills to conduct research with children. Tudball (2000) also described a focus on knowledge development, arguing:

As this was the first study of its kind in Victorian prisons, initial investigation of the need of children through surveying parents and caregivers was considered to be critical (p. xi).

She provides no further explanation of this statement or why the views of parents were considered of greater significance than the views of children. Ethical concerns are noted by Lewis et al. (2008), as well as by Al Gharaibeh (2008) and Tomaino et al. (2005) as precluding the interviewing of children. Lewis et al. (2008) state that children were not

included due to “ethical restraints on involving children in focus groups” (p.6), while Tomaino et al. (2005) reported:

The project team was mindful of ... the potentially exploitative nature of raising traumatic events with a child during a one-off interview conducted over 30–60 minutes (p. 40).

Studies which have sought to include children in research about their experiences of parental incarceration report a range of difficulties with recruitment (Boswell, 2002; Brown, 2001; Loureiro, 2010; McCulloch & Morrison, 2002). Caregiver reluctance to expose children to the research experience is a problem commonly reported when using adult gatekeepers (Greig et al., 2013). This was an issue noted by Gursansky et al. (1998). Although the 24 mothers in that study had a total of 43 children, permission was obtained by mothers/caregivers to interview only eight of these children. The level of children’s involvement in this decision is unknown. Similarly, despite the views of children being the planned focus of their study, and subsequent obtaining of data from at least 40 women with 78 children, Cunningham and Baker (2003) were able to recruit only seven children directly to participate in their Canadian study. Advertising their study to families via agencies working with women involved in offending and in public places failed to attract participants. The researchers concluded that the poor participation was likely due to the women not having custody of children, being embarrassed, or not having told their children about their imprisonment. These reflections would also seem to indicate that relying on an adult-oriented process of recruitment and consent, as well as adult gatekeepers creates barriers to children’s participation.

Powell, Fitzgerald, Taylor and Graham (2012) describe a more recent questioning of this reliance, along with the suggestion that the usual gatekeepers be bypassed in research which is considered to be sensitive. They further argue (citing Alderson, 1995, p. 16) that

such a process would address the silencing of children “who are dependent for the most part on someone else being sufficiently motivated to give consent for them to participate”.

Conversely, Nutbrown (2011) suggests that researchers need to consider parents and other adults as ‘research guardians’ instead of ‘gatekeepers’, and that researchers have responsibility in ensuring that these guardians have the information necessary to act in the best interests of children. This is best done by ensuring that researchers have a trusting, honest and reliable relationship with the adults who see themselves as safeguarding children’s interests (formally and informally) (Greig et al., 2013). Another issue noted by researchers is the apparent reluctance on the part of children, and parents alike to self-identify and put themselves forward for research. McCulloch and Morrison (2002) remind us that the situation is more complex than children being unwilling:

Alongside young people’s often desperate desire to keep the imprisonment of their relative from other people, their inaccessibility indicates the hidden nature of the problems discussed in this report (p. 6).

Such hidden populations often become known as ‘hard to reach’ (Brackertz, 2007), with the onus of being ‘reached’ (or not) placed upon the researched. Yet Zea, Reisen and Diaz (2003) argue that “being hard to reach” is often not due to any particular characteristic of the group itself, but rather the researchers’ “distance from that population” (p.287). Bridging this distance is ultimately the responsibility of the researcher. It requires us to reflect upon and ask questions about how we might better establish relationships and connections with hidden populations, as well as better design inclusive and non-stigmatising research methodologies.

Other researchers describe having included children in their data collection, but on examination, involvement is minimal. For example, Henriques (1982) describes having “seen” 15 children in her study of imprisoned mothers’ views of their children’s situations. She gives a detailed description of the study’s methodology and the interview process with the children, but does not include any data from them. Later, she states that many were too young to provide meaningful information about their situations. King (2002) sought to gather and examine children’s views on parental imprisonment in Dublin, Ireland. However, as she began interviewing adults for the study, she reports it became clear that the majority of children were not aware that their parent was in prison. As a consequence, many parents and caregivers were predictably reluctant to consent to children’s involvement in the study. Subsequently King (2002) conducted informal interviews with just six children in the prison visitors’ centre. This data seems incomplete: it failed to address how children viewed their parents’ imprisonment, or its effect on them, despite this being the intended focus of the study. The information gathered focused instead on the children’s views about the visitor’s centre, which was not identified by the researcher in discussion with any children as belonging to a prison (because of the lack of clarity about children’s understanding of their parent’s imprisonment). It is unclear how the purpose of the study interview was explained to the children, or in what kind of activity the children believed they were involved. How children’s consent or assent was obtained is also not discussed.

The majority of studies examining the impact of parental imprisonment on children have sought to illustrate adult concerns for children, most often identified in terms of their behaviour, or visible emotions. While these studies highlight a range of common issues, they typically fail to include a child’s perspective. This is a significant gap in the knowledge base, and leads researchers to rely on speculation about how children make sense of their parents’ incarceration and live with this experience (Cunningham & Baker,

2003). The research conducted with children (Brown, 2001; Kampfner, 1995; McCulloch & Morrison, 2002) indicates that adults who have significant roles in the lives of these children often discourage them from speaking about their parent or the imprisonment. Thus the capacity of these significant adults to provide a complete picture of the consequences for these children must be questioned and limitations acknowledged. As noted above, where the views of children have been obtained, they differ markedly from those of the adults.

Lessons learnt from research with children of incarcerated parents

So far, we have considered some of the complexities that have prevented or challenged successful research with children who have experienced parental incarceration. While not offering prescriptive methods, the following section seeks to raise and discuss ethical and methodological issues that the authors have struggled with when engaging children who have experienced parental incarceration, offering some insights into how such issues were addressed.

Strategies: Developing and shaping research

Children's participation in research.

There is much critical work around children's participation in research that has been undertaken globally in the last decade. One of the issues often directed towards participatory research relates to the 'how and when' children should participate in research (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010; Greene & Hogan, 2005; Greig et al., 2013). Some authors highlight the advantages of engaging children and young people in the pre-planning stages of research projects, arguing that research questions can ultimately influence the structure and design of a study, and subsequently the findings and possible recommendations of the research. However, in our experience, including children at the very earliest stage of the research process is not always possible. For pragmatic reasons, the original research

proposal for the ACT study was developed by adults, without the participation of children, and as a result the research questions held a number of preconceived ideas about what needed to be studied and, to some extent, how the study was to be conducted.

Subsequently in order to ensure that the research was meaningful and beneficial for the children participating, a ‘children and young people’s reference group’ was established to inform and guide the research process. The establishment of a reference group for the ACT study was assisted by a youth worker who knew a number of local children who had experienced parental incarceration and who would also be interested in participating in such a group. Subsequently Vicky was able to recruit five participants aged between 13 and 15 years old who were keen to assist with the guiding and shaping of the research project. All the children knew one another prior to the meeting and this assisted with the group formation.

Scoping the context with children – children and young people’s reference group

The participation of children and young people not only as participants in research but also as co-constructors or ‘experts’, has been promoted by a number of authors (Fraser, Lewis, Ding, Kellett, & Robinson, 2004,; Kellett, 2005). In most successful participatory research projects, adult researchers see themselves as learning alongside children (Davis, 2009).

The five children engaged in the ACT reference group were conceptualised by the research team as ‘experts’: experts on being children and experts on knowing what it was like to have experienced a parent in prison. Drawing on this knowledge, Vicky and other researchers worked with the ‘children’s reference group’ during the initial pre-implementation phase of the study to shape, guide and scrutinise the proposed study. Jones highlights that (2004, p. 117): “as with children and young people’s participation in other spheres of social life, research is not isolated from the structures and processes that affect their involvement”.

As the reference group participants had not had any prior experience of being involved in research, the reference group meeting also provided a space where children could learn about the research process and gain an understanding of their role as a reference group member as well as discuss and to some degree influence the processes in which they were to be involved. Although not able to change the research questions, children were involved in a range of tasks that were designed to consider and challenge the adult assumptions made about the research; reflect on the possible ways for children to participate; identify the potential barriers and enablers for participation and to consider other stakeholders and the impact of the research on them.

Developing child-friendly and ethical methods with children.

One of the key challenges of any research conducted with children is the use and appropriateness of language. It has been our experience that often the terminology used in research questions can distance young people from the project and prevent their full engagement. Subsequently another key role of the children's reference group at the commencement stage was to provide feedback on the language children would prefer to use during the research. Interestingly while children in the ACT study reported being comfortable with the use of the word 'prison' or 'jail' in the research questions, when they spoke to each other in the reference group about their experiences, they spoke using acronyms and specific organisation names rather than using the words prison or jail. Listening to the children, there appeared to be a common language that existed between them, of which Vicky had been unaware until attending that reference group meeting. As a result, where appropriate, we were able to use the words that children used to describe prison. In turn, this made the research questions more typical and reflective of their everyday worlds.

In addition to the discussion concerning appropriate terminology, children were also able to provide feedback regarding a range of potential methods researchers had considered possible for data collection. Enabling children to actively engage in research allows researchers to develop a greater understanding about their lived experience and a deeper understanding of the challenges and concerns that affect their lives and those of their families and communities (James & Christensen 2008). Therefore, it was critical that the methods employed to elicit the information required were not only robust, but also meaningful to children.

In line with a participatory approach, a range of flexible and creative methods for data collection have been utilised in research with children (Nieuwenhuys, 2004; Tisdall et al., 2009). Methods such as photography, drama, DVD and music production, writing diaries and drawing can serve as constructive tools that generate discussion about children's experiences and provide a focus on which researchers and children alike can make meaning. However children in the reference group highlighted that such methods might be more appropriate for younger children, and they as adolescents would simply be happy to discuss their experiences with researchers in a one-on-one interview. Focus groups were identified as potentially useful, but might not necessarily provide the right environment to discuss sensitive issues. The children participating in the ACT study discussed the need for methods that did not involve 'too much writing or drawing', were visually stimulating and enabled the participant to get to know the researcher.

The importance of building relationships, rapport and trust prior to any data collection is highlighted by Milne, Munford and Sanders (2001), who state that one lesson they have learnt is that, good research information comes out of carefully constructed relationships, "... A one-shot interview is unlikely to yield much useful data" (p.5). However, once a

trusting relationship has been established, high quality data can be generated in large volumes (p. 5).

The children in the reference group believed that researchers meeting children prior to interviewing them was the best method in which to achieve this.

Recruitment

The practical and ethical difficulties associated with identifying and gaining access to children who have experienced parental or sibling imprisonment have been well documented and outlined earlier in this chapter. Couch et al. (2012) argue that it is generally agreed that this process of gaining entry to a group, as an ‘outsider’, is one of the first and most difficult steps in doing research. These authors describe research with young sex workers, whereby the researcher attempted to address this challenge by immersing himself “into the culture of [this group] enabling him to understand the culture as an insider” (p. 49).

For many researchers, there is a distinct dichotomy between insider and outsider, and a clear value position that being an insider gives more valid and valuable data. There is likely merit in this claim with children of prisoners, with Tudball (2000) finding that ‘insider’ knowledge and understanding is sought and valued by the families of prisoners when seeking to speak to someone about their needs and experiences. It is questionable, however, whether spending time ‘as if’ the researcher were one of them, allows a genuine insider view.

In the Victorian study, Catherine held the position of ‘informed outsider’—not immersed, but able to hear what children had to say, bringing the ability to see from a different perspective. She had no direct personal experience of imprisonment, but had conducted

research with women exiting prison and had nuanced knowledge of the prison system. In recruiting children whose mothers she had met previously in a research role she drew on insider knowledge and previously established relationships. This was the most direct and effective strategy, given the lack of success reported in previous studies. She was, however, cautioned by Hepinstall's (2000) advice that relying on adults as gatekeepers can lead to those adults making decisions about children participating, without the children necessarily being consulted. Further, the possibility of coercion by adults was present because of the pre-existing relationships between Catherine and mothers as adult gatekeepers (Curtis, Roberts, Copperman, Downie, & Liabo, 2004).

These concerns were addressed in Catherine's study in two ways. Firstly, this issue was specifically named and discussed with the mothers. Secondly, all potential child participants were met with in an environment of their choice, separately to their mother. They were encouraged to discuss and query the research and their own participation; and they were advised that they could choose not to participate.

As indicated in the ACT study, using this time to establish a transparent and honest relationship with children prior to them deciding whether to participate in the study was vital. While this should be a feature of all research, this group of children brought particular histories and challenges. The children of prisoners are often not told, or not told immediately, about their parents' imprisonment (e.g. see King, 2002, discussed earlier in this chapter); or they are often actively discouraged from speaking about this experience as discussed (Brown, 2001; McCulloch & Morrison, 2002). Transparency and honesty were deemed vital to respectful engagement and the creation of real choices for young people about participation. These characteristics were demonstrated in a number of ways. Catherine's interest in the study was explained to young people, along with her previous involvement with their mothers in another research project. This proved to be an

important issue for 13-year-old Keira, who needed to ‘place’ the researcher. Catherine reflects on this process: In the discussion about participating in the study, we talked about a range of issues: the research itself, other children I’d met; but she was also keen to know how I’d met her mother, and what teaching I did at the university. Shortly after we had been talking about my teaching, she asked “Were they nice?” I didn’t think she was referring to the students I was teaching, but I wanted to be sure, so I asked “Do you mean my students or the women I met, like mum, who had been in prison?” It was the latter. Although there are other ways of thinking about this, my interpretation of this question was that she was doing two things: seeking to establish my position on ‘prisoners’; as well as thinking about her own views on how people end up in prison. I told her the truth: that I had met really nice people in that project, who had all been in prison. These issues clarified, Keira was happy to engage and participate; the interview continued. Some chose not to participate. One mother advised that her son was interested in doing an interview and provided his mobile phone number. But when contacted a few days later, after some discussion he was able to state that although he would like to participate he didn’t want to “start thinking about that again—thinking about mum and stuff, when I should be thinking about my life”. Overall, this transparent approach and being heard allowed young people to make active and informed decisions about participating in the Victorian study.

Remuneration

There is no clear agreement in the literature on whether children should be paid for participating in research (Kellett & Ding, 2004) or about what kinds of rewards are appropriate (Gallagher, 2009). The use of remuneration in research with children is a contentious issue, mostly because it is seen as potentially coercive and can exaggerate the power differential between an adult researcher and a child participant (Rice & Broome, 2004). Yet it remains the most common approach (Seymour, 2012).

In the Victorian study all children were given a \$20 gift voucher. The rationale was one of equality: all mothers who had participated had been compensated in this way. Was the children's time, effort and data to be seen as less valuable? This was indeed the successful argument made to an ethics committee who questioned the provision of gift vouchers for the children. Couch et al. (2012) expand on this to argue that monetary compensation, particularly for young people who are marginalised, provides indirect benefits. Being perceived and treated as experts/consultants is seen to augment their self-esteem.

In the ACT study, both the children's reference group and research participants alike received \$40 vouchers in return for their time and expertise. However participants were not told of the payment until after their consent to participate had been obtained so that it was not perceived as an incentive to participate or likely to affect their consent. Further, participants were also told that even though they had been given this voucher they still had the right to stop at any time and were still able to keep the voucher. In discussing remuneration with the children's reference group, children stated that they believed financial remuneration was fair recompense for their time, however they also identified that if the research was important to them they would participate anyway.

Strategies: Gathering data

Data collection: Individual, focused interviews

Although research indicates that there is no one 'right' method for conducting research with children (Hill, 2006) there is some argument that individual interviews, which provide a private research environment, may be valuable when the research is examining a sensitive or personal topic (Gallagher, 2009; Punch, 2002). This certainly reflects the feedback from the ACT study reference group, who also highlighted that this approach allows young people to get to know the researcher. Cousins and Millar (2006) suggest it to be an appropriate method as it can "enable overlooked and disempowered individuals to

express their views freely” (p. 452). Yet this is not the dominant trend within research into the direct experiences and needs of the children of imprisoned parents. This has resulted in a significant gap in our knowledge.

Research into the experiences of young people with a family member in prison (McCulloch & Morrison, 2002) found that these adolescents felt that adults avoided asking them about their feelings and experiences, and seemed afraid of what they might express. Bearing this in mind, individual interviews were developed as the method of data collection in the Victorian study. This meant data could be gathered in a private and safe environment. Although it is suggested that it is best when interviewing children to “[enable] them to take the lead in discussion rather than simply responding to questions” (Thomas & O’Kane, 2000, p. 829), it was decided for the purposes of this study, to be very focused about the specific needs of the research, the participant group, and the topic. Specifically, a structured approach gave young people a better chance to understand what they were agreeing to, in terms of the general terrain of the interview. This approach was mindful of the likely educational experiences of these participants, and did not presume advanced literacy or verbal skills. Young people could respond as briefly or as lengthily as they wished. The focused interview schedule provided clear parameters around topics. This was essential given the findings by McCulloch and Morrison (2002), that for many young people “the interview was one of the few places they had ever talked about their experiences” (p. 11); this also reflected what Catherine had been told by the mothers. It was also informed by the understanding that the provision of a dedicated listener and a safe space in which to talk (Goulding, 2004) for individuals who may be quite isolated may lead to over disclosure (Daley, 2012), that is disclosing ‘too much’ in an interview and then regretting it later. The strategy was successful, with all participants able to contribute meaningfully and complete the interview. This is in contrast to the findings of Gursansky

et al.'s (1998) research with the children of imprisoned mothers, which indicated that children frequently found interviews distressing, with many opting out early.

Interviewing skills: The ability to listen

As noted above, some research has highlighted an identified lack of skills in researching with children. Recently, it has been argued that care theory (Noddings, 2003 cited in Daley, 2012) can assist researchers when gathering sensitive material in interviews with young people, allowing researchers to navigate challenges which arise during the interview process. To simplify and summarise, this approach is based on the view that 'ethical actions are those which stem from caring for the other' (p. 29). This is an excellent starting position, if caring underpins listening with care. Drawing on her 10 years of experience as a social work practitioner, Catherine reflects that an unstated question is embedded in much communication with young people: 'Can you understand me?' This is particularly the case where there is seen to be some social distance, as often occurs between researchers and children participating in research. Catherine recalls an illustrative interview from the Victorian study, with 12-year-old Joel approximately 18 months after his mother had been released from prison, where he began to cry and Catherine also had an emotional reaction.

In that moment I decided to share with Joel that my reaction had been prompted by what he was saying; this had made me think about how sad I was when I was his age, and my father was taken away to hospital, and I couldn't go with him, and I couldn't visit him for quite a long time. I believe this brief and straightforward disclosure reduced social distance, and reassured Joel about my capacity to hear and understand his experience. Joel was able to continue the interview and went on to discuss a range of issues about foster care, how he managed at school, the day his mother came home, and his own father's 'illness'.

Actively engaging with, and not being afraid of, the emotional responses shared by Joel and other children allowed these experiences to be heard and validated, perhaps for the first time. Placing herself as an informed outsider allowed Catherine to have enough room for an emotional response to the material but... not [be] driven by it (Cashmore, 2013). This created a safe space for children.

Interviewing: Responding to a range of needs.

A commitment in the Victorian study to being responsive to the needs and wishes of children was a key concern both in the research environment and for the time that was set aside for interviews. These were conducted wherever the youth felt safe and comfortable; young people were also encouraged to have a support person present if they wished. Interviews took place in a range of settings: including homes, at the park, in fast food restaurants, in group interviews with sibling/s, or with other family members present. Flexibility also extended to practical matters, such as collecting a child from school, transporting a mother to collect methadone, or being available for an early morning interview because the young person worked a night shift. These actions by the researcher established a measure of reciprocity. Flexibility and attentiveness to how young people felt comfortable communicating was also significant. One mother advised the researcher that her son did not want to speak about his experiences, but wanted to be able to participate in the study by completing a written questionnaire. The interview schedule was duly amended and the young person actively participated.

A flexible approach to time was a key aspect of both studies: time to engage and to listen. Although information was collected in single interviews, there was no set time limit on these and the length of interviews was dictated by the wishes of the individual participant. This approach to data-gathering further contributed to minimising the power imbalance

between the researcher and the young person by giving the latter control over this aspect of the interview.

In the Victorian study, Catherine was mindful that many of the young people were likely to have experienced difficult and forced separations in the past, making it important that interviews ended in a positive manner. The interview schedule was structured to enable participants to tell their story in a chronological order: ‘what happened before, during and after the parent went to prison’. This ensured that participants were focused in the present at the end of the interview. A winding-down phase of the interview then followed, focused on identifying hopes and plans for the future. In all interviews, young people were given the final say, being asked if they had anything else they wanted to add, or anything else they thought the researcher could or should have asked. A number of young people were able to outline hopes for their futures, including careers as well as reflecting on the process of being interviewed. This allowed them to close the interview.

Strategies: Data analysis and reporting

Working with children to construct meaning out of data.

Children’s active participation in research should not end with the collection of data.

Children’s involvement in the analysis of the data generated is important and discussing findings with them in the post data analysis phase of a research project is essential for both methodological and ethical reasons. Punch reminds us that “Particular care must be taken when interpreting children’s views” (Punch, 2002, p. 329) so that in interpreting findings, authority is given to the child’s voice. There are a number of ways of doing this. The NSW Commission for Children and Young People suggest meeting with a small group of participants at the data analysis stage to explore their ideas about the research findings (2005). Other practices identified within the literature include enabling children to choose

comments and quotes to be included in reports (Thomas & O’Kane, 1998), inviting children to review their interview transcripts for accuracy, meaning and emphasis (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2005; Morrow & Richards, 1996, p. 100): using methods which are non-invasive, non-confrontational and participatory, and which encourage children to interpret their own data.

One of the values of working with a reference group is that the group is able to indicate what they think of the researcher’s original interpretations of data. However this approach is not without its challenges. It was the intention of the ACT study for the children’s reference group to return and discuss the findings together in order to reflect on and ask questions about why particular aspects of the research might be emphasised, whether the language used reflected and represented participant’s experiences, and whether the recommendations were in line with what children wanted. However, due to the length of time it took to complete the project and the often difficult and challenging lives that reference group members experienced, it became problematic for the reference group to return together to achieve this.

In order to ensure the rigour and credibility of the research (Padgett, 2008) Vicky contacted each of the participants to discuss her interpretations of the findings and to ‘check in’ with each participant as to whether or not these interpretations resonated with their experience. The time spent with children checking and discussing key themes provided Vicky with a greater depth of understanding about the issues experienced by children and ensured that these were represented fairly and accurately in the final report.

Dissemination of research

Research organisations are increasingly aware of the need to get research messages across into policy and practice environments (Roberts, 2004). As part of a move for more

ethically and morally responsible research (Cloke, 2002), the inclusion of appropriate dissemination strategies is now an integral part of research process for many funding bodies. Despite the greater inclusion of participatory processes in research with young people, there appears to be little evidence for similar discourses regarding children's participation in dissemination strategies. Yet they are often deeply concerned about how the research they are involved in can be used to influence and create change.

Two key issues arose from the ACT study concerning dissemination of the research: the first being that while the research project aimed to be as participatory for children as possible, its ultimate aim was to inform adult stakeholders about children's needs. As a result, limited funding was available to develop any resources that could be used in the dissemination of the findings to children (or their families). While children accepted this constraint, they also highlighted that if more funding had been available, they would like to have accessed the findings in an easy-to-read format through posters or pamphlets clearly available at the prison for both themselves and their families.

The second issue arose at the time of the publication of the report when media releases were sent out providing information to newspapers, TV and radio about the imminent release of the study. Morrow (2008) describes how, at the level of dissemination, children may be misrepresented in sensationalised accounts, revealing a need for researchers to protect children from such experiences and challenge any negative tones or misrepresentations. Media interested in the findings of the ACT report were particularly interested in asking questions that potentially constructed children of prisoners as the 'next generation of criminals' or as 'vulnerable and problem saturated'. Ensuring that the research was represented fairly and accurately was essential and researchers were keen to, without negating the difficulties children experienced, provide opportunities to talk about

the strengths of children and how they, as other children do, have dreams and aspirations for their future.

Conclusion

We hope to have contributed to an increased awareness of this issue in the community, including among service providers and researchers, allowing us to see into a world lived parallel to the ordinary world, but ... hardly known about or understood ... This is a world vibrant with unhappiness and pain but also shot through with hope and love. A first step towards changing that secret world for the better... is to open a door so that we cannot overlook these parallel lives any longer (Billington, 2002 cited by Katz, 2002/03, p. 19).

In Australia, a clear understanding of the needs and experiences of children whose parents are imprisoned is extremely limited, particularly from the perspectives of the children themselves. At a time of increasing incarceration and speculation about the longer term costs—to the children and the community—such understanding is vital to underpin effective policy and practical interventions.

[END]

4.5 Publication 3 – ‘Not seen and not heard: Ethical considerations of research with children of prisoners’

Saunders, V., McArthur, M., & Moore, T. (2015). Not seen and not heard: Ethical considerations of research with children of prisoners. *Law in Context*, 32, 108–125.



Abstract

The ethical complexities associated with research with children are well recognised and have been debated extensively within the childhood literature. However, ethical issues occurring in research with children about sensitive issues, such as parental incarceration, and the practical solutions required to address such issues, are less well described. This paper draws on recent experiences of a research project conducted in the ACT exploring the needs of children of prisoners. It discusses three key interrelated methodological and ethical challenges observed by the researchers. While there is no doubt that considerable care needs to be taken to identify ethical and effective ways to undertake research with this group of children, we argue that applying a process of ethical reflexivity will assist researchers in planning and conducting ethical and methodologically valid research with children of prisoners.

Introduction

Over the past two decades there has been a considerable shift in understandings about children and childhood. The importance of children's participation, their opinions and perspectives are now seen to be essential in the development of both social policy and service delivery. Current understandings of childhood highlight that children often have different views from adults and that understanding and incorporating these is critical if we are to respond effectively (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010).

Current understandings also emphasise the need for children to be provided with opportunities to participate in dialogue and to have their views heard (Thomas & O'Kane, 1998). However, Masson (2004) makes the point that researchers cannot simply focus on children who are readily accessible or who are articulate. Children's views are particular to the childhood they experience and researchers need to ensure that they include children from a range of backgrounds (Masson, 2004). Therefore, facilitating meaningful participation of children who are hard to reach, and talking with them about their lives requires particular attention to ethical and practical challenges.

Many of the ethical and methodological challenges associated with research involving children are well recognised and have been debated extensively within the literature (Alderson & Morrow, 2011). While a number of these challenges are common to research with all children, many of them are more problematic and some are even unique to research with children whose social positioning renders them particularly vulnerable (Liamputtong, 2006). As more and more children experience social and emotional challenges to their wellbeing it is likely that social researchers will increasingly be required to conduct research with children about these difficulties or sensitive issues (eg child abuse, homelessness, domestic violence) (Liamputtong, 2006). While there is more literature regarding the ethical and methodological challenges experienced by researchers

when engaging children generally, this lacks any real analysis or discussion of how such challenges relate to, or may be addressed for, children about sensitive issues.

This article focuses on the interrelated ethical and methodological issues that occur when research with children interfaces with research on sensitive topics. Drawing on a recent study conducted in the ACT,³ which explored with children their experiences of parental incarceration, this article describes three key barriers to engaging children observed by researchers over the course of the research: the invisible nature of children of prisoners; the role of gate keepers; and the need for children to be protected. While there is no doubt that considerable care needs to be taken to identify ethical and effective ways to undertake research with this group of children, we also make the argument that through applying a process of reflexivity, researchers will be in a better position to respond to both ethical and methodological issues as they arise throughout the research process.

Involving children in sensitive research

Until recently, the parenting status of Australian prisoners has been poorly considered. However, Australian and international criminological policy and research is now more focused on the role that families play in the wellbeing, re-offending and rehabilitation of prisoners (La Vigne, Nasser, Brooks & Castro 2005). This growing body of research has considered family connectedness from a variety of perspectives and the emerging evidence of its positive impact on mental wellbeing, and social, health, and criminological outcomes for prisoners (Robertson, 2007; Stanley & Byrne, 2000; Travis et al., 2003).

There is also growing interest in the reciprocal impacts of imprisonment on families, and particularly on children (Poehlmann et al., 2010). It has been recognised that prisoners

³ The ACT is the capital of Australia with a population of 350,000 people

need to be seen in the context of their family and parenting identities if a range of preventative, restorative and rehabilitative imperatives are to be fully achieved for the prisoner and for their children (Poehlmann et al, 2010).

Current research has found that children whose parents are imprisoned are likely to be affected by higher levels of disadvantage than their peers; for example, they are more likely to experience multiple and complex health, social and welfare problems, including poverty, family violence, substance abuse and mental health issues (Eddy & Reid, 2003). While a growing body of international research has described the characteristics of children of prisoners, what is known about these children has been gleaned largely from research conducted with adult professionals, or from the parent or caregiver perspective (Bloom & Steinhart, 1993; Kingi, 1999; McGowan & Blumenthal, 1978; Tomaino et al., 2005; Tudball, 2000; VACRO, 2006). While this research is important, there have been very limited efforts to include children themselves in research.

The value of engaging children directly in research about their lived experiences has been recognised only recently. Historically, research with children has been dominated by methodologies that focus ‘on’ children (where adult conduits spoke about and on behalf of children in the research space), and which were framed by discourses of vulnerability and incompetence (James & Prout, 1998). Over the past 20 years there has been an increasing quantum of work that promotes children’s agency and conceptualises them as able and competent research participants with views different to adults (James & Christensen, 2008). This position has been framed in part by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which asserts that children have “the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them” (United Nations, 1989).

At the same time, the ‘new sociology of childhood’ and ‘childhood studies’, have influenced how children are constructed as social actors who can shape their own lives and can also influence others. These approaches identify how children have distinct capacities to understand and explain their lives. It has also been recognised that children conceptualise and experience the world differently to adults and have distinctly different experiences and concerns. It is only by engaging children directly in research that a more complete picture of their life worlds is possible. These theoretical arguments have led to the increased participation of children in research, including their more active participation in the design and implementation of research (Kellett, 2010).

Nevertheless, while there has been a shift in how children are constructed, which has led to their increased involvement in research, there are still many areas of social experience that are often regarded as too sensitive to explore with children, or which are even taboo, such as research exploring sexual abuse, violence, drug use or homelessness (Liamputtong, 2006).

Concerns about the sensitive nature of these life experiences have meant that these groups of children have traditionally been excluded from participation in studies exploring these issues. For many researchers, this is motivated by a view that childhood is marked by vulnerability, in that children may be seen as “lacking the ability to make personal life choices, personal decisions, maintain independence and self-determine” (Moore & Miller, 1999). In the research context, this has meant that in an attempt to protect children, adults have been wary of allowing children to participate in research, due to a perception that children may not be in a position to act in their own best interests and to opt out of studies if they cause discomfort or concern.

Punch (2002) states that children are marginalised in an adult-dominated society due to the unequal power relations with adults and are therefore seen as being particularly at risk of exploitation and abuse by adults. It is also evident that for some groups of children, their life circumstances and social positioning further marginalise and disadvantage them, hence making them “doubly vulnerable” (Liamputtong, 2006).

Subsequently, it is argued that these children’s participation in research may potentially pose more emotional and social threats, and further vulnerability (Renzetti & Lee, 1993). This means that the obligations and responsibilities that researchers have towards participants may be different, which becomes even more pronounced when a child is identified as already “damaged by their experiences” (Liamputtong, 2006). However, we contend that researchers can act in ways that respond to these vulnerabilities and enable children to participate. Researchers have a responsibility to protect research participants from harm no matter their age, capacity or experience. By ensuring that research is child-centred, responds to the unique needs of particular groups of children, and that potential risks and harms are balanced with benefits to children as a group and as individuals, we (and others) argue that children’s participation in research on sensitive issues can be conducted ethically and appropriately (James & Prout, 1998). Further, researchers contend that by excluding children from research on sensitive issues, and by not directly talking about these topics, the research community may be acting unethically, as children’s voices are silenced and they remain in a powerless position (Moore, Saunders, & McArthur, 2011).

Being a child who has a parent in prison is clearly in this category of social research. Few authors have commented on their reasons for excluding children of prisoners from their research. Three international studies highlight the ethical concerns involved in such research, such as the notion of raising traumatic events, or the risk of exploitation due to

the research methods utilised (Al Gharaibeh, 2008). Others highlighted a lack of specialised resources and skills required to conduct research with children (Eddy & Reid, 2003).

Planning and conducting any research with vulnerable groups of children and young people raises dilemmas and tensions that are common to most research with children. There are, however, specific issues that are particular to research with children who experience parental incarceration. For these reasons it is argued that children require particular safeguards to protect them from harm, and that the obligations and responsibilities that researchers have towards participants are different (Aldridge, 2014).

Within Australia, the NHMRC (NHMRC, 2007) highlights that research involving children and young people raises ethical concerns that are different to those of other vulnerable groups. Ethical issues relating to research with children discussed in the literature focus on capacity to consent, power imbalances, confidentiality, beneficence and non-maleficence (Alderson & Morrow, 2004; Hill, 2006). It is not possible in this article to fully address the debates concerning each of these issues, however, researchers emphasise that ethical research with children is more than a ‘to-do list’ or a codified set of principles (Fraser, et al, 2004). Ethical considerations when researching with children are of an ongoing nature. Researchers need to be aware of possible ethical issues that may arise throughout the entire research process through ongoing questioning, acting and reflecting (Gallagher, 2009; Moore, 2013).

The process of questioning, acting and reflecting provides researchers with a process through which they can challenge what they know and how they know it. According to Berger (2013) the process of reflexivity is: commonly viewed as the process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researchers’ positionality as well as active

acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome.

Further, it is argued that reflexivity is a way of developing an awareness of self-knowledge, of observing the self and the impact of one's own prejudices, beliefs and personal experiences and an understanding of how these influence the development of new knowledge (D'cruz, 2007). In order to recognise and respond to the ethical and methodological challenges and issues in this project, researchers engaged in ongoing internal dialogue and critical self-reflection, through which the researcher's positionality was made explicit and accounted for (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2010). The remainder of this article discusses a recent study conducted with children whose parents are incarcerated to highlight specific ethical and methodological issues and how researchers managed the complex and sensitive context. We make our observations based on our own reflexive observations and from feedback we have received directly from children and carers.

Children of prisoners: The study context

The study described in this article received ethics approval from Australian Catholic University's Human Research Ethics Committee and permission from the Alexander McConachie Centre.⁴ It was conducted in 2012 within the ACT in partnership with a non-government organisation, SHINE for Kids. SHINE for Kids provides a range of support services to children of prisoners across NSW and Victoria which aim to support and strengthen the lives of children and families of prisoners. With the commissioning of a new prison in the ACT in 2009, SHINE for Kids wanted to establish appropriate and meaningful services to support children and young people who experience parental

⁴ Commissioned in 2009, the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC) is a prison and remand centre complex located in the ACT

incarceration in the ACT, similar to their Victorian and NSW sites. The aim of the study, therefore, was to develop an understanding of the needs and experiences of children with a parent in prison in the ACT in order to assist SHINE for Kids to develop and implement appropriate supports for children and young people. SHINE for Kids obtained funding from the ACT Health Directorate under the ACT Health Promotion Grants Program to commission this study.

Research approach

The study was informed by a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is primarily concerned with the study of experience and aims to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in a situation (Lester, 1999).

In line with our commitment to participatory research approaches, a Young People's Reference Group (YPRG) consisting of five young people aged 13–16 years was established. Recruitment of the young people was possible with the help of a youth worker. The YPRG advised researchers on a range of issues, including the language to use in regard to parental incarceration, sensitive issues for researchers to be aware of, and potential interview tools. The YPRG also provided feedback on ways to ensure that all young people who participated would feel adequately supported and safe throughout the interview, and in a manner that was appropriate to them.

The qualitative methods employed in this study included semi-structured interviews informed by a focused literature review, and were developed in consultation with the YPRG and a Project Reference Group. The sample size of this study included fifteen children and young people aged 8 to 18 years who have or have had a parent incarcerated in the ACT, and 12 interviews with parents or caregivers (eg grandparents).

Recruitment

It is acknowledged that facilitation by service professionals who are known to clients is a useful strategy for recruiting participants into research as it helps to establish contact and trust between researchers and participants (Alderson & Morrow, 2004). Currently, the only specific program working with children and young people who have parents incarcerated in the ACT is SHINE for Kids. However, this service had only recently been established at the commencement of the research project, which meant that they too were in the process of identifying children and families to work with, and did not have a readily available ‘sample’ for the research team to access.

Subsequently, the study was advertised widely across the ACT and the project information was circulated using a range of strategies. While this method of recruitment was partially successful, recruiting the required sample of 20 participants remained problematic, owing to the fact that many services in Canberra either did not consider they had ‘children and young people like this’ within their programs, or felt that the children and young people within their programs were ‘too vulnerable’ to participate in an interview. Where possible, we met with these services to discuss the benefit of our study and to provide them with information and assurances that our approach was ethical and appropriate.

Responding to ethical and methodological issues

Access to research participants can be one of the most difficult stages of research with children (Alderson, 2004). We observed through interactions with ethics committees, institutions, organisations and families that three interrelated ethical and methodological issues made access and recruitment particularly problematic for this project: the social visibility of the issue being researched, the role of gatekeepers, and concerns about protecting children.

The invisible nature of children of prisoners

The social visibility of the research problem is often a significant methodological challenge for researchers to address, and must be confronted in order for the research to be successful. Many research populations have high visibility, such as school children or children with disabilities. While it may not always be easy to access them, it is clear where they are located. Other groups, because of sensitivities surrounding behaviour, moral or legal issues, have very low visibility and subsequently present some critical problems for locating and contacting potential participants.

Until very recently, children of prisoners in the ACT have been a largely unrecognised group at both a research, policy and practice level. Currently there is only one specialist service (SHINE for Kids) within the ACT that specifically works with children of prisoners. However, they only work with children who visit the prison, and based on the numbers of children who have a parent in prison, as identified in the 2010 ACT Health Survey; this is only a small proportion of children of prisoners being supported.

Consequently, obtaining a group of participants for this study relied on the goodwill and knowledge of other local organisations, adult programs associated with the prison, youth workers, child protection services and community agencies who work with disadvantaged clients. However, relying on the willingness and capacity of professionals to recruit participants also created a number of challenges.

Due to the single focus design of many services, organisations rarely see the ‘full spectrum’ of children of prisoners. For example, not all children and young people have contact with their detained parents, so recruiting from the only prison program for children meant that those who did not have contact, or those who only have infrequent or sporadic contact with their detained parent were potentially excluded from participating. Further,

many marginalised groups do not use or have access to mainstream services, and so by default were not included in the recruitment process (Atkinson & Flint, 2001).

Additionally, not all children are aware of their parent's incarceration. When asking detainees for permission to interview their children it became apparent that some parents had not told their child that they were incarcerated and did not want their child to know that they were currently in prison. One family member described the great lengths they had gone to prevent the children from finding out. This was particularly evident in families with younger children. Some carers with younger children reported that they would avoid telling them the truth:

*We used to say daddy was fishing and mummy was at work, and they accepted that (Clare, grandparent.)*⁵

This isn't just his sentence—it's my sentence too. I do not want my kids knowing and being affected by this (Sarah, parent).

Likewise, professionals working with children and young people do not always know that their client has a parent in prison. Services and workers do not, as a matter of course, ask children and young people if they have experienced a parent in prison. Much of the time it is left for children to provide this information to workers. Parental incarceration has been highlighted as a potentially stigmatising and shameful experience for children and young people (Boswell, 2002). Research from the US highlights that children frequently articulate experiences of stigmatisation as well as experiences of bullying and shaming; most frequently from peers but also from teachers and neighbours (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2011). Similar experiences were discussed by the children and young people in this study,

⁵ All children and caregivers have been provided with a pseudonym

and as a consequence of this, many children and young people preferred to keep the knowledge of their parents' incarceration a secret. The withholding of such information further contributed to the invisibility of their experiences and in turn made it more challenging for researchers to locate them.

Conversations with workers also highlighted that there were often unspoken assumptions held by workers about what children of prisoners would 'look like' and how they would be known to the service. Even though services did not collect data on children and parental incarceration, they frequently stated when asked to assist with recruitment that they did not have children 'like that' using their services. Although we did not explore what was meant by this statement, it was evident in interviews conducted with children and young people that a number of the workers who children had approached for support also held particular views about what it meant to be a child of a prisoner:

He was kind of shocked, yeah kind of like gobsmacked, didn't really know what to say so ... He just started telling me stories of these children in the drug world and yeah I was just like, "Is that how you see me, is that like what you're visualising me as?" I didn't really know how to take it so yeah, it was just awkward, very awkward (Jessie Claire, young person).

To make the invisible more visible, researchers worked with stakeholders, services and institutions (eg attended staff and network meetings) to raise their awareness that children who experienced parental incarceration may be accessing their services even if they were not readily identifying themselves as a child of a prisoner to workers. As part of the initial contact between researchers and services, we gently challenged the possible stereotypes that may exist about children of prisoners and asked services to consider how they would know if a child had a parent in prison. Asking workers to think about their experiences and

to question their ways of knowing enabled them to be more open in asking children and families to be involved in the research project. Further, engaging workers who were asked to recruit research participants to participate in this process of shared reflexivity enabled a greater awareness of this population group and the issues they potentially face. This also proved to be a successful strategy in the recruitment process in that it increased the number of referrals of potential participants to the research project.

Gatekeeping

In research with children and young people, the issue of negotiating access through ‘gatekeepers’ is one that has been widely discussed (Balen, Blyth, Calabretto, Fraser, & Manby, 2006). Where participants are recruited through organisational settings, such as schools or other services, access has to be negotiated to determine the most effective and ethical way for potential research participants to be approached and invited to take part in an interview. Our experience has been similar to other children’s researchers’ experiences, in that these ‘gatekeepers’ often come in the guise of ethics or research committees and the organisations through which children and young people are accessed. However, we also found that family members played a considerable gatekeeping role in and out of the prison. As well as their parents and caregivers, children’s siblings also censored their participation.

The first stage of our research project involved gaining the approval of a number of Human Research Ethics Committees and research committees located in the ACT. The university ethics committee required particular amendments and clarification about how researchers would manage issues such as the disclosure of illegal activity, and the potential emotional distress that they believed children may experience if they participated. This ethics committee indicated through their questions to researchers that they believed that by discussing the nature of these children’s lives with them directly, researchers could cause

psychological distress such as depression or feelings of guilt. However with appropriate care and safeguards in place they agreed that children had the right to discuss such issues and granted approval. Unfortunately, the two other ethics/research committees did not approve the research (even for an ethics application to simply request the advertisement of the project in support services located in the ACT). Both decisions indicated there was a significant risk of the research causing harm by further stigmatising the children who participated and thereby increasing their vulnerability.

In addition to ethics/research committee concerns, children and young people were also prevented from participating by other gatekeepers such as parents and workers of organisations. Three young people (aged 13–16) who had seen the project advertised contacted researchers to see if they could participate. However, because the young people were reluctant to ask for the parental consent needed in order to participate, they had to be excluded. These young people had been told by their parents that they were not allowed to discuss the issue of incarceration outside of the family home. Young people reported that there were strong beliefs in their family that the parental incarceration had to be kept secret as it was embarrassing and shameful for the family, and could have far-reaching consequences for all family members.

Other young people acted as gatekeepers for their own siblings, reporting to researchers that they believed that their siblings would be uncomfortable talking about their lives and the impact of having a parent in prison. Young people in the YPRG also spoke about some of the difficulties they foresaw in recruiting children for this project.

A. To be honest I can't see our little sisters doing this because my sister would flip and she'd be out the door in a second.

A. Same with [my sister].

Q. Why would that be?

A. Because my sister is very intimidated, really easily and like my dad pretty much disowned my sister the day she was born because she is a lot darker than him and she believes my mum cheated on him.

A. Yeah that's the same as my sister. She doesn't want to have anything to do with dad because he's been in jail and she's all against that sort of stuff. She wouldn't want to be reminded of it (Reference group participants).

Parents also played a role in stopping their children's participation. While no non-detained parent explicitly refused to allow their child to participate, a small number of parents were unable to be followed up after they had initially provided consent for their child to participate. For practical reasons, parental consent was usually obtained from the non-detained parent as it was easier to speak with parents in the community. However, caseworkers at the prison also asked a number of parent detainees if they would consent to speak to researchers about the project to consider consenting to their children being interviewed. No parent detainee agreed and caseworkers reported that detainees were unlikely to agree to their children participating in research if there was any danger that the research could gain information that could risk their sentence or parole.

Workers were the last group of gatekeepers. While many organisations were enthusiastic about this project, certain workers purposefully chose not to refer or discuss participation in the research with potential participants. These workers believed that children were too vulnerable to participate in the research, or that those children's lives were too busy.

Access to children for this research has required negotiation with multiple layers of gatekeepers at different stages of the research process. In order to gain trust and understanding about the project, we spent considerable amounts of time in attending to and addressing gatekeepers' concerns. Considerable time was taken to build relationships with workers and family members. Indeed we found that once researchers had gained the trust of some key families connected to the prison, other families were more likely to consent to participate.

Clearly all gatekeepers have the power to allow or restrict researchers' access to children when they have concerns about the possible negative impact that research participation may have on children. This is despite research that has indicated that this is a low risk. Research which quantifies such impacts is limited but generally suggests that psychological distress is unusual and short-lived (Finkelhor, Hamby, Turner, & Walsh, 2013). A number of studies have shown that children exposed to traumatic life events experience the research process in ways not dissimilar to children without such exposure and rarely reported feeling upset as a result of their participation (Ybarra, Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Friend, & Diener-West, 2009).

This study found that such gatekeepers exercised considerable influence over whether children and young people are given the opportunity to decide whether to participate in research about their lives. However, silencing these children by constructing them as 'too vulnerable' and unable to cope with their vulnerability could also perpetuate the exclusion of the most marginalised groups from research and denies them their right to articulate their views and concerns.

Protecting children

Much of the literature available concerning gatekeepers discusses their roles in either censoring children's right to participate (Coyne, 2010) or ensuring that children are protected from research that could potentially be exploitative, invasive or coercive. Due to the fact that these gatekeepers are also increasingly at risk of consequences (legal, financial, emotional and reputational) for failing to provide children with protection, parents and other adults have becoming increasingly risk-averse and have often chosen to restrict children's participation, and as an unintended consequence, any potential benefits that their participation might allow. Added to this are parents' concerns and fears about allowing their children to discuss such stigmatised matters or issues that expose matters that families wish to remain private. Subsequently, while a number of parents identified that the project might benefit the individual child, other individual children, and children as a group; it was evident that many more parents had concerns of varying degrees that prevented them consenting to their children's participation.

The NHMRC highlights that research may lead to harms, discomforts and/or inconveniences for participants and/or others (Al Gharaibeh, 2008). While there is not an exhaustive list of harms, the NHMRC classifies harm as being physical, psychological, social, economic, or legal. Gatekeepers in this project were particularly concerned with social and psychological harm of children participating. Social harm includes damage to social networks or relationships with others; discrimination in access to benefits, services, employment or insurance and social stigmatisation (Al Gharaibeh, 2008). Stigmatisation is often identified as one of the impacts of parental incarceration on children and young people. Stigmatisation has been described as a process which distinguishes and labels differences with negative attributes in order to perpetuate differences in social, cultural, political and economic power (Link & Phelan, 2001).

Research is one process which makes these differences noticeable. Indeed, research can often reinforce ideas about difference. As Phillips and Gates (2011) highlight, the term ‘children of incarcerated parents’ has become more than a descriptor, it is now a label that signifies a group of children based “upon a stigmatised characteristic shared by their parents” (p.287). The issue for researchers and ethics committees is to understand and articulate clearly what safeguards need to be in place that protect children and young people from harm, and that do not negatively contribute to ‘further’ stigmatisation, but allows researchers to explore this group of children’s needs and experiences in order to better support them.

Balancing safeguarding and stigmatisation: Strategies implemented

Flexible methods to respond to concerns

As identified earlier, researchers employed a reflexive approach throughout the duration of this research project. Researchers asked critical questions of both themselves and other stakeholders about assumptions held not only about the research questions but also about the possible methodologies available to researchers to fully consider the research question. Such critical reflection was designed and used to understand and minimise risks of the research, particularly for the children and young people who were rendered vulnerable due to their age and also their social positioning. While many of the challenges we experienced we had broadly anticipated and addressed in our research proposal, we still encountered issues, particularly with recruitment, which necessitated adapting the research process.

For this project, the methodology and methods were considered for their appropriateness and safety through a number of ‘controls’. Collaboration between the YPRG and the researchers ensured that questions, tools and activities were sensitive to the issues that children experienced. In this study, both researchers and the YPRG reflected on how the

recruitment of participants and the development of the research questions could influence or impact children's identities and perceptions of stigmatisation. Questions were designed to elicit information about the impact of parental incarceration and also to understand the child or young person's experience from a holistic perspective (ie seeing them for more than this characteristic of their life). Ethics committees and an 'adult' reference group comprised of experts also provided feedback on the questions and methods.

Discussions also occurred with young people about how they might like to talk about their experiences of parental incarceration. Researchers spoke with the YPRG about activities and tools, and whether face-to-face interviews were more preferable than focus groups or online questionnaires. Young people like the concept of chatting over Facebook and thought that the information provided to researchers may be more truthful.

*Well they feel bigger and tougher and they have more confidence in them- selves over the internet because they're not face-to-face
(Reference group participant).*

However, they also recognised that the internet was not always safe, so after much discussion decided that face-to-face interviews would be preferable.

Safety scaffolding

To ensure children and young people's safety, clear parameters were put in place around the sample at the beginning of the research process. This study only engaged children and young people who were fully aware of their parents' circumstances and who had an informed understanding of what parental incarceration meant for them. This was determined by parents and workers who had referred the young person to the study. It was important to not stigmatise children by recruiting them in ways that identified them to

others as ‘a child of parent who is incarcerated’. This was ensured through the recruitment methods and the way the project was advertised.

Once involved in the research, in line with best practice, children were afforded a safe and secure environment in which to discuss with the researcher their experiences of parental incarceration. Through discussions with the YPRG, researchers were aware of the types of venues and places that were acceptable for children and young people to be interviewed in, and how children and young people travelled there. For many children and young people, school was identified as one of the most convenient and safest places. However this was not possible, as approval had been declined by the Education Directorate, and subsequently, researchers were not authorised to speak to children in the public school environment. This meant a number of children and young people were excluded from the research as alternative venues were not readily available. For a small scale qualitative study this was problematic in that it affected the sample size and our opportunity to speak to children in an environment that they considered familiar and safe.

At the completion of the research process, researchers also have a responsibility to ensure that children have the opportunity to debrief. Researchers regularly ‘checked in’ with children throughout the interview and at the end of the interview asked them to choose a facial expression carved into a rock, which represented how they felt. All children and young people identified that the interview had been a positive experience, although for some it was clearly an emotional experience:

Well I’m kind of tired so I’m going to pick that one too but I was happy to do it and I like this rock (Shelley, Young person).

At the end of the interview, children and young people were offered access to further support. The support offered included referrals to other services. Before the commencement of the interviews, the YPRG alerted us to the possible issues that might arise and cause distress for participants. They also identified possible avenues of support that existed, should participants become distressed, such as the school counsellor or Kids Helpline. Subsequently, researchers were prepared with relevant and current information about the possible avenues of support for children and young people. Only one young person, after hearing about the study, declined to be interviewed because they did not wish to discuss the topic, believing it would distress them. No child or young person who did participate in the interviews became distressed, with all participants describing the experience as useful and worthwhile.

Dissemination

Finally, dissemination of findings is a critical component of keeping children and young people safe in the research process, which is not always sufficiently addressed. Much discussion in the literature about research dissemination considers the need for the widest possible dissemination of the research, in the most effective manner, and at the earliest opportunity (Cloke, 2002). This includes the need to translate research into practice. Researchers and those who commission research are acutely aware of the need to identify the problems or difficulties that particular groups experience in order to obtain funding for programs and support. In constructing research findings about problems or negative issues, researchers run the risk of stigmatising or causing further harm to participants and the population groups they are researching. Consequently, it is important for researchers and their commissioning bodies to be aware of the impact and the unintended consequences of research on participants and the population groups they are researching. Further, reinforcing the belief that children of prisoners are different to other children who experience the loss of a parent or identifying them as a specific group that needs ‘fixing’

has the potential to cause a range of inadvertent challenges for children and young people with such life experiences.

The dissemination of research findings is therefore another opportunity in the research process which may be appropriate for children and young people to participate in.

However, there is little evidence in the literature concerning parental incarceration to suggest that children and young people have any involvement in this stage of the research.

Researchers are increasingly coming from a perspective framed within the social studies of childhood (Holloway & Valentine, 2005) and as a result, recognise the need to work with rather than on children. The children's rights agenda, emerging from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, advocates children's involvement in decisions that affect their lives, and this has had implications for the ways in which children are now included in all stages of research (United Nations, 1989). This has resulted in innovations that seek to empower young people in the research process, including through dissemination of research findings (Morrow, 2008).

For this study, informed by the principles and practices of child-centred research, the researchers asked children and young people from the reference group to check the meaning and emphasis of the interview data, the adult interpretations of what children and young people said, and what children and young people wanted to see included in the final research report. Enthusiastic discussions were held with children about what should be included in the report. Children wanted to be described as aspirational, strong and independent. They wanted the research to highlight the difficulties they suffered without diminishing the successes they also experienced. Agreeing with the themes identified by the researcher, they also wanted the findings to be presented as dynamic so that people could understand the changing, fluid nature of their lives.

Children and young people described to the researcher how they appreciated being involved in this stage of the research. It was also important as children have the right to know the findings and conclusions of the research. If children are to be conceptualised as agents in their own life, they need also to be conceptualised as exerting agency in respect of research, especially when it concerns the representation of their own views (Alderson, 2001).

Conclusion

This article has considered the complexities of the issues in research with children and young people who experience parental incarceration. The article does not offer prescriptive methods or try to suggest any formula of how to do research in this area. It does, however, seek to identify and discuss some of the key ethical and methodological issues we have struggled with when engaging children and young people in research about issues concerned with parental incarceration.

Enabling children and young people to actively engage in research allows researchers to develop a greater understanding about their lived experience and a deeper understanding of the challenges and concerns that affect the lives of children and those of their families and communities (James & Christensen, 2008). Many issues encountered in this study are similar to those found in other research with children, however, researchers found that research with children and young people experiencing parental incarceration presented additional challenges. The invisible nature and lack of recognition that these children and young people experience from policymakers and services, paternalistic constructions of risk and vulnerability that discriminates and excludes children and young people from being provided information about participation in research, the secrecy and the stigma attached to children and young people's lives that result in some children and young people not wishing to participate, as well as the need for time to build robust and trusting

relationships, all significantly influenced how research is conducted with this population. By taking a reflexive and responsive approach to research, we were able to respond simultaneously to the ethical and methodological issues encountered, thus ensuring the research remained rigorous, ethically sound, and most importantly benefited both participants and their communities.

[END]

4.6 Chapter summary

This chapter has described the conceptual approach underpinning the present study and the ethical and methodological considerations needed to undertake a research project with children of prisoners. The two publications presented provide a useful addition to the research literature about undertaking research about sensitive issues with vulnerable populations.

Chapter 5 will provide an overview of the key themes that emerged from the interview data. The next two chapters present publications 4 and 5 (appendices E and F), which focus on two key issues identified in the interviews with children and young people.

Publication 4 considers children and young people's perspectives. Each of these publications present sufficient detail for the reader to comprehend the later discussion in Chapter 8.

Chapter 5: Children and young people's experiences of parental incarceration

5.1 Introducing the chapter

The study's findings in relation to the research question are presented in the following three chapters. This chapter examines and describes the experiences of parental incarceration as described by children and young people participating in this study. The children and young people shared a range of experiences related to the arrest, sentencing, imprisonment and release of their parent. The analysis of the interviews showed that young people's lives were characterised by considerable disadvantage that affected their day-to-day lives. Children and young people believed that this disadvantage was frequently as a result of their parents' criminal behaviours prior to incarceration as well as the impact of parental incarceration.

To capture these insights, this chapter presents an overview of the broad themes that emerged from the analysis of the data. These themes are connected to a chronology of events structured by the adult criminal justice system, as described by children and young people. Consistent with interpretative phenomenological analysis conventions described in Chapter 4 (see 4.2 Conceptual framework), these themes are first summarised in Figure 2 (page 150) and then represented as the headings that guide the discussion throughout the chapter. An introduction to these themes and how they emerged is provided below.

In keeping with a childhood studies perspective, this chapter aims to explore the subjective nature of parental incarceration and does not provide definitive answers to all children and young people's experiences of parental incarceration. What this chapter provides is a discussion about the important features of the phenomenological experience of parental

incarceration as well as the other associated issues related to living within a criminal milieu, as described by children and young people.

Children and young people agreed that parental incarceration presented practical, emotional and social challenges both in their day-to-day lives and into the future. Children and young people emphasised that these challenges commonly overlapped and were interrelated. They stressed that having a parent involved in the criminal justice system was marked by a constant presence of their parent's absence, which had both positive and negative consequences for them. Children and young people also spoke about the emotional rollercoaster they experienced, caused by their parents' offending behaviours and the associated consequences of being connected to the criminal justice system. Children and young people explained how the challenges they experienced were dynamic in nature, with different challenges present at different time periods of their lives and occurring for different lengths of time.

This research also uncovered the different experiences of parental incarceration among children and young people. Some children and young people described themselves as interacting or participating with the adult criminal justice system, subjected to the conditions imposed by this system. Others described that, while they were aware of the challenges their parents experienced inside prison, as well as the demands that the adult criminal justice system placed upon families, these had little practical implications for them in their day-to-day lives.

All children and young people spoke about the instability and insecurity they experienced across their lifetime. Instability and insecurity were often described by children and young people as resulting from the impact of the multiple disadvantages, including parental incarceration, that were evident within their lives. These included difficulties within family

and extended family relationships, including living in out-of-home care arrangements; family and domestic violence; unstable and insecure housing arrangements; changing financial circumstances; and a variable engagement in education. However, children and young people also held different perceptions about these disadvantages and the level of impact that they had. These differences were frequently associated with age of the participant, the length of time that they had experienced parental incarceration, the support being provided to the participant, gendered expectations, and whether the gender of the participant was the same as their incarcerated parent.

Children and young people also stressed the emotional challenges they experienced. While the interviews with children and young people were marked with concrete examples of the practical challenges they experienced, as described above, they also illuminated deep feelings of loss, stress and disconnection. This chapter explores how these feelings coalesced in children and young people's lives and helps us to understand that the meanings and impacts of parental incarceration are varied but compelling, influencing how children and young people understand and make sense of their lives, as well as influencing who they are, or can be, in the future.

Section 5.2 is structured by the chronology of the experience of parental incarceration, from arrest, sentencing and imprisonment through to release. Within and across these phases or stages that somewhat structure the experience of parental incarceration for all the participants, the research highlights a spectrum or continuum of involvement for the children and young people—from bystander (or appendage) to participant. This spectrum of involvement sits alongside the spectrum of emotions experienced by the children and young people. However, there is no direct correlation between involvement and emotional experience—being involved in and aware of what was going on did not align with a positive experience, nor did being a bystander. Instead, this chapter highlights a complex

interaction between involvement and participation, on the one hand, and the phenomenological experience for the research participants, on the other.

Children's experiences of parental incarceration

Superordinate themes

Children and young people interacted with the adult criminal justice system in different ways.

Some felt that they **participated** in this system, as they followed their parent through the processes of arrest, remand and imprisonment and release. Others felt more that they were **bystanders**, having different levels of awareness of what their parent was experiencing but not feeling connected to this.

Children and young people thought that parental incarceration created a great deal of **instability** and **uncertainty** across their lives, including:

- family relationships;
- housing and care arrangements;
- financial circumstances;
- caring responsibilities; and
- capacity to engage in education

Parental incarceration also involved a scope and depth of feelings that were associated with:

- loss and sadness;
- worries and stress;
- being alone and disconnected.

Figure 2: Superordinate themes

5.2 Bystanders or participants

The analysis of interviews to understand the phenomenological experience of the children and young people (as outlined in section 4.2 Conceptual framework), revealed that many of the challenges that participants experienced were dynamic in nature, often being present at different time periods of their lives and occurring for different lengths of time. Children and young people often spoke about their experiences as a process, involving a series of steps beginning with their parents' arrest and ending with their release; frequently, they commenced again when their parent breached conditions or committed new crimes. They described that some of the issues affected them only at the time of arrest and others were linked specifically to incarceration or release. Children and young people spoke about the degree to which these processes had impacted on their lives. Children and young people who lived with their parent, or who had reliable and sustained contact with them, commonly described themselves as participants in the criminal justice process. They described being exposed to and experiencing the challenges that their parent experienced and usually having to navigate these on their own or with only limited assistance. Those children and young people who did not have strong relationships with their parent described being aware of their parent being incarcerated but expressed that, while they felt that they were considerably emotionally affected by this, their day-to-day living remained reasonably unaffected. Nevertheless, these children and young people were also identified as experiencing significant disadvantage, which had most likely been present for all, if not the majority of, their childhood. Children and young people shared the following narratives about their experiences with the criminal justice process.

Arrest

Each child and young person described different experiences of their parent being arrested by police. Five of the young people reported not knowing about or remembering when the first time their parent was arrested. For some, this was because of their young age and the

recognition that their parents (incarcerated and non-incarcerated) had tried to protect them from this knowledge. These participants spoke about how they had not been told by anyone about the arrest of their parent and either were left to believe that the parent had gone away somewhere or had found out much later through the media or friends. Not knowing where their parent was and why they had “suddenly disappeared” was reported by children as often more concerning to them after they had found out that their parent had been incarcerated. Retrospectively, children identified that, as a young child, they had missed their parent but because of their young age they had also just accepted what they had been told by their caregiver—that is, that their parent had gone somewhere else.

Yeah, he wasn't there and I didn't know what to feel when he wasn't there because I didn't know he was actually in jail. I just thought he was away for a bit of a holiday (Sarah, 15 years).

Others described their parent as a habitual offender who was frequently arrested and incarcerated. Children described that this had become so ‘normal’ to them that they had lost count of how many times their parent had been in prison and were unable to recollect the first time they experienced this.

I'm not actually sure when my dad went first was arrested and went to [prison]. I was young, I know that, I was early primary years. At first no-one would really tell me and my brother, so we would be like, “I wonder what's happened to dad,” and then mum would be like, “Oh your dad's gone to jail” (Jane, 15 years).

Children and young people who were very young when their parent first went to prison reported that their non-incarcerated parent had frequently separated from or divorced their incarcerated parent in the early years of their lives. They highlighted that they did not have close relationships with their incarcerated parent and they described having a more

detached response to their parent's arrest. Despite this distance, children and young people described that they were usually always aware of when their parent was returning to prison, as either a family member or the media would inform them at some point. While they described that this still emotionally impacted on them, they highlighted that their life did not really change in any particular way; as a result, they felt more distant from this experience.

It's obviously still upsetting to think that your dad is in prison, it makes me feel depressed and all that ... but it doesn't really change anything for me or my sister or my mum. We just know he's there (Erin, 15 years).

Other children and young people described experiencing a deep sense of upset and sadness when learning that their parent had been arrested. These children and young people's experiences differed from the previous children's in that they frequently lived with their parent prior to the arrest and described a much closer and loving relationship with them. These children and young people were also usually witness to their parent's arrest.

A. It was pretty fucked, I pretty much begged the coppers if she could just come home and go to court tomorrow.

Q How old were you then?

A I was heaps young, it was when we left [name of] Caravan Park I'm pretty sure that was the first time, the first time that I remember it all, like I paid attention to what was going on and it wasn't like, "Mum will be back tomorrow," it was like I understood what was going on and it's like my mum's getting taken away, and I would have been about nine, 10 ... we were getting all of our stuff from the house, I was with my dad and putting all the stuff in the back of the truck and putting his couch on the back of the truck and they never asked have you got a warrant, got court. They [the police] thought she'd fail to appear in

court the next day and she had a warrant. Mum was like, “I can go to court tomorrow, I know I have a warrant, I’m just going to turn up tomorrow at court,” and they’re like, “No, that’s not going to happen” (Natasha, 14 years).

While children and young people identified feelings of upset and fear at witnessing the arrest of a parent, young people also described that being witness to this process provided them with some information about their parent’s whereabouts. For example, Jessie Claire, 17 years, described how the police had informed her family of where her father would be going and what might happen next. This information was often lacking for children and young people who had not been with their parent at the time of arrest. Only one young person described that their parent had known of or suspected their impending arrest. They spoke about how their parent had made arrangements for them to go somewhere else prior to the police arriving. However, this child also spoke about how he had only found out retrospectively that his parent had been arrested and that he was not actually told of his father’s imprisonment—he had to find out for himself.

He took me away to a friend’s house so I didn’t have to be around it, which is fair enough ... but then no-one told me or anyone I know. I went to my friend’s house on Tuesday I think ... and I didn’t hear from him [dad] or I didn’t know he was in jail till Friday, I didn’t see him until about a month later, yeah, a month. I found out through the internet. The Canberra Times, I didn’t even get told, I had to look it up myself which I ended up finding a big article on dad and I’d never been told by anyone, I didn’t never get contacted (Max, 14 years).

Sentencing

Many of the children’s parents were arrested and then held on remand until a court date was set for a trial. Children who lived with their parents described how the delay in time between being arrested and charged and then sentenced presented particular emotional

challenges for them. They highlighted that waiting for court dates and knowing how long their parent was going to be imprisoned were important factors for them to know about. This knowledge assisted in them coping with this loss.

He hasn't even been sentenced yet; he's been in there for almost a year without even being sentenced ... I'd never been away from my dad for longer than two weeks, for the 13 years of my life, and because they've got limited visibility rights, I know committing a crime is 100% wrong and that you get punished for it but there just needs to be some sort of way that you can know (Max, 14 years).

Max described how at the beginning of his fathers's incarceration he would regularly search court lists on the internet in order to try and establish some sort of idea about how long their parent might be in prison.

It's just been announced on the ACT Court listing, he's got a court date but we have no idea what it's for, if it's just to sentence him or if it's, yeah, what it's for ... I go onto the ACT Court listings and it tells you what's when, you search up [parent name] and it will—or [parent name] either one it works, and it comes up which, yeah, and that's how I find out ... I haven't done it for quite a while but I used to do it often when he was going through the whole phase of going in (Max, 14 years).

Another young person spoke about the sentencing process and how they were a part of this with their family—they felt informed and that nothing was being hidden from them. This knowledge was an important feature in how children then coped with their absent parent.

I was there for everything, I went to all his court appearances and yeah ... it helped me cope with the shit, knowing that, like yeah. The first sentencing after they raided the house, he was sentenced to a year of weekend detention. And then there were issues with these people; they

were going to come to our house while dad was away, they like threatened to kill me and my mum, to my dad, so he stopped going to weekend detention because he didn't want to leave us at home alone, and so that was a breach of his, yeah, his conditions. So that's when he got re-sentenced. And then a firearms charge was brought up during his new sentence, which is why he got the extra time on top of his one year, because the conditions of weekend detention was if he didn't go, he'd spend that one-year duration in full-time imprisonment (Nick, 16 years).

Other participants described that hearing the sentencing was in some ways a relief and that good news could also be gained from this. Some children and young people spoke about how they often thought their parent's prison sentence would be much longer than what was actually handed down.

Yeah, I went to his court cases ... Yeah, it was alright. I just went in there and we just sat down and then he came in, and the judge just sentenced him. The judge let him off six months, so I was pretty happy (Jason, 9 years).

Imprisonment

All the children and young people interviewed spoke about the imprisonment of their parent. Again, there were some distinct similarities and differences in how they participated, or not, in this part of the criminal justice process. In keeping with a childhood studies perspective, the capacity of children and young people to choose whether or not they visited or maintained contact with their incarcerated parent was framed, by young people in particular, as a matter of individual choice and self-determination—but only as they became older. Young people reflected that, as a young child, it was a parent that made decisions about whether or not they could visit their incarcerated parent. Young people described that, as they aged, they were more often able to influence whether or not they visited their parent. However, this was only if the incarcerated parent was determined by

other adults, such as their non-incarcerated parent, as ‘safe’. For those incarcerated parents who were deemed as ‘unsafe’, children and young people were still prevented from seeing them, regardless as to whether or not the participant had expressed a wish to see their parent.

It was also evident through the examination of their narratives that for a number of young people their individual choice as to whether or not they would maintain contact with their incarcerated parent was based on their own perceptions of their needs. Children and young people spoke about their current practical, emotional and social needs of having a parent in their lives. Their often pragmatic assessment of their needs helped determine whether or not contact with their parent was necessary or beneficial. Chapter 6 presents Publication 4, which focuses on children and young people’s decision-making regarding having contact with their parent. It highlights the key factors which influence this, including prison visits.

It was also evident within the narratives of children and young people who visited their parent that these visits also could be a particularly difficult place for children and young people to be. A small number of participants described how it was upsetting for them to see their parents either physically injured or suffering from a mental health issue when they visited. Max spoke about how he had seen injuries on his father inflicted by other detainees. He explained that this distressed him enormously as he had not been warned about this prior to their visit. Max described that seeing these injuries made him anxious about the safety of his parent while he was in prison.

Yeah, he got into a fight the other day ... because they moved him to another thing, ward, because he wanted to do metalwork, to get more money and stuff. Some guys went up to him, and was like, “Are you [parent name]?” and he was like, “Yeah.” It was like just fairly punched him in the head. Then dad got up to fight him, and picked his glasses up

to put them on, and the guy just kicked him in the face, so he had a big gash down here. So dad said he bashed him right after that (Max 14 years).

Max described that his father had been the “winner” in this particular fight and went on to discuss how proud he was of him. However, from the tone of his voice and his later comments expressing concerns for safety of all detainees it was evident that witnessing his father’s injuries had been distressing.

Nick also described how he had visited his father and had seen his father’s face all bruised and swollen. Nick reported that his father had been attacked by another detainee and that his mum and grandparents had tried to report this but the prison had purportedly refused to protect their dad other than to put him in solitary confinement, which Nick described as being further punishment for his dad.

Been there six months. Been stabbed twice, bashed. The other week he got bashed in—because he’s in one of those cabin things, the cottages ... His face was swollen. This was before he got—no, after he got stabbed. They put him—took him out of there and wouldn’t let him go back for the night and put him into solitary confinement for the night. So you get punished for telling them. They said that they would sort it and then the next day they wanted him to sign a piece of paper to say that nothing happened, even though my mum told the guard the time, the cabin number and what day ... They wanted him to sign a thing to say nothing happened. He wouldn’t sign it, so they’ve just put him back in the cabin. So they know this guy’s flogged him and stabbed him, but they’ve done nothing about it (Nick, 16 years).

Release

For children and young people who had a parent who been sentenced to prison for a long period of time, the release of their parent was not a topic they discussed. This was most

likely because the release date of their parent was many years away and either these children could only focus on how they could have contact their parent in the present or they had ceased having any contact with them, in which case the concept of release had become irrelevant.

For children and young people who had remained in contact with their incarcerated parent, the release of their parent—while pleasing for some—could also be problematic and was seen to add further pressure to their relationships. One young person spoke about how her father had been released and how they had found accommodation for them to both to live together. This young person had experienced her father repeatedly returning to prison since she was a child. She spoke about how, for much of her life, she had been living independently without either parent. She expressed that she loved her father and was glad for his release. However, she described that when her father began to live with her he had tried to ‘parent’ her, and this had resulted in a breakdown in their relationship.

It happened like last year and the year before because like he wouldn't let me go out and do anything. He just, yeah, you can't hold on to someone really tight or they're just going to let go, and yeah I guess he was holding on too tight and wouldn't let me go out or do anything and he wouldn't give me money. So I kind of just had to get out and figure my life out on my own pretty much ... things got better for me but things got worse for him and he started using again and drinking and it's not good for him. He has had a few overnight encounters (Sarah, 15 years).

Other children and young people who had parents who repeatedly returned to prison and who no longer lived with their parent due to parental separation, also expressed concerns about the release of their parent. They highlighted that, once their parent was released, they would now no longer know where their parent resided or what they were doing. This was

problematic for two young women in particular, as often their parents would turn up unannounced and create chaos for them. Erin explained:

Like, because he got out and like he was out for like four good four months. This was in December. He just turned up at school to see me because I was not going anywhere else because he is very unreliable, and he came to the school to see me and when he came we were talking and the guy I was seeing for so long, like he threatened to kill, because I had made him come with me. I was like, "I'm not going by myself, like I don't know what he's going to do." He could do anything ... like it's a bit Looney Tunes, he's not all there (Erin, 15 years).

Children and young people also indicated their concern that despite their parent being released this time there remained a fear that their parent would offend again and the cycle will repeat once more. John explained:

Sort of frightened. If he goes back to jail again after this. Because he doesn't really learn. He's been in jail his whole life. All different things, weapons and drugs and shit. He just needs to pull his head in, but he doesn't listen (John 16 years).

The quotes and stories presented here, from children and young people who experienced parental incarceration, clearly demonstrate how they participate in and witness the criminal justice processes as a result of their parent committing a crime. While the extent to which a child or young person was a participant in or a bystander to these processes differed—in other words, whether or not they lived with their parent and/or visited them over the time of the incarceration—it was evident that all children and young people were emotionally impacted by the loss of their parent. As noted at the beginning of section 5.2, it is important to recognise that, whether children and young people were considered as bystanders or participants of the criminal justice process, the emotional experience of

being involved in and aware of what was going on did not necessarily align with a positive experience—nor did being a bystander.

For some children and young people, the emotional impact of parental incarceration was further complicated because of the instability and uncertainty they experienced both before and during their parent's incarceration. For those who had experienced their parent's release from prison and subsequent return, the instability and uncertainty of both their life and their parent's life profoundly impacted them. The complexity of these experiences will now be explored.

5.3 Instability and uncertainty

Separate to the uncertainty that the criminal justice process provided for children and young people, many of the participants in this study also spoke about a number of other issues that contributed to a deep sense of instability and insecurity. Experiences of disrupted or violent family relationships, unstable housing, an unreliable financial income, increased caring responsibilities and variable school engagement were identified by children and young people as contributing to their shared understandings of parental incarceration.

Family relationships

As noted earlier in section 5.2, a number of children and young people identified that their parents had either separated or divorced at some point in their childhood. The Australian literature has highlighted that a father's absence from their children's home prior to incarceration is at a rate almost three times higher than there were absent fathers in the general Australian population (Dennison et al., 2013). A relatively large part of the literature also describes that incarceration during the time of the marriage considerably increases the probability of divorce occurring in families (Lopoo & Western, 2005;

Siennick, Stewart, & Staff, 2014). However, there is limited understanding of children and young people's perspectives about parental separation and the impact of this when combined with parental incarceration.

The majority of children and young people who had indicated that their parents had separated or divorced explained that both their mothers and fathers had established a range of new family structures that they now lived within. Children and young people explained how these new family structures had impacted their relationship with their incarcerated parent and more broadly in their lives.

Most children and young people indicated that it was their mother's decision to separate from their father, usually because of the continued impact of their father's offending behaviours. Sarah explained that her mother had left her father due to his continued drug use.

They fell in love, and then he slowly got, like he was—I don't know how it all happened but they ended up on drugs together and then she got off them while they were still together and then it just—like their relationship just crumbled and then she turned into a better person after she left him and his life just turned to shit (Sarah 15 years).

Many of the participants went on to describe that their mothers had met someone else and that they now had a stepfather in their lives. For many, this was a positive experience, and participants spoke about how this had benefited their life.

My mum met another man, so he's now my stepfather, so I pretty much base, I use him as my father figure. So usually when people ask me about my dad you're like. "Which one do you want to know about?" (Jane, 15 years).

John explained that, when he was younger, his life had been very chaotic. He described that he had spent some time in juvenile justice and had experienced significant drug and alcohol problems. While he described himself as still vulnerable to heading down the same pathway as his dad, he also described how much his stepdad had helped and supported him.

My stepdad has a business and he went up to Newcastle a week ago because he is doing a contract up there. And then they got another contract down here, and I think I have to work tomorrow. He gives me work which really helps (John, 16 years).

For a smaller number of participants, though, having a step family was said to complicate their lives. These participants highlighted the challenges that this placed on their relationship with their birth father and the conflict that occurred as a result.

I would obviously see my dad a lot more. I reckon everything would be a lot more simpler to me, with explaining stuff, you don't have the three families you have to explain—I reckon life would just be easier as well, it's just fucked. I've moved out of home now and my mum and stepdad are in Western Australia, now, so far away (Erin, 15 years).

Relationships with new stepmothers were also more frequently presented as problematic by children and young people, when compared to relationships with stepfathers.

Participants described that the “new” women in their father’s lives were frequently known to be using illicit drugs and committing crimes. These issues prevented young people from building any relationship with them. Young people said either that they did not want to get involved with drug using or be associated with parental crimes or that their other parent had always prevented them from interacting with these step-parents.

Many of the children and young people described that the loss of family relationships and the gaining of others did generally not occur as a direct result of their parent being incarcerated. Although it was evident that the fracturing of family relationships was particularly difficult for children and young people, and when parent's criminal behaviours and resulting incarceration was overlaid with this, a great amount of instability was created within their lives. Participants did identify that, because of their mothers and fathers' offending behaviours and resulting criminal record, they were frequently forced to deal with a parent's separation in ways that other children and young people did not. Participants believed that parents who separated and divorced and who did not have a parent in prison had easier experiences, particularly when step-siblings were introduced into the family.

Living with step-siblings or new siblings as a result of new parent relationships was also described as challenging for children and young people, especially when new siblings were younger. Participants with step-siblings frequently described how they were treated differently within the household. They highlighted that they often did not feel included or an important part of their family. This led to them leaving home early or experiencing conflict with not only step-parents but also step-siblings. Jasmine described the interaction between her and her stepfather:

I was sitting in the lounge room with [name of friend] one day and my stepdad comes in and he picks me up and he throws me across the room and I'm just sitting there going, "What the fuck?" ... my stepdad has two kids with my mum and they're my little sisters but the way he treats me and my little brother because we're not his kids ... It's so different. You can just tell that we're not his. I always have to do the dishes and my brother gets blamed for everything. That's why I don't live with them anymore (Jasmine, 15 years).

Children who experience family and domestic violence

At least half of the children and young people spoke about how they had frequently experienced threats of physical abuse from their incarcerated parent as well as family and domestic violence prior to their parent being incarcerated. These children and young people also highlighted that their father had committed acts of violence perpetrated towards other individuals outside of the family. For some incarcerated fathers, these acts of physical violence were one of the reasons that they had been imprisoned. As identified in Chapter 4, all participants were advised about the extent of the confidentiality that I could offer. Further, at the end of each interview I offered to follow up with the participant if they would like further support with regard to some of the difficult events that they had discussed—no participant wanted me to do this with them.

Young people in particular reflected on the abuse that they and their siblings had endured as young children. They described how they remembered times where their parents were yelling at each other, or where their father would come home and be physically and verbally aggressive towards their mother. Witnessing or hearing about acts of physical violence perpetrated by their father were frequently discussed by participants. One young person reflected on how she and her sibling had been forcibly taken by their father.

... he has kidnapped me and my sister before but we were both like, I was like three and she was like just a newborn baby. Like it was when my parents first split, and it was just like in—like it was hectic but he took us for two weeks and then the police couldn't do anything. I like worry that he'll do something stupid again but like I guess like I am that much older now (Julie, 15 years).

For those who had witnessed their father perpetrating physical abuse towards their mother, their discussion about the past violence appeared, on the surface, to be now quite

pragmatic. However, it was interesting to note through the analysis, by listening again to the recordings and re-reading my notes, that participants' body language, tone of voice and use of silence reflected that these experiences had been extremely frightening at the time, and they still held considerable anxiety about them.

Yeah, because my mum always has to call the police on him so at home he used to hit my older sisters and belt them. So mum would call the police and then lock us in—actually lock us in a bedroom so we wouldn't see it. But one time like it was too late, he like grabbed mum by the throat. Then he grabbed my sister and we got this massive hole in this metal heater because he punched it. And then he got arrested then. That was really scary (Jason, 9 years).

Three of this group of children and young people described how this violence persisted despite their incarcerated parent no longer living with them. Jacinta described that their mother had never re-partnered due to the concerns she had about how her incarcerated ex-partner would react to another person being in her life. This young person described that her father had threatened her mother, telling her that he had contacts within the community who would feedback information about her mother to the incarcerated father and who could act on his instructions.

Jane described how, when she was younger, her mum would take her to visit her dad but that this was often frightening for her and her siblings. Now that she was older and she no longer had contact with her father, she reflected on what she had experienced:

Like we were sitting in the jail one day and we were just sitting there and he said it in a slyest way possible but he threatened to kill my mum. Him being in jail again, yeah, I kind of feel safe now, you know, from him because I know in there that he couldn't get to me. He couldn't do

anything. You know, because yeah he's not a nice person at all (Jane, 15 years).

Children and young people also spoke about the potential risks that they were currently exposed to. This related predominantly to physical abuse and emotional abuse by their incarcerated father. A key way that participants managed such risks was to try and cease contact with their parent.

I never see my dad ... Doesn't even bother me because last I talked to him he was abusing me and telling me he was going to bash me and shit. So I told him to get fucked and don't talk to me anymore (John, 16 years).

Another young person described how, before she had ceased contact with her father, when she visited him with her mother he would try and humiliate her mother in front of her. She described that her father would spend much of the visit telling her mother what she had done wrong and interrogating her about who she had seen and when.

It's no wonder I don't want anything to do with him, like, he's that much of a dick, and he'll go to me "Oh, your mum's nothing but a slut," and just shit like that (Carina, 13 years).

A small number of young people who had experienced domestic and family violence prior to their parent's incarceration also spoke about their concerns about what would happen after the release of their parent. This was particularly evident for children and young people who had parents who were described as habitual offenders. Having their father incarcerated for a period of time provided some reprieve from the worry and fears that their family experienced when their father was living freely in the community.

Care arrangements

Four of the children and young people in this study resided in out-of-home care, and two young people described how they had been in foster care at various points of their life.

Three of these participants had experienced both their mother and their father being incarcerated. While these participants shared many of the experiences of uncertainty and instability that others did, they also highlighted some challenges that were different.

Children and young people spoke about the distress that going into new foster homes created for them, particularly at a time when there was so much other chaos occurring within their lives. Max described that he did not want to go into foster care and had heard some concerning stories about what happened to you when you stayed in foster care after a certain age. He believed that no-one had explained to him why he had needed to be looked after and that it was only because he had behaved so badly that he had been allowed to live where he wanted.

Yeah, they've put me into foster homes when I didn't want to. I was smart enough to realise what they were doing when I was 8 and they tried to put me into a foster home and if I didn't scream and pull and jump around they would have put me into another foster home, because I went into one when I was 4 and 5 and I got out of that and went straight into kindergarten. Yeah, I went straight to kindergarten when I got home to dad and if I wasn't smart enough to realise what they were doing when I was 8 then I would probably still be in a foster home now. Because when you're over 8 it lasts for four years and I would have got out a few years ago or if there was problems with mum and dad I'd rather stay in or go to other ones, you know what I mean (Max, 14 years).

Two of the young people who had been in out-of-home care described how they had experienced continuous instability of care and access to accommodation throughout their

lives. Even where extended family had agreed to care for them, young people described that this was not always stable or secure. The ending of a family care arrangement appeared to be more painful and distressing for young people than for those who had ceased foster care arrangements. These participants described instability in their lives.

Well I was care protection since I was younger because my mum and dad being in and out of jail because dad is a violent person, he's in Queensland. And then I lived with my grandma for eight and a half years and I was living on the streets for two years and then I got put into a refuge and now I'm still in a refuge (Rochelle, 16 years).

Three other participants who had not directly experienced being in out-of-home care did discuss how they had experienced other family members (usually described by them as half-siblings) being removed by statutory child protection services and placed in out-of-home care. Further, the four Aboriginal participants, while not in out-of-home care themselves, also described other family members' interactions with statutory child protection services. All of these children and young people discussed how their previously incarcerated father had gone on to have relationships with other women and that new siblings had been born as a result of this relationship. Young people spoke about how access to these siblings was prevented by either parents who did not want the child or young person to interact with the step-parent or because new siblings had been removed by statutory child protection services. Rochelle explained that this removal of her siblings into out-of-home care had resulted in her not being able to meet one of them and that she had become disconnected from her other siblings. Based upon her experiences, she described that it was unlikely that statutory child protection services would allow them to have contact with any sibling who was involved in this statutory service.

Like me and my sister get affected by not even being able to meet our little sister. It's just like not fair. My dad is not allowed to see her and his girlfriend, it's like she fucked off our chances, excuse the language, of ever meeting her but like she still gets the advantages of like seeing her and spending time with her. So it isn't fair at all. And my brothers. I don't even see them. I think [brother's name] is in Queensland. My stepmum and my dad had my little sister, and then she was living with them for I think it was like four years and then she got taken off them with her other four kids (Rochelle, 16 years).

Housing

Some children and young people experienced feelings of uncertainty and instability due to a lack of secure housing, influenced by the incarceration of their parent in various ways. Interestingly, in this study it was only girls who described experiences of homelessness, and this often resulted due to conflict with step-parents or because both parents had been incarcerated. These young women indicated that, once they left home, it was difficult for them to find safe long-term accommodation. They described having to live with friends or boyfriends or in refuges when they were no longer able to live with their parent.

For two of the young people, homelessness was directly caused by their parents' incarceration. These young people had become homeless due to the parent's tenancy being terminated when they were imprisoned. While family members stepped in to care for them, both of the young people described how the care arrangements had been difficult and had at various times faltered, resulting in their having to find accommodation by themselves while still at school.

I was really young. It was really difficult. I lived with my aunt until she passed away and then with her friend ... and then my dad, when he got out of jail ... he couldn't cope ... then we ended up moving to [crisis

accommodation]. I now live with my boyfriend as I just couldn't keep living with dad (Sarah, 15 years).

These young people described how homelessness has also impacted on their lives and compounded the issues of parental incarceration. For the two who were homeless because of parental incarceration, the state of being homeless had continued to a lesser or greater extent ever since.

I was living on the floor of her [mother's friend's name] son's bedroom ... So it was very uncomfortable and squishy and I'd go out for three nights and come home for one because it was just so squishy and I couldn't take it. She [mother's friend] kind of got sick of that too ... just got sick of it and she was like, "I'm sorry, but you're going to have to find somewhere else to live, we don't have the room" (Erin, 15 years).

Younger children, particularly where both parents had been imprisoned, were more likely to describe moving between foster care and living with extended family at different periods of time. This instability often had repercussions for other areas of life. For example, the changes in housing and care arrangements also brought about other adjustments, including a new school and a loss of old friends.

I have lived in three houses after mum and dad were in jail, the first one was this place and it had teddies and like a video game there and like with the video I passed level 1 but I couldn't even pass level 2. It was so hard ... then I lived with nanny and pop, that was actually really sad because I didn't get to see my friends again but then I moved here [foster care] then actually I got a new puppy and he's mine (Nick, 8 years).

Financial challenges

The majority of young people reported how the imprisonment of their parent had influenced family finances. All participants described that, if they could have any one thing to help them when their parent was in prison, it would be extra money. Most participants described coming from families that had predominantly low incomes prior to their parent's incarceration, and many relied on welfare payments as their primary source of income. Children under the age of 12 did not specifically discuss within their interviews the financial challenges the family encompassed, yet they did discuss how they regularly went without things that they saw their peers access, such as participating in organised sports teams.

For some participants, an already low income became even lower when a father went into prison. Children and young people described that, when this happened, buying basic necessities such as clothes and shoes became difficult, which further added to their feelings of shame and embarrassment.

... because I wouldn't have, like, shoes to go to school with, I would but they would have holes in them and stuff. It was too embarrassing for me (Carina 13 years).

Young people also spoke about how, when the family income was reduced, access to health care and mental health supports was repeatedly compromised. Three of the participants reported that they had to stop seeing their psychologist as they could no longer afford it, nor were they able to access new supports. Others indicated that even going to their general practitioner for physical and mental health care was difficult.

Like I have days of, I don't know, it's the depression I guess, like I've never actually seen a doctor about it but ... like mum doesn't have the money, like it's the money situation (Gary, 16 years).

Other basic services were also described by participants as being compromised by a drop in family income. This was perceived by participants as adding considerable stress to the family. Young people spoke about how household bills for electricity and gas became unaffordable and their mother would need to supplement their household income with food vouchers or money sought from non-government support organisations such as St Vincent de Paul Society. Young people described that they would also feel obliged to use their money from part-time casual employment to help parents get by.

The electricity—dad used to pay the electricity bill, now mum can't afford it, so our electricity is going to get shut off, so that's been pretty full on (Jessie Claire, 17 years).

Participants in high school spoke about seeking financial support from school to buy school uniforms and to participate in school activities with their peers.

A I've had to get the principal to help me pay for my year 10 uniform and stuff.

Q Is that okay? The school's quite good at helping out with the finance bits?

A If I talk to the youth worker then yes, but I talked to my year adviser and he was like, "You can't hand in the note without a deposit, I'm going to need a deposit before I can actually order it." So I was like, "Oh, so I had to come down here, I talked to the front office ladies and they were like no, so I came down here and talked to the youth worker about it" (Erin, 15 years).

Others described how they relied on friends and boyfriends to provide money for them to be able to participate in social events. One young person described how her boyfriend would 'treat her' to McDonald's or KFC, because otherwise they would not be able to go out. While financial support from friends was gratefully received, it also came at a cost, with young people expressing how this made them feel guilty, embarrassed and beholden to certain friends.

My friend's helping me get through a lot of stuff too. She pays for my MyWay [bus] card to be topped up, she randomly just gives and gives and gives. Then when I get money I try and [pay her back], like I got my school bonus money and I went school shopping and lingerie shopping because I needed some. I was like to her, "Do you want this?" ... She's like, "No". She says I don't have to pay her back, but if I ever have to pay her back, it would be so much money, but I'm so grateful for her (Carina, 13 years).

Those who had moved out of home and identified as homeless reported that finances were extremely difficult to manage. One young person spoke about how she had had to go through a process with Centrelink to allow her to be classified as an independent child, as this then allowed her to access income support. Another young person described how Centrelink had been unhelpful and that she was refused an out-of-home allowance that she had thought she was eligible for. Erin described that she had not been provided with any other source of financial support, despite currently couch surfing and living away from family.

Because I'm not 16 yet, I can't get the out-of-home allowance. Because I've been couch surfing I've had to go to Centrelink so many times and Centrelink is so boring. Oh my god, I've sat in there for hours. [Boyfriend's name]'s mum is going to apply for family tax and see if she can get that, then I can stay there.

Added to the financial difficulties children and young people experienced due to the absence of their parent, children and young people spoke about how expensive it was to visit their parent in prison and the impact that this had on day-to-day costs. Paying for petrol to get to the prison and buying tokens for food and drink in the visiting room was identified as a huge cost for families, particularly when there were a number of children and adults to pay for.

Despite the largely negative financial challenges experienced by participants when their parent went into prison, for a small number of participants, having their parent in prison improved their financial circumstances. Julie described that their incarcerated parent was required to contribute child support out of any earning that he made while in prison.

... like dad owes my mum over like a million dollars in child support because he just doesn't want to get a job, and when he's in we have more finance because he does have to pay out of his money in there, we do get—like it's not much, but we do get extra money because he's paying maintenance while he's in there (Julie, 15 years).

Others spoke about how, when their mother or father was in prison, they were unable to spend money on drug use, so the income that they did have lasted longer and there was more stability within the home.

Responsibilities: Children and young people as carers

Children and young people who had a parent in prison also noted that they had increased caring responsibilities. For some families, the absence of a parent meant that the non-incarcerated parent had to work hours that they previously had not in order to try and reduce the financial impact of parental incarceration. This left older siblings in particular to take on more household responsibilities than they had previously been used to, in order

to support their non-incarcerated parent. Participants spoke about how, in the absence of their father, they would have to assume caring responsibilities, including dropping off and picking up younger siblings to and from school, shopping for family groceries, paying household bills and spending more time at home to keep family members' company. Some young people identified that they were the only source of transport for their family and this placed a considerable burden on them.

While no child or young person identified themselves as a carer, it was apparent that, for some participants, their increased caring responsibilities prevented them from participating fully in employment opportunities, school activities and social events with peers. It was also apparent that, for older young people, the task of facilitating contact between their detained parent and their siblings also became their responsibility.

This is the first time he's been in there, so it's been pretty difficult, because my mum's not very ... stable. So a lot of the pressure's been put on me personally, looking after the family, and financially, yeah taking on a lot of responsibility since dad's been gone. So it's been tough, yeah (Jessie Claire, 17 years).

The majority of children and young people in this research did not use support services to alleviate the extra responsibilities they were tasked with when their parent was incarcerated. They did, however, identify the need to be provided with extra support to enable them to cope with these responsibilities. Children and young people asked for greater flexibility in visiting times at the prison so that they did not have to leave work early. Participants also asked for schools to have a greater understanding of the increased emotional distress they experienced when a parent went to prison. They also called for more financial and practical supports that could ease the burden of caring.

School

Education and access to educational activities were described by children and young people as often being interrupted when a parent was imprisoned. Participants explained that there were a number of reasons as to why this occurred, including the need to move schools due to changing care arrangements; that family life was chaotic and it was often difficult to get to school on time or complete assignments; and that schools generally did not recognise that a young person's parent was incarcerated or provide adequate responses to support young people in this situation. Children and young people also spoke about the bullying and stigma that they experienced at school, which is addressed in Chapter 7.

The need to move schools because of changing care arrangements was discussed by children and young people attending both primary and high schools. Changes to school were described by children and young people as stressful and challenging. They highlighted that often they had to move long distances away because their father or their mother were no longer able to care for them. Participants reported that changing schools resulted in them no longer being able to see their friends and losing contact with trusted supports. David described that moving schools had made him feel sad and that he wished he had "super hero powers" that could help him reach his friends. David was particularly quiet as he drew me his superhero to illustrate what he would change in his life to make things better.

Well it's actually really sad because I don't get to see my friends again because my friends are at [name of school] and I have to go to [name of school] (David, 12 years).

Explaining to new groups of children and young people why they had moved to a new school was explained by some participants as difficult and providing further challenges. A number of young people described that teachers had tried to do their best in making the

participant feel at ease by talking to them in breaks or by asking other students to look out for them. Participants explained that, when teachers went out of their way to include them, they would often become a target for other children and young people.

A change of school also brought about changes in the curriculum and school subjects studied by participants, creating further challenges for them. Even where children and young people had not moved schools, many participants felt that parental incarceration often resulted in them living a chaotic and unpredictable existence, which in turn made it hard to attend school. Keeping up with schoolwork and social pressures at school sometimes became impossible. Nick described that the police regularly came to his house because his dad would get drunk and become violent towards his mother. Nick described that this impacted on his capacity to concentrate and that his own mental health had deteriorated as a result. He expressed that he had begun to feel that he did not fit in at school. He said:

Yeah I was pretty bad at school. Always getting suspended and that ... I think it was just like because my dad was always gone off at home and that. Because alcohol and that. Cops were always there and shit... All the stuff that was going on at home. They [teachers] don't really help and they don't understand (Nick, 16 years).

For others, the pressure of taking on the care of siblings or other family members resulted in them being unable to continue to keep up with schoolwork. Children and young people who had lived with their parent prior to their parent being incarcerated acknowledged that, since this had occurred, they were no longer able to sustain the grades they had once achieved.

Since dad's been away my grades have dropped dramatically. Just trying to find time to do homework—homework's hard to do, because I never have time to do it, I'm always running around for everybody else trying to, you know, taking mum grocery shopping, taking her here, taking her there (Jessie Claire, 17 years).

It's hardest for me and my brothers at the moment to keep up with school, so I think there needs to be a lot more support at school, just for keeping up with homework, and getting those extensions, and someone communicating with the teachers for you, letting them know, "Listen this is ... I'm not going to tell you but this is what's going on, round about, and this person needs help." And getting you that little bit of leeway, to make it a little bit easier (David, 12 years).

The support that children and young people received at school was dependent on the relationships they had with teachers. If young people did not trust the teachers then they were unlikely to seek any assistance. Further, if young people asked for help and did not receive it, they described that they were unlikely to ask again.

... because, you know, what's the point if you can't tell them the truth because like if you tell them the truth, then you're just slapped down or you're judged (Jane, 15 years).

The male participants in particular described that when things became difficult it was easier to disengage or not participate in something than to ask for help. These young people spoke about how they believed that, when schoolwork became difficult and they began to fall behind, it was easier to stay at home or hang out with friends.

I was out for a rather long time, because I was moving from family to family so that I could either go to school or be comfortable and stay away from the drama (Nick, 16 years).

For some children, concerns at school began in early primary school. Jane described that by the time she commenced school both her parents had been incarcerated and she was already aware that she felt different to other peers and did not want to go to school.

When I was back in primary school ... I'd tell everyone about my mum ... I'd talk her up and be like, "Oh, she's going to murder you if you do that." To little kids in primary school someone in jail is pretty scary, but they didn't understand what I understood, I was just different.

At the same time, though, many young people reported that going to school also provided a source of support for them. This finding is in agreement with research from the US that also acknowledges how engagement in education increases resilience and opportunities to participate in other social activities, thereby preventing further exclusion (Beck & Jones, 2007; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Young people in this study further stated that getting an education differentiated them from their parents and opened up opportunities for better employment. This was identified as important by those young people who had ceased contact with their parent or who had reported feeling estranged or distant from their parent.

He's a drug addict and he has a tiny small job packing away stuff in a little souvenir shop. I don't know how someone can live like that. It's strange. I will never live like that, that's why I need to get my year 10 (Erin, 15 years).

5.4 Children and young people's feelings and emotions

This next section provides a description of the feelings and emotions that were common to children and young people who experienced parental incarceration. Within each of the interviews, all children and young people spoke about a range of emotions that they experienced as a child of a prisoner.

Recurring emotional themes that emerged from the narratives of children and young people included feelings of loss and sadness, worries and stress, and being alone. Feelings of shame and embarrassment were also powerful emotions reported by children and young people; these are explored further in Chapter 7.

This section of the chapter explores how these emotions came together in children's lives to make their experiences complex and multifaceted, compounding the challenges and difficulties they face. The narratives of children and young people illustrate how they come to understand and make sense of their past and present life, as well as how these emotions and feelings come to shape their becoming or future selves (Uprichards, 2008).

Loss and sadness

Many children and young people described feelings of loss and sadness when they spoke about their mother or father being in prison. Children and young people explained that parental incarceration was a loss of not only the relationship they had with their parent but also of what they understood to be normal. Participants described feelings of loss that involved the absence of their parent, intangible losses of what might have been such as childhood and possible futures, and their loss of privacy. As already noted in section 5.3, many of the losses children and young people faced were related to material resources and family relationships, such as the loss of siblings, extended family, housing and income—all of which resulted in a loss of stability and certainty. It was apparent that these losses and the ones described below resulted in profound feelings of sadness for children and young people.

The loss of a parent

The loss or absence of their parent was, unsurprisingly, the single most discussed loss and cause of sadness for children and young people. Children and young people elaborated that

having a parent in prison meant that they missed out on the love and support that their parent had normally provided to them. Many incarcerated fathers and mothers were unable to undertake the roles that they had usually performed at home, both practically and emotionally, resulting in their children feeling a deep sense of loss. Children and young people described missing out on the companionship, parental support and fun that parents had usually provided them with.

Sarah described that when her father went to prison she was no longer able to go fishing or go to the movies, and this made her feel sad. Jessie Claire explained that her brothers also missed out on playing football and playing with their father in a way that their mother cannot. These examples illustrate the difficulty that children and young people experience when they are no longer being able to take part in activities with their incarcerated parent. Participants often referred to these activities as a loss of acts of love and care performed by their parent. This was evident not only in the words that children and young people used to describe their experience but also in the tone that they spoke with and the body language that they portrayed. Participants became very serious and spoke more slowly to emphasise how their parent's absence created a "big hole" in their lives, which made them feel sad and upset.

The gendered norms held within participant's families, unknowingly or not, clearly shaped how they related to their parents and how they experienced loss. Feelings of loss were particularly profound in the lives of children and young people who had a parent of the same gender in prison. While this study is too small to say that there are any conclusive differences in the losses for children who have parents in prison of the same gender, the analysis of the interviews found that these participants provided deep and lengthy descriptions of loss.

All of the interviews with male participants who had a father in prison highlighted how these children and young people identified with their father in ways that girls did not. For the male participants in this study, the loss of a father meant the loss of physical activities such as wrestling together at home, participating in sport such as football, or discussing shared interests such as football teams or TV shows. It was evident that the boys and their fathers in this study connected through these physical pursuits and shared interests; when they were no longer available, children and young people suffered a deep sense of loss and sadness.

The female participants in this study, while evidently also missing their incarcerated father, did not describe such intense feelings of loss when their father went into prison. Many of the girls spoke about how they missed the regular physical displays of affection from their father and deeply missed him. They also spoke about how their personal interests were often separate to those shared with their father. The female participants did not indicate that they felt any loss in the continuance of their interests and hobbies in the same way as male participants. Subsequently, the loss and sadness that they felt when their father went to prison were not associated the loss of self.

Conversely, when female participants discussed the loss of their mother to prison, their conversations were imbued with considerable sadness about not just their parent's absence from them but also about what their parent missed out on as a mother when in prison. While these numbers were very small, these interviews illustrated the gendered expectations of female participants about what it meant to be a mother. Girls frequently projected what they thought their mother would be feeling or should be feeling because of being in prison and "leaving them". While I would not have been surprised to hear participants' feelings of anger about their parents, the girls in this study only relayed

feelings of sadness about how they and their mothers missed out on important moments across their lifetime.

I don't know, it's just shit, you don't have your mum, she misses out even though she's already missed out on so much of my life. Every time she's locked up it feels like it's the most important part of my life she's missing out on. Every time she's either missing out when I'm heaps young or as I'm growing up or I'm too old, there's not a part you don't want her to be there for, there's not a stage in life you want to give up (Stella, 18 years).

The loss of what might have been

Children and young people who no longer had contact with their incarcerated parent also described feelings of loss and sadness. However, this loss was predominantly associated with not having a relationship with their parent (incarcerated or not) because, in the most part, their parent had never “been there” for them. When I asked what “being there” meant for them, children and young people described that their parent was simply not physically or emotionally available to them and did not provide them with love and care or the emotional and financial support they required when growing up. This was often associated with not only the absence of their parent due to imprisonment but also their parent’s criminal behaviours, drug use and possible mental health challenges.

Like many other participants, Erin spoke about how sad she felt when she reflected on her life without her biological parent. She said that if she could change anything it would be to have a father present in her life to love and support her. However, this wish also presented a level of consternation for children and young people. Thinking about what they wanted from a father figure also highlighted to participants the deficits they saw in their own father and what they did not want. This level of analysis for children and young people compounded their feelings of loss and sadness.

Younger children frequently described that the absence of a parent was particularly apparent on days such as Father's Day or Mother's Day. Taking part in activities or celebrations at school relating to their parent reinforced feelings of sadness and highlighted to others that they did not have a parent to share these times with. Children and young people also reflected that family celebrations and anniversaries could be particularly painful events. Similar to others who no longer had contact with their parent, David described that, no matter how long he had been disconnected from his mother and father, their absence was a constant reminder of what was meant to be there. Christmas and birthdays were reminders that participants no longer had contact with their parent. Jason spoke about how he felt the first time his father did not call him on his birthday. He described the complexity of feelings that he went through: worry, disappointment, confusion and then deep sadness that his father had forgotten him.

Those with stepfathers also highlighted that, despite the fact that these individuals frequently fulfilled particular functions in their lives, the new relationship did not substitute or account for their internal need for their biological parent. Those participants who indicated that they had new stepmothers highlighted that these individuals rarely fulfilled any function in their lives, making the loss of a mother even more profound.

For many participants, the intangible aspects of loss were most apparent when they made comparisons between their lives with the lives of other children who had not experienced parental incarceration. Children and young people commonly reflected on what their lives may have been like and what might have been different had their parent not gone to prison.

The loss of a 'normal' childhood was something that children and young people frequently reflected on. Children and young people spoke about how, because they had lost a parent to prison and had considerable lengths of time away from their parent, they had been

unable to participate in developmental activities with their parent that other children had been able to take for granted, such a learning to tie shoelaces or ride a bike. Many children without contact with their incarcerated parent considered that their childhood was lost or 'not normal'.

I always wondered what life would be like ... I wonder where I would be, who I would be, who my friends would be, what I would be doing. It's just mind-blowing. If you sit down and think about it you're like well what happens if this happened and this happened and this happened, what if this never happened? I wouldn't be where I am today (Rachel, 14 years).

The loss of privacy

Children and young people also spoke about a loss of their privacy as a result of parental incarceration. This was particularly evident in the narratives of young people who highlighted that media reports often relayed what they considered to be identifying information about their lives. Young people described that the public provision of this information made them a target to others. Those who were connected to social media (eg Facebook and Snapchat) also noted that, despite privacy settings, they were often pursued either by strangers seeking information about their parent or by individuals wanting to threaten them for the being connected to their parent.

Young people expressed that online and print media outlets removed their anonymity from within their community and as a consequence made them feel exposed. A number of young people reported that they were also sometimes tagged in Facebook posts by people who they did know, and this further eliminated any chance of keeping the information about their parent a secret. Further information on this issue is found later in the thesis, in Chapter 7. This loss of privacy created considerable upset and distress in the lives of

children and young people and further contributed to the next issue discussed, worries and stress.

Worries and stress

Evident across all interviews with children and young people was a pervasive sense of worry and stress. As the focus of this thesis is parental incarceration, it is unsurprising that this issue was identified as a key source of stress and worry for many of the participants. However, children and young people also spoke about a range of stressors that they experienced, both real and perceived, that were associated with other demands placed upon them. Many of the worries children and young people experienced relate to issues such as family relationships, housing and financial challenges, as outlined in section 5.3. While section 5.3 spoke more to the practical experiences of these issues, this section highlights the interrelated and complex emotional consequences that result.

Worry and stress related to parental incarceration

For those children and young people who had only recently experienced parental incarceration for the first time, participants identified that this was a major life event that, overnight, created drastic changes to their home life and to their relationship with their parent. The limited capacity to see their parent immediately after their arrest, the unfamiliar environment of a prison, and a lack of available information from the police, prison and courts all contributed to deep feelings of worries and stress among these participants.

As identified in Chapter 4, many of the participants had experienced parental incarceration more than once. Nonetheless, it was apparent within the interviews with this group of children and young people that there was still a profound worry and stress associated with this event. While the familiarity with the prison environment and the previous knowledge

gained from seeing their parent in prison before reduced this stress somewhat, it was apparent in the transcripts and also visible to me at the interviews that these participants felt extremely concerned about their parent. Participants' pace of speaking increased as they described their concerns and their voices became louder, indicating the depth of feeling that they experienced in these moments.

Other participants described that the release of their parent from prison also created feelings of stress and worry for them. Many of the young people highlighted that they worried about whether their parent had the capacity to continue to stay out of prison or if they would end up going back in again. As discussed further in Publication 4, both Erin and Julie described the worry they had about how they would be able to maintain contact with their parents once they had been released, because their parents were not reliable enough to maintain contact with their children unless they were in prison. Not knowing when they might see their parent again created a great deal of stress for these young participants.

Somatic presentations of stress

Children and young people spoke about stress as an emotional and a physical formation. Many of the younger children highlighted how they would experience somatic conditions when stressed. Jason described how he would get "terrible tummy ache" on the way to seeing his father. He said that his mother had told him that this was "his nerves" about going to the prison. When I asked him if he thought this was true, he said he did not know but that it was not there when he came home again, so perhaps it was. Some older children highlighted regular headaches and feelings of lethargy that they believed were associated with stressful emotions. One older young person spoke about how the intensity of their stress at different times in their life had led them to cutting themselves. They described that this action was a way to make themselves "feel something" because when they felt so

stressed they began to feel numb and lost “emotional perspective”. I asked them if they had spoken to anyone about this, and they confirmed that they had seen their school counsellor.

I get so stressed, I don't know why. I'm so tired. I just lose air, I need my puffer, sometimes it gets so bad I ... I almost died in my sister's arms on her thirteenth birthday, I almost died, I wasn't breathing, I was so stressed (Carina, 13 years).

I find the more I worry, the more I want to eat. I just want to eat all the time. If I'm sad then I'm hungry and if I'm stressed I'm hungry. Hungry hungry hungry (Jason, 9 years).

Stress and worry related to disadvantage

Those participants who continued to live at home with their non-incarcerated parent spoke about feelings of stress that were frequently related to the wellbeing of their siblings and parents (both incarcerated and non-incarcerated), academic achievement, family conflict and reduced financial incomes. Unsurprisingly, participants who had become homeless or who had been dealing with considerable chaos within their lives over a prolonged period of time explained that the stress and worry they experienced was mostly related to their own immediate issues of safety and survival. As noted in section 5.3, children and young people experienced a range of challenges associated with their parent's incarceration. These participants highlighted that, while they clearly had concerns about the welfare of their parent, the stress that they experienced was mostly due to the profound challenges that they were left to negotiate themselves within their daily lives.

It was apparent that the complexity and number of issues some participants experienced contributed to substantial emotional distress. However, the variability of the stress and worry reported by children and young people was often dependent on the supports

available to them. Young people commonly described how their “heads were full” of issues that had to be dealt and that this resulted in extreme anxiety. Working with support services or Centrelink also created other forms of stress. Sarah, Claire and Rebecca all gave similar accounts of the stress that they experienced in trying to access welfare payments to support themselves when living away from home. They highlighted the challenges they experienced in completing paperwork and providing proof of eligibility to Centrelink, which not only added to their stress of being homeless or trying to live independently but also compounded the worry and stress that they were already experiencing.

Future worries

Children and young people consistently spoke about the worries they had for their future. Adulthood and the responsibilities that come with it was clearly a common concern among children and young people. Surprisingly, even the youngest participant, aged 8, spoke about their worries for their future life and growing up to be an adult. For some, this was because they were acutely aware of the stigma associated with parental incarceration: they worried about how this would shape their future life. Participants also commonly discussed their concerns about whether or not future employment opportunities would be impacted.

For other children and young people, worries about future issues centered on growing older and not being like their parent. This anxiety was common across interviews, particularly for older young people and young people who had already been caught up in the youth justice system.

Being alone and disconnected

In addition to the pervasive emotions associated with parental incarceration described above, children and young people also spoke about feelings of being alone. These feelings

were often caused or compounded by the sense of shame that they and other family members associated with parental incarceration. The silence and the secrecy they and their families commonly employed to protect themselves from others were strategies that were seen to further contribute to this. Children and young people described often excluding themselves from social situations and becoming more self-reliant in efforts to reduce their interactions with others. Self-exclusion and isolation are discussed further in Chapter 7, as they pertain to stigma and shame. Below is an account of how children and young people have described further experiences and feelings of being alone.

Solace in isolation

Feeling a sense of belonging and connection to others was important to children and young people. However, many children and young people also spoke about a sense of comfort that they experienced when being alone. Participants were acutely aware that having a parent in prison contributed to a perceived sense of difference among their peer group. While it is highlighted in Chapter 7 that shame and stigma have prevented children and young people reaching out for support and developing friendships, children and young people also acknowledged they often found comfort in being on their own. Being alone did not necessarily mean they were lonely. Being alone provided respite from having to explain what was occurring in their life and defending their behaviour to others.

Children and young people highlighted the difficulty they had in talking to peers about their experiences. Firstly, they indicated that there were few people they could trust. Secondly, those they could trust often did not want to listen to the sad feelings they experienced. Subsequently, when times were tough or when they felt stressed or sad, it was sometimes just easier for them to be on their own.

One of the younger children, Max, also highlighted his preference for sometimes being on his own rather than playing in groups at school. However, he also noted that, by excluding himself from others in this environment, he was made to feel different again. Max described that, while he had one really good friend who he would spend some time with, he also liked doing his own thing at school. Yet he also described that, in doing so, other students found him ‘weird’.

Alone together

Participants’ narratives highlight that, separate from their decisions to be alone or feeling the loss of their incarcerated parent, children and young people frequently feel lonely and alone at home and within their families after a parent has been incarcerated. Many of the children and young people described that, when their father went into prison, their non-incarcerated parent was frequently preoccupied with trying to manage a new way of life. New financial pressures, caring arrangements for young siblings, increased hours at work and new relationships meant that children and young people felt excluded from their non-incarcerated parent’s lives and were left feeling alone in an otherwise busy and chaotic environment. Rochelle explained that the loss of her non-incarcerated parent left her and her siblings alone at a time when she believed she needed her parents the most:

... because when my father got out of jail she had to support him as well because he had no income. So she picked up another job and was supporting this grown man and that was a huge impact on her—and then when she was working she’d work all during the day, go to university and then go to another job at night. That was hard because I was little and so was my sister ... It was our loss because of our father’s mistakes, like we never really got to spend time with our mum because she was still supporting him when he should have been supporting himself.

Like many of the children and young people in this study, Gary highlighted that not having the attention he once had from his parents when he was younger left him feeling depressed and alone. Gary and the older boys in the study described that this often left them seeking a way to rid themselves of these uncomfortable feelings and gain a sense of belonging elsewhere. Unfortunately, for some of the young people in this study this meant developing friendships with peers who often had considerable difficulties themselves.

A I hang out with [boy's name]

Q Who's that?

A My best friend.

Q Does he come here or does he ... ?

A No he's got a job, but he's not much good influence.

Q Why not?

A Because he's an alcoholic. Always drinking. He just got out of rehab actually. I don't want to take drugs anymore. Like I don't feel like it. But sometimes I can do foul drinking when I'm around him. But like he gets it, like he knows (Gary, 16 years).

5.5 Chapter summary

This chapter described the lived experiences of parental incarceration for children and young people living in the ACT. It was evident across the interviews with children and young people that there were distinct differences in their experiences of parental incarceration, which led to a range of competing views. Nonetheless, this chapter also

identified a homogeneity of experiences concerning the overarching themes that impacted on their lives.

Children and young people tried to make sense of and navigate the life cycle of the criminal justice process. Competing themes about the challenges children and young people experience when their parent is arrested, sentenced, incarcerated and released were apparent. Many of the children described feeling as though they were participants in this process, while others highlighted how they were mostly onlookers. However, all children and young people discussed the emotional impacts of the offending behaviours of their parent, which were often compounded by the social and cultural contexts in which the children lived and the systems that they engaged in.

Children's narratives provided insights to their lives prior to, during and after the release of their parent. For some of these children and young people, these experiences were current and impacting on them as we spoke. Others benefited from experiences of hindsight, and they spoke retrospectively about certain issues. What was evident was that all these children and young people experienced profound disadvantage, which led to lives that were marked by considerable uncertainty and insecurity. Alongside this, children and young people were exposed to a range of chaotic and destabilising events. Violent fathers were of particular concern in that children and young people not only saw significant acts of violence perpetrated towards their family members also described how these experiences led to confusing and anxious thoughts about their own identity, now and for their future selves.

Experiences of parental incarceration were also influenced by children and young people's normative assumptions about family and childhood, as well as the thoughts and actions of the adults around them. While many of the feelings children reported were based upon

responses to concrete events, it was also evident in their interviews that some of these feelings were related to unmet expectations of what they considered was normal.

It was evident that, for younger children, the thoughts and actions of the adults in their lives significantly influenced whether or not they remained connected to their incarcerated parent. Older young people described how they would make their own choices. To explore this further, Chapter 6 will present a publication about how children and young people make decisions about maintaining a relationship with their incarcerated parent.

Chapter 6: Children's decision-making about contact

The happiness of any society begins with the well-being of the families that live in it.

Kofi Annan

6.1 Introducing the chapter

The previous chapter provided an overview of the important elements that featured in children and young people's descriptions of their experiences of parental incarceration. Children and young people perceived parental incarceration as a dynamic process manifested by the criminal justice system. Children and young people's experiences were frequently marked by notions of uncertainty and insecurity. This chapter uncovered the complex array of emotions that resulted from the loss of their parent to prison and the profound disadvantage that they endured. Most apparent was the distinct differences children and young people experienced in how they connected and maintained their relationship with their incarcerated parent.

To provide a deeper understanding of how children and young people make decisions about maintaining their relationship with their incarcerated parent, this chapter presents a publication which focuses on the children and young people's decision-making and the important factors that influence this. It is informed by the childhood studies approach to research, which challenges the idea that children are less competent than adults (James & James, 2008). Consistent with a childhood studies perspective, the insights provided in this publication help us to understand children and young people's capacity to appropriate and influence their own worlds. This publication outlines four key factors that children and young people consider as influencing factors to maintaining relationships with their incarcerated parent: (1) the quality of parent-child relationships, (2) their participation in decision-making, (3) their perceived challenges and benefits of maintaining contact with

their incarcerated parent and (4) the practical issues that children and young people may need to overcome to see their parent.

6.2 Publication 4 – ‘Children of prisoners: Children’s decision making about contact’

Saunders, V. (2017). Children of prisoners: Children’s decision making about contact. *Child & Family Social Work*, 22(S2), 63–72. doi: 10.1111/cfs.12281.



Abstract

Children commonly experience considerable disruption to their care when a parent is incarcerated. Maintaining relationships between children and their incarcerated parents can present particular challenges, and for a growing number of children, continuing contact with their incarcerated parent is a key issue. Most of the research about children’s experiences of parental incarceration is filtered through adults who may or may not have spoken with children. This article draws on data collected for a research project which aimed to build an understanding of the needs and issues facing children and young people living in the ACT, who have experienced parental incarceration. This paper considers one key finding; children and young people’s perspectives on contact with their incarcerated parent. This was reflected in four thematic clusters: quality of relationships; participation in decision-making; the challenges and benefits of contact and practical issues.

Introduction

As prisoner numbers in Australia rapidly increase (ABS, 2015), it is expected that more children and young people will experience parental imprisonment (Flynn & Saunders,

2015). While children of prisoners have attracted some interest among policymakers, researchers, and practitioners in recent years, there remains no systematic collection of data about the numbers of children affected by parental incarceration in Australia, and researchers and practitioners have relied on estimates. A 2004 cross-sectional health survey reported that approximately 5% of children experience parental incarceration in their lifetime, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's risk being considerably higher (Quilty, 2005). A more recent survey found that 28% of prisoners identified as a parent with at least one dependent child, and 5% reported having four or more dependent children at the time of entering prison (AIHW, 2013).

Increasing numbers of children experiencing parental incarceration raises the question of how decisions about contact between children and incarcerated parents are made (Poehlmann et al., 2010). The right for children to maintain a relationship with their incarcerated parent is underpinned by Article 9 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989). Yet, maintaining relationships between children and incarcerated parents can be complex and “present particular challenges for families and legal and welfare decision-makers” (Sheehan & Levine, 2009, p. 4).

There remains a lack of understanding about what influences or prevents children from wanting to visit or have contact with their incarcerated parent. Drawing on data collected for a research project undertaken in the ACT with children and young people in 2013 about parental incarceration, this paper reports on children’s experiences of contact and their relationships with their incarcerated parents.

Background

Research suggests that children who experience parental incarceration are more likely to experience considerable disadvantage and are at risk of increased mental health problems,

poor educational outcomes and behavioural issues that may lead to incarceration (Dallaire, 2007; Tomaino et al., 2005). Parental incarceration may contribute to unstable care and living arrangements for children, attachment insecurity, difficulties maintaining contact with incarcerated parents and problematic family relationships (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Murray & Murray, 2010; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010).

For many children, life prior to parental incarceration is characterised by low income, mental health problems, family violence, substance abuse and child abuse and neglect (Stanley & Goddard, 2004). Relationships between children and their parents are often problematic and disrupted (Sheehan & Levine, 2009). Parental incarceration further compounds such difficulties and may extend to children feeling shame, guilt and anger (Murray, 2007; 2012). Maintaining contact between incarcerated parents and their children involves a complex pattern of factors, rather than a straightforward, easily understood occurrence. Contact is most likely to benefit the incarcerated parent, as they are often more motivated to change; experience lower recidivism rates and better outcomes after release (Healy et al., 2001; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010), while research about the benefits for children is mixed. Whereas some research identifies that contact between children and their incarcerated parents reduces children's anxiety (Snyder et al., 2002), other findings question the benefits (Poehlmann et al., 2010).

In recent decades, the issues of contact and maintaining relationships with non-resident parents have been a focus of other policy areas such as out-of-home care and family law (Smyth, 2009; Taplin, 2005). Research about contact between parents and children has generally been based upon theories of attachment, bringing attention to the challenges that separation between children and parents can have upon a child's health and wellbeing (Taplin, 2005). The reliance on this theoretical perspective has led to considerable attention being paid to ensuring that children have the right to know both parents and that

parenting is a shared responsibility, provided that this is in the child's best interest (McIntosh & Chisholm, 2008).

What little is known about contact and relationships between children and their incarcerated parents is largely gleaned from the opinions and experiences of parents, caregivers and professionals working with families. A small number of studies about parental incarceration include children's perspectives, offering insight into children's views about contact (eg see Beck & Jones, 2007; Boswell, 2002; Flynn, 2014; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). This literature is limited and provides mixed accounts. In one study conducted by Nesmith and Rhuland (2008), it was reported that nearly all children wanted to maintain an active relationship with their incarcerated parent, even if they felt upset towards their parent. Conversely, Shlafer and Poelmann (2010) found that children in their study expressed uncertainty about seeing their incarcerated parents, and no child who had recently visited their parent described a positive experience.

It is evident from this emergent literature that children are less likely to have contact if there are relationship difficulties or conflict between their carer and incarcerated parent (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Children report that their carer often becomes a 'gatekeeper' for their relationship with their incarcerated parent, which is pivotal as to whether this relationship is maintained.

A recent Australian study of women prisoners and their children (Flynn 2014) concluded that while practical support is required to maintain children's visiting, it is not enough on its own to encourage some children to visit their mother in prison, particularly older children (eg 10–14 years). Further, young people visited their parent in prison less frequently, even when supports were available (Flynn, 2014; McCulloch & Morrison, 2002). An earlier US study by Casey-Acevedo and Bakken (2002) hypothesised that older

children are less likely to visit their parents due to competing interests, or because they can develop ‘negative attitudes’ about visiting prison; although there is insufficient evidence available to reach any firm conclusions.

Research approach

Methodology

This qualitative study was informed by a phenomenological approach which attempts to understand how the everyday, inter-subjective world is experienced by participants (Smith et al., 2009). Its purpose is to identify the core meanings of the shared experiences of individuals within a particular phenomenon (Lester, 1999). This approach was particularly useful for this study, as it allowed for a nuanced exploration and analysis of individual instances, and how such experiences were similar or different across participants.

Ethics

This study, conducted with the approval of the Australian Catholic University Human Research Ethics Committee was carried out between 2012 and 2014 in the ACT⁶. An informed consent process was undertaken with children and where possible, their parents or carers. Children were provided with information about the study and an explanation of their rights. Researchers also provided information about the participants’ protection, privacy, anonymity and confidentiality (France, 2004).

Semi-structured interviews

The interview schedule was informed by a literature review and developed in consultation with a Young People’s Reference Group (YPRG) and Adult Project Reference Group. The

⁶ The ACT has a population of 345,000

YPRG provided an important forum for researchers to gain an understanding about how to ethically and effectively explore and understand children's views from their perspective (Moore, Noble-Carr, & McArthur, 2015; Moore et al., 2011). It included five children aged 13–16 years, who advised on the language to use in regard to parental incarceration, potential issues to discuss and sensitive issues that researchers needed to be aware of (for further discussion of this see Flynn & Saunders, 2015).

The interview schedule and accompanying interview tools were also tested with this group. Semi-structured interviews focused on three core areas: children's experiences of having a parent in prison, the types of supports they currently used, and the types of supports they needed but were unable to access.

The interviews lasted one hour and were conducted in environments usually chosen by the children. With the children's consent, interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder. The interview process used several tools, including drawing materials and picture cards that were responsive to children's differing ages and needs. The picture cards were most useful with children who had difficulties in describing their experiences, and were often used as an 'allegory', representing and illustrating the complexity of emotions that young people experienced.

Data analysis

The analytic process used a set of processes and principles common to a phenomenological approach that included "moving from the particular to the shared and from the descriptive to the interpretive" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 79). Data analysis was assisted by NVivo, a qualitative analysis program, which allowed for data to be sorted, matched and linked; for questions to be asked of the data and to see it in new ways (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). The development of themes involved a careful reading and re-reading of interview transcripts

(Rice & Ezzy, 1999). We were interested in what children's experiences were, and how they discussed them. Data were then coded, compared and contrasted (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). Themes were developed deductively, using knowledge gained from a literature review, and inductively, using an iterative and inductive cycle that examined data for emergent patterns and relationships.

The resultant themes identified in this process were taken to a small number of individual members of the YPRG for discussion and 'checking'. Employing 'experts' (ie those who know most about their lives), to verify and confirm findings has been widely endorsed (Whitehead, 2004).

To ensure children and young people's voices remain central to the dissemination phase of the research process, participants' quotes and stories are used throughout this paper to exemplify particular research findings. The quotes and stories selected are indicative of the broader themes found within the study. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the confidentiality of participants.

Participants

The practical difficulties of recruiting children with incarcerated parents into research projects meant that the sample of children was smaller than anticipated with the group ranging in age from 8 to 18 years. Nonetheless common experiences were identified across the sample. Children aged 8–18 years, who resided in the ACT and who either currently or previously had experienced parental incarceration were eligible to participate. The research was advertised widely across the ACT. Although the recruitment of children was problematic (see Flynn & Saunders, 2015), 16 children and young people participated in the research. Participant characteristics are detailed in Table 2.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of participants

Demographic characteristic	Number (N=16)
Cultural background	
Aboriginal	4
Caucasian	12
Gender	
Female	8
Male	8
Age	
8–10 years	3
11–14 years	3
15–18 years	10
Gender of incarcerated parent	
Female	3
Male	16
Living arrangements	
Living with mum and stepdad	7
Living with other family member	3
Residing in out-of-home care	4
Homeless	2
No. of times parent has been incarcerated	
Once	2
More than once	14

Findings

The larger study commissioned by SHINE for Kids⁷ aimed to build an understanding of the needs and issues facing children experiencing parental incarceration. Several themes were identified, and have been discussed more fully elsewhere (Saunders & McArthur, 2013). This paper focuses on the findings about relationships and contact with incarcerated parents.

⁷ SHINE for Kids is a not-for-profit organisation for children and young people affected by parental incarceration

In listening to children it became evident that children experienced three types of contact with their parents: regular contact including visits, telephone calls and letters; more infrequent contact including intermittent visits and telephone calls; and no direct contact where children received information about their parent from other sources. Children were not directly asked about the contact they had with their parent but each child reflected on this when they spoke about their experiences of parental incarceration. Across these groups there were key issues reflected in four thematic clusters: quality of relationships; participation in decision-making; challenges and benefits of contact and practical issues. Participants' insights about these are summarised below.

Quality of relationships

Children's experiences of family relationships emerged strongly from the data. Children spoke about how the quality of family relationships was a key factor influencing whether they had contact with their incarcerated parent. This included the relationship with the incarcerated parent, with other family members, and the relationships between other family members and the incarcerated parent. Participants reported family as comprising of a range of people including parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, foster carers, cousins, step-parents, friends and ex-partners of parents. These different family relationships and how they facilitated contact with incarcerated parents are discussed below.

Children and young people discussed that their families experienced several challenges prior to and after their parent's incarceration, including family violence, child abuse and neglect, parental unemployment, mental illness and parental drug and alcohol use. They reported how these issues had impacted and shaped their relationships with their parents.

The young people who had close supportive families prior to, and throughout the duration of their parents' incarceration reported having regular contact with their parent. These

participants had mostly been adolescents when their father was first imprisoned.

Participants described that this contact was usually supported and facilitated by their other parent, typically the mother. In the interview, these young people spoke about their relationships with parents prior to incarceration as being close and loving. They also reported that their families had separated, sometimes many years prior to the parent's incarceration, although relationships between both parents were congenial and children described being able to successfully maintain good relationships with both parents.

Oh she [mum] actually encourages me to stay in contact with him—they have an ok relationship (Jason, 9 years).

Other children reflected on how the discord between their parents after the relationship separation affected their capacity to maintain a meaningful relationship with their incarcerated parents.

Mum, instead of talking me and my brother into going to see him, she'd be more like just get rid of him, cut him out of your life, you don't need that. So that's also why we lost contact with him. Mum was a major influence on not seeing him and stuff (Julie, 15 years).

Those who had more uncertain relationships with their parents prior to imprisonment described their relationships with incarcerated parents as continuing to be problematic and sometimes breaking down completely. Children discussed that their relationships with their incarcerated parents were influenced by the actions of the other parents or caregivers; and reflected on how they related to their parents prior to and during the incarceration(s), and how this impacted on their ongoing relationship and contact.

Children talked about how as their relationships changed with their incarcerated parent across the time of the sentence, this influenced their need and desire to see them. Children

who had already strained or difficult relationships with their parents described that they experienced further challenges the longer they were away from their parent. Some young people discussed how distant their relationship was with their incarcerated fathers, and felt that was demonstrated by the parents' limited interest in or lack of understanding of their life.

I just don't feel comfortable around him anymore because it's just been so long, and because I'm so old now, he's missed all my little childhood years and missed pretty much everything (Carina, 13 years).

For others, the knowledge that their parent was in prison gave them the opportunity to reconnect, because for a time their parent would be in a known place and accessible for regular contact.

Like him going in is probably the easiest side of things, like it might sound a bit backwards ... but you know where he is ... but when he's out, like finding out he's coming out and he hasn't even contacted me that's the worst... (Julie, 15 years).

As influential as parental relationships were on the participants' contact and relationships with their incarcerated parent, other family relationships were also instrumental in supporting children's relationships and contact with imprisoned parents. Children spoke about how helpful other family members and friends could be in supporting relationships between them and their fathers. Other family members assisted children with travel to visits and provided emotional, financial and practical supports.

Decision-making and contact

Children described their involvement in decisions about contact with their incarcerated parents and the amount of influence they had in the decision-making. This influence

reflected a continuum where some children made independent decisions about when and how they would have contact with their incarcerated parent; to others who had no influence at all, where adults made all the decisions about if and how contact would happen.

Children expressed the view that the younger they were when their parent went to prison, the less likely they were to have any choice in whether or not they had contact or how they would have contact with their incarcerated parent. Almost half of the children interviewed had difficulty remembering the age they were when their parent was first incarcerated and all but three children described being very young (before and during primary school) when this had first occurred. Children also discussed that their incarcerated and non-incarcerated parents had made decisions for them when they were younger, about the amount of information children had about their parents' incarceration, the type of contact they would have while their parent was in prison and how frequently this would occur.

A number of children reported that when they were younger they had not been told about their parents' imprisonment. For some children, this meant regular face-to-face contact with their parent (usually the father) ceased without any explanation. Children said that they had been left to 'work it out' for themselves as to why they no longer saw their parent. As these children grew older, they began to piece information together, learnt from family, friends and media, and realised at some point in their childhood that their parent was or had been in prison. Other children reported that their incarcerated and non-incarcerated parents had decided that prison was an inappropriate place for children to visit and therefore phone contact and letter writing would be the only form of contact that occurred. Only a small number of the children remembered visiting their parent in prison when they were very young.

As they grew older, young people described how their parents or caregivers provided them with more information about their incarcerated parent and gave them more choices about contact and visitation. Becoming 'older' enabled some young people to make decisions about whether or not they continued to have contact with their parent and how this would occur.

Q. Do you have contact with dad now?

A. I could have if I chose to.

Q. But you don't?

A. Yeah... It was pretty bad finding that out and it was pretty sad to know that someone with my blood could do something like that (Sarah, 15 years).

Decision-making about continuing contact with parents who recurrently re-offended and were frequently re-incarcerated was also problematic. Participants described how adults often wanted them to cease having contact with their parents, as these parents were construed as unreliable and their behaviours problematic. Some said they felt unsupported by their non-incarcerated parents and caregivers when they had decided to maintain contact with their 'unreliable' parents.

Young people discussed the reasons why family members, particularly siblings, had decided to no longer have contact with their incarcerated parent. They described emotions such as shame, fear, hatred and a lack of attachment that considerably influenced whether or not they wanted to see their parent. Such choices were evidently not always supported by other siblings or family members. A number of children described the pressure placed on these siblings by other family members (including themselves) to see their parent even

when they had clearly stated they did not want to. Children spoke about how they would make their siblings feel guilty or ‘push’ them into speaking to their incarcerated parent.

My sister hates my dad for [the crime he committed] and doesn’t talk to dad at all unless we force her to talk to him (Jasmine, 15 years).

No child or young person identified having any support outside of their family to help them make decisions about contact with their incarcerated parents. Children and young people in formal state care reported that decisions made about whether contact occurred with their incarcerated parents, and the frequency of this contact were often dependent on the caseworker or the court.

Children living at home and who wished to maintain contact with their parent in prison but who did not have the support of their other parent or caregiver also found the decision to have contact problematic. Current ACT prison policy does not allow children under 18 years to visit their parent without an accompanying adult. Children talked about the difficulties this caused for them and how it removed their right to have regular and meaningful access to their parent.

I honestly think it’s a bit slack. It can be like fair enough if the kid is like four years old but like we should have the option to go and be able to see them without like a parent—like have the parent’s permission but go by ourselves (Max, 14 years).

Benefits and challenges of contact

Children and young people discussed the benefits and challenges they experienced when having contact with their incarcerated parent. For children who described close relationships and strong attachments with their parents prior to incarceration, maintaining a relationship with them when they were in prison was an important goal; contact was a

priority for both them and other family members. For those who described more problematic relationships with their parents prior to incarceration, and where attachment and positive caring relationships between the child and their parent fluctuated, children spoke about the challenges of contact. Children conveyed that the limited amount of direct contact that they had with their parent was upsetting and this was compounded by the lack of understanding from adults who just assumed children were better off without that parent in their life.

Young people spoke about their need for connection with their incarcerated parents, most frequently their father. For those who had infrequent and sporadic contact there was still a sense of biological connection between them and their parents, that children considered important to acknowledge and preserve. Even those who no longer saw their incarcerated parent spoke about how they would always be connected to them by virtue of being their child.

Yeah, like I always tell my mum he's always going to be my dad—there's nothing that's ever going to change that (Julie, 15 years).

While many children and young people spoke about how little their incarcerated father contributed financially to their lives, older children, even those who had infrequent contact identified financial support as a benefit of having some contact with their parent. A number of young people were quite pragmatic in their approach, acknowledging that as their parent didn't support them emotionally or psychologically, they just 'took' what they could get.

Yeah I could have used my dad back then for stuff like riding my bike, tying my shoes and like when I was 10 I could have used him for help with my assignments and education. I look at it like now and I don't really need you for anything more than funds (Jasmine, 15 years).

Those children who had limited or sporadic contact with parents while in prison and after their release also spoke about the enormous emotional consequences this had for them. For some there was a constant hope things would be different—that their parents’ criminal behaviour and lack of interest in them would change so that they could assume a more meaningful relationship with them. However, for the most part, children and young people spoke about how this hope was rarely realised and they were often left feeling disillusioned and rejected once again.

It makes you think what they’re going to do when they get out, are they going to make life better or just go back down that bad track. It took him nearly a month after he got out to actually get in contact with me again and I was just like I just shut down ... I felt alone (Julie, 15 years).

Nevertheless, this did not stop young people seeking contact with their parents. If direct contact was not possible, hearing stories from other family members or through social media had to suffice. Knowing what parents were up to or where they were gave children a sense of ‘closeness’ to their parent, hope for change and the opportunity for contact with them, even if this was never realistically able to be achieved. The sense of hope fuelled by intermittent contact enabled children to dream about having a relationship with their parent that fitted the social norm. Yet it also contributed to children experiencing profound loss and sadness each time their parent disappeared again.

And then I remember I looked down the hallway and I just saw mum was walking up and I just dropped to the ground. I didn’t know what to do because I hadn’t seen her for so long and I just started crying and she started crying too and then picked me up and hugged me. And she’s like, “I’m never leaving you ever again”. And then, yeah, six months later, she’s gone (Stella, 18 years).

There was a small group of children who had positive contact with their imprisoned parents, due in part to the strong pre-incarceration relationships. However, this did not mean that children were not affected adversely when they saw their parent in prison. One girl talked about that although she and her brothers had strong and positive relationships with their incarcerated father, her brother's behaviour had significantly deteriorated at school.

His grades have dropped dramatically; he's just been naughty at school, swearing at teachers and yeah (Jessie Claire, 17 years),

Children who had regular contact with their parent also experienced a range of difficult emotions, including anger, sadness, shame and embarrassment associated with their parents' incarceration. Children discussed overwhelming feelings of anger which they experienced when they had any news about their parents. Such feelings resulted from disappointment in their parent, embarrassment and shame about what their parent had done and the powerlessness they felt about their situation as well as the lack of influence they had on changing it. Some children described how they 'acted up at school' and took their emotions out on their friends.

After the game I kind of came to realise that I was being a complete bitch to my own team and my friends but I apologised. I was a big enough person to apologise to them but I didn't explain anything, I was just like I have family issues at the moment and they're like huge and everything... (Julie, 15 years).

A number of young people felt it was easier to not think about their parent or have contact with them. Children expressed that coping with these feelings was challenging and not worth the pain and stress they experienced when trying to make sense of them.

I'm just numb and don't have many feelings, I don't give a fuck. I have just cared too much ... And when people haven't cared about me as much as I've cared about them it's like I just won't be upset then, I know, it's just easier to show no emotion and just be like that, it's just easier to block everything off and kind of de-personalise yourself (Rachel, 14 years).

A group of children were also aware of their own and other family members' safety when it came to having contact with incarcerated parents. Children discussed how their incarcerated fathers' behaviours and criminal activities made it difficult to want to have contact with them and other family members. For example, when there was a history of domestic violence, mothers were often understandably reluctant to facilitate contact between the offending parent and the child.

My mum and dad didn't end on good terms because he broke my mum's nose and I was standing in a room when he did it. He ran my mum over and I was in the car (Rebecca, 15 years).

For one child, witnessing family violence was enough to decide they no longer wanted contact with their father. For others, this did not necessarily mean they wanted to forgo their relationship with their father even where parents had separated. Nevertheless, because mothers in this study were typically the principle facilitators of contact, this often meant that children, particularly young children, were denied the opportunity for contact when the other parent was in prison. As they grew older, children described how they would regularly attempt to try to renegotiate different forms of contact with their father through social media or other family members.

Children also spoke about how their decision to have contact with their incarcerated parent was often influenced by the perspective of their other parent or caregiver. The quality of

the relationship between the incarcerated parent and the caregiver was often instrumental as to whether or not, particularly younger children, had contact with their parent while in prison. This also impacted their decision-making as they got older. If they believed that their caregiver/ parent would be unduly affected by their decision to have contact then they would often not pursue this for fear of upset, even though they also expressed feeling sad about this decision.

Because it would upset my mum, even though me and her don't really get along (Sarah, 15 years).

Practical issues

Children described a number of practical issues that affected contact, similar to those identified in other studies (Flynn, 2014; King, 2002; Tomaino et al., 2005). Children reported that the physical constraints and the environment of the prison often affected the quality of the visits with their parent. Prison visiting times meant that some children missed out on school. Young people also identified that the lack of age-appropriate activities, physical contact and privacy was problematic.

I think that's the biggest part about it is just yeah, we need more one-on-one time with dad without being, feeling like we're watched all the time by the screws, and every time we do just one thing wrong, like lift your knee up on the chair or something, you get yelled at. So you feel really uncomfortable being there ... The hour visits are nothing, you get there and kind of like don't know what to say for an hour and then leave— it's just kind of like ... Dad's like, "Oh how's school been?" And kicks you up the butt if you've done something naughty, and yells at you and then you leave. So it's just, yeah it's kind of like not that relationship anymore (Jessie Clare, 17 years).

Children and young people also identified difficulties getting to the prison on public transport or finding people to take them if they were under 18 years of age.

The transport out to the jail is horrible. There's only two Action buses a day that go out there, so maybe like a bus or something, like a communal bus would be good to have for children, like if my brothers want to go out there by themselves on say the family day, transport is probably a big thing, when everybody is at work during the day. So that's probably a big thing as well, getting out there, because it is so far away (Gary, 16 years).

Where children reported being satisfied with contact with their incarcerated parent, they also had support to visit. A small number of children and families were provided with financial support from organisations such as Prisoner's Aid to cover costs of travelling to and from the prison.

Discussion and conclusion

The findings described in this paper provide insight into how children make sense of their relationships with their incarcerated parents and how this impacts their decision-making about maintaining contact with their parents. Many of the children participating in this study were subjected to a number of considerable risks, such as poverty, family violence, and substance misuse prior to their parent being incarcerated. Such risks frequently precede a parent's imprisonment (Miller, 2006), and subsequently, many of the parent-child relationships were already faltering prior to the parent being incarcerated. Despite these difficulties, the majority of children and young people in this study continued to want contact with their parent both throughout the duration of incarceration and after release.

The qualitative insights of children's experiences of contact in this study highlight the complexity of their feelings and behaviours. Although this study indicated that positive

contact existed for children who had strong parental attachments pre-incarceration, this did not predict children's behaviours after contact. Older children whose parents were regularly incarcerated reflected on the emotional consequences this had for them, for which they rarely received support. Those who experienced sporadic contact often reported feelings of profound sadness and loss, and those with no regular contact relied on symbolic relationships, and as in Bocknek and colleagues' 2009 study, the ambiguous loss associated with parental incarceration considerably impacted children and young people. Some children felt contact in any form was preferable to no contact at all, and others felt that incarceration provided the chance to cease contact.

For a number of children in this study, prison was a reliable place in which to re-connect with their parent. While most children did not expect to live with their father after release, they had aspirations to maintain a connection with them and this was often left to children to negotiate as the justice system did not provide opportunities or supports for children to maintain this after release. These insights illustrate children's active participation in seeking out contact with their incarcerated parent and the challenges that arise from this. The support of the non-incarcerated parents/ caregivers is instrumental for younger children in facilitating contact with their incarcerated parents (Arditti & Few, 2006; Enos, 2001). Yet it is evident that as children become older, for the most part, they felt unsupported by both their caregivers and the systems that surrounded them in their choices about contact with their incarcerated parent.

This has significant implications for families and caregivers, the criminal justice system and service systems that surround children. Currently, children are not reliably recognised or responded to within the adult criminal justice system (Flynn, 2014). Many children remain unsupported and responsible for themselves to negotiate dysfunctional family relationships.

Correctional policies regarding contact represent an important aspect of the child's capacity to maintain a relationship with their incarcerated parent. The prison visiting environment as well as the timing, access and cost of visits affects the quality and frequency of ongoing contact. There is a need for innovative and child-focused responses within the criminal justice system to improve and sustain parent–child contact, throughout the duration of a parent's sentence and after release.

It is critical that the criminal justice system supports caregivers and incarcerated parents to help children to understand and manage the complexity of feelings experienced when their parent is imprisoned. As not all family members share the same views about the importance of contact, it is essential that parents are supported to focus on their children's needs as well as their own. Where safety issues exist for families and where contact with an incarcerated parent is contrary to the best interests of the child, it is important that children be given age appropriate information and long-term supports to understand and manage this loss. Given the importance of contact, future research with longitudinal designs are needed to examine incarcerated parent–child contact over time. Additional research may also usefully explore the effects of the different types of contact for children and to consider child characteristics such as age and gender. Understanding these phenomena in more depth is critical for designing interventions that can meaningfully build and maintain relationships between incarcerated parents and children over time.

[END]

6.3 Chapter summary

This chapter explored the ways that children and young people experienced contact with their incarcerated parent. This included understanding how children made decisions about contact; the perceived benefits and challenges in maintaining contact with their parent and

the practical issues that impacted upon the quality of contact. This study contributes to the knowledge about how children and young people who visit their incarcerated parent experience contact with their incarcerated parent. This study also provides knowledge about children and young people who do not visit their parent in prison. This group of children have remained invisible in many studies which focus on this issue. This is because studies that focus on prison visiting and contact with incarcerated parents have usually recruited children through prison visiting programs.

Chapter 7: Experiencing and managing stigma

The quality of mercy is not strained. It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath. It is twice blest: It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.

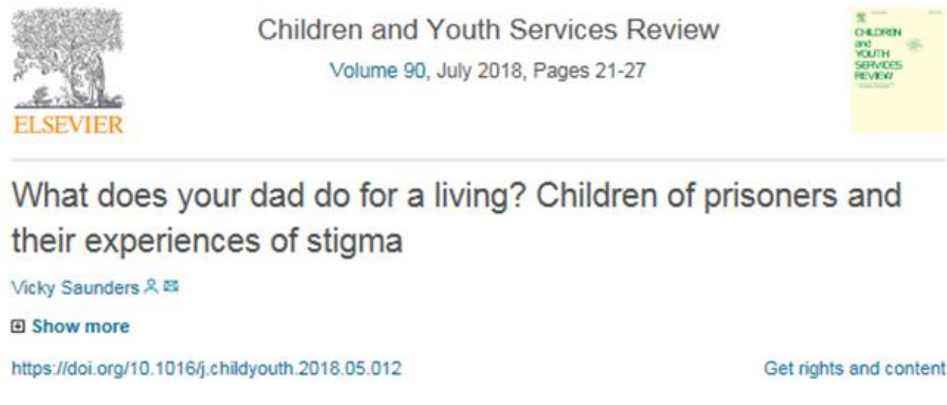
William Shakespeare, *Merchant of Venice*

7.1 Introducing the chapter

This chapter presents a publication in press concerning children and young people's experience of stigma. This publication contributes to knowledge about how children and young people perceive and understand stigma and how they in turn manage and cope with this in their day-to-day lives. Stigma has been identified as powerful force that prevents individuals seeking and accessing support (Phillips & Gates, 2011). The small number of studies about parental incarceration that have sought to include children illustrate that children frequently experience feelings of shame and stigma, through association with or 'contamination' by their incarcerated parent (Condry, 2007; Cunningham, 2001; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Other studies describe how children experience direct discrimination which has led to bullying and rejection from peers (Boswell, 2002). The publication included in this chapter seeks to explore this issue further and to consider the coping mechanisms that children and young people employ to manage both felt stigma and direct discrimination and bullying. This publication concludes with a discussion about the ways to further support children with a parent in prison. In particular, it emphasises the need for more holistic interventions to be available to children and young people that respond to their needs as children, and not necessarily as children of prisoners.

7.2 Publication 5: ‘What does your dad do for a living? Children of prisoners and their experiences of stigma’

Saunders, V. (2018). What does your dad do for a living? Children of prisoners and their experiences of stigma. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 90, 21-27
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.05.012>



Abstract

Stigma has frequently been described as one of the unintended consequences of parental incarceration, yet little research has been conducted on this issue with children and young people. This article examines and conceptualises the experiences of stigma for children who have experienced parental incarceration in the ACT, Australia. The article reports on the findings of a qualitative study designed to investigate children's experiences of parental incarceration. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 16 children. The results of this study demonstrate that stigma associated with parental incarceration manifests in children's lives in different and distinct ways. Despite these differences, children and young people describe three key strategies to manage the stigma that they experience: maintaining privacy and withholding information; self-exclusion and self-reliance, and managing peer relationships. The policy and practice implications of these findings are discussed.

Introduction

A significant and increasing number of Australians are affected by incarceration each year, with the national imprisonment rate reaching a ten year high (ABS, 2015). A recent prisoner health survey reported that 46% of prison entrants have children who depend on them for their basic needs (AIHW, 2015) and it is estimated that around 5% of all children will experience a parent imprisoned within their life time (Quilty et al., 2004).

Yet for a long time this group of children have remained invisible, neglected or forgotten (Robertson, 2012). Debates about our increased use of incarceration have focused predominantly on its value in reducing crime rates rather than the adverse consequences for children and families. More recently though, there has been an emergent interest from researchers, policy makers and practitioners about the impact and consequences of parental incarceration on children (Arditti, 2012; Murray & Farrington, 2008).

A range of studies, predominantly from Europe and the US, have drawn attention to and focused on the social, emotional and behavioural impacts of parental incarceration on children (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2003; Travis & Waul, 2003). Stigma and shame have frequently been described as unintended consequences of parental incarceration (see author's own work; Myers, Smarsh, Amlund-Hagen, & Kennon, 1999; Travis et al., 2003). Phillips and Gates (2011) report that very little research has been conducted on this issue, its role in the development of emotional or behavioural challenges or about how it manifests in children's lives and the impact of this. Drawing on data from a research project conducted in the ACT, Australia in 2013, about children's experiences of parental incarceration, this paper reports on a key finding about how the stigma associated with parental incarceration manifests in children's lives and the how children and young people manage the impact of this.

Background

Sociologist Erving Goffman (1963) defined stigma as a discrediting mark that sets individuals apart from others. Typically it is understood as a social process that connects individuals to a set of negative characteristics that result in discrimination and devaluation (Scambler, 2009). More recently Link and Phelan (2001) have conceptualised stigma as a process consisting of key elements that include labelling, stereotyping, differentiating, devaluing and discriminating. Stigma is characteristically associated with having a negative impact on personal identity formation and may result in social exclusion which in turn may impact upon an individual's capacity to access resources and opportunities.

The literature indicates that stigma is commonly organised into three typologies, felt or perceived stigma, enacted stigma and project stigma (Link & Phelan, 2001; Phillips & Gates, 2011; Scambler, 2009; Scambler & Paoli, 2008; Link, Wells, Phelan & Yang, 2015). Felt or perceived stigma is described as the internalised perception or fear of devaluation (Phillips & Gates, 2011). Enacted stigma is defined as experiences of direct discrimination where individuals may be ostracised from their community or prevented in some way from participating in or taking up opportunities available to 'others' (Jacoby, 1994). The concept of project stigma developed by Scambler and Paoli (2008) refers to individuals feeling or experiencing perceived stigma, but only involves the act of avoiding enacted stigma. Those who experience project stigma do not experience any associated shame but rather show resistance and defiance in the face of the issue (Scambler & Paoli, 2008). Nevertheless, it is argued that the anticipation of rejection or devaluation can be as damaging to individuals as the experience of direct discrimination. Felt or perceived stigma can reduce self-confidence and may prevent full social interaction resulting in individuals becoming isolated and experiencing lower levels of support (Scambler & Paoli, 2008).

The majority of literature regarding stigma focuses on 'primary stigma' for example those who directly experience stigma because of disability, mental illness or poor health such as HIV (Fielden, Chapman, & Cadell, 2011; Moses, 2010). Goffman (1963) suggests that stigma not only affects the individuals directly experiencing these, but that it also affects those who are associated with the 'stigmatised'. Goffman argues that 'courtesy stigma', the stigma passed to otherwise 'normal' people, is structurally embedded and dependent on the social location of both the stigmatised person and the people that they associate with (p. 30). While Scambler (2009) argues that the concepts of primary and courtesy stigma do not differ in their basic social processes, others highlight that there is a notable difference between them. Courtesy stigma originates from kinship or family, while primary stigma originates from deviant behaviour, physical conditions or through group identity. Further, Corrigan and Miller (2004) maintain that courtesy stigma is underpinned by notions of not only shame, but also of blame and contamination.

Children of prisoners

Early studies about children of prisoners found that shame and stigma associated with incarceration are more likely to be experienced by the caregiver of children with an incarcerated parent rather than by the children or their incarcerated parent (Johnston, 1995). Other earlier studies considering parental incarceration also found that shame or stigma were not significant factors in producing the negative 'effects' of parental incarceration (Bloom & Steinhart, 1993). Morris (1965) and Johnston (1995) suggest that as parental incarceration is frequently more common among particular groups and therefore this experience is widely shared, the experience of stigma is reduced or nullified for individuals positioned in that particular group.

Conversely, other studies directly involving children have described that the stigma associated with parental incarceration does have significant consequences. In a study by

Bocknek et al. (2009), the children interviewed expressed feelings of isolation, and reported having few friendships and troubled relationships at school. Children and young people in studies by Boswell (2002), Katz (2002), Lee (2005) and Chui (2010) all described experiences of bullying and shaming when people became aware of their incarcerated parent. This was most frequently carried out by peers but also from teachers and neighbours. In Katz's study (2002), children reported being stigmatised by their friends about their parents' incarceration more frequently than describing them as a source of support.

Nesmith and Ruhland (2008) describe how it is not uncommon for children whose parents are incarcerated to want to maintain a level of secrecy about this. Many of the children in their study revealed an effort to keep their parent's incarceration private and demonstrated considerable anxiety about being found out. While some children in this study benefited from telling others about their parent in prison, others remained isolated and fearful of social stigma.

How much children know about their parent's incarceration is also linked to the concerns about children being subjected to stigmatisation (Manby, 2014). Parents and caregivers often do not discuss parental incarceration with children because of the often difficult emotions experienced by parents and children, associated with this (Bocknek et al., 2009). Chui's study (2010) describes that in order to deal with the stigma associated with parental incarceration children will lie about their parent's whereabouts in order to protect themselves. Research also highlights that families who demand that children do not disclose information about their parent's incarceration also infer to children that incarceration is a stigmatised issue. Hagen and Myers (2003) in their study about secrecy and social support for children with a mother in prison report that children who are at greatest risk of behaviour problems are those who have low levels of social support and

who also speak with anyone about their mothers' incarceration. However, they also state that secrecy alone did not predict behavioural outcomes for children.

The possible ongoing harmful effects of stigmatisation for children with a parent in prison have been considered in a small number of studies (Boswell & Wedge, 2002; Sack, 1977; Sack & Seidler, 1978). Such effects can be detrimental for a range of reasons including a lowered self-esteem, a heightened risk of bullying and peer victimisation and isolation from family and friends (Murray & Murray, 2010). A number of other studies have indicated that children, when asked, are often unable to identify support figures who they would talk to about their parents' imprisonment in times of stress or trauma (Bocknek et al., 2009; Flynn, 2011; Lösel et al., 2012; Loureiro, 2010).

A recent report from Europe concerning the mental health outcomes for children of prisoners describes that the stigma of having a parent in prison can cause children of prisoners "to be labelled and rejected by peers, and children may feel they are different from others and withdraw from social contacts" (Jones et al., 2013, p. 484). The differences between how children experience and manage perceived or felt stigma and difference compared to how they may experience and manage active discrimination is less understood but important if we are to support children of prisoners to not take on problematic beliefs and attitudes that may impact their wellbeing.

Methodology

This paper reports on the findings of a qualitative study commissioned by SHINE for Kids. The overall study sought to identify the needs of children living in the ACT who had or were currently experiencing parental incarceration. To develop knowledge in this area, data were sought from a number of sources including parents and caregivers, stakeholders that included government and not-for-profit services and children and young people. This

paper concentrates on the findings from children and young people to explore how stigma manifests in their lives.

Ethics

Approval for the study was provided by the university's Human Research Ethics Committee. In order to ensure the rights and interests of children and young people were upheld in the research process, particular care was taken to address issues such as informed consent, protection and confidentiality (Powell et al., 2012; see author's own work). Child-friendly information letters and consent forms were developed and used, and follow up support was offered; although no child or young person required this. All children were provided with remuneration for their time and expertise.

The commitment to the rights of children and the importance of upholding children's perspectives was also reflected in the chosen research methods. A semi-structured interview schedule was developed with the children's reference group (see author's own work). The overarching research question was "what are the experiences of children with a parent in prison?" The questions were designed to elicit responses from children that reflected their experiences of having a parent in prison; the types of formal and informal supports they currently used and the supports they needed but were currently unable to access. The children's reference group developed open ended questions that addressed the social, emotional and practical challenges experienced by them when their parent was in prison. Children and young people also provided feedback in regard to the use of activities and tools. The St Luke's innovative resource card sets and other similar cards were identified by children and young people as important ways for them to identify and discuss some of the feelings they experienced when a parent was in prison.

Data analysis

The interviews were audiotaped with permission of participants and transcribed verbatim and provided rich data for a thematic analysis. Consistent with phenomenological approach, the aim of the thematic analysis was to gain insight into the perspectives and experiences of the children and young people. Data analysis was assisted through the use of NVivo software to enable the recording, sorting and retrieval of interview data (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). Data were then coded, compared and contrasted to draw connections between concepts, explain areas of conflict and find alignments which may not be immediately evident (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). Themes were developed both deductively, using knowledge gained from the literature review and interview schedule, and inductively, ensuring coding stayed close to participant's accounts and the issues important to them (Boyatzis, 1998).

It is important at this point to highlight that children and young people did not directly use the terms 'stigma' or 'being stigmatised', rather they described feelings and experiences as they appeared in their consciousness. In undertaking a phenomenological approach, I attempted to access the participant's own world through a process of 'interpretative activity' (Smith, 2004), which relied on the children and young people's capacity to articulate their thoughts and experiences and my ability to reflect and analyse these. Thus, this article reveals the analytic account derived from the joint reflections of both children and young people and the researcher.

Limitations

This qualitative study is exploratory and the sample does not represent all children with incarcerated parents. A number of limitations can be identified in relation to the present study. Due to the challenges of recruitment, it is a small sample which held a diversity of experience including age, maternal and paternal incarceration and length of sentence for

the incarcerated parent. While we invited children between the ages of 8 and 18 to participate, the views of younger children have not been captured and it is possible that the experiences of these children would reveal a different understanding than told here. The diversity of experience between genders is also not able to be captured due to the small sample size. Finally, only three of the children described having a mother who was incarcerated so the experiences described in this paper are more closely linked to the experiences of children with an incarcerated father than with a mother in prison. What this study does achieve is an account of the perspectives and experiences of children and young people as described by them which has been rarely considered. As such we can highlight some of the implications of this for practice and provide some insight into directions for further research.

Participants

Participants were recruited not only with the assistance of the ACT prison but also from diverse range of organisations including youth groups, statutory child protection services and family support services located in the ACT. A total of 16 children who have or have had a parent incarcerated in the ACT were interviewed. Of the 16 children who participated, 10 children were aged between 15 and 18 years, and six were aged between 8 and 14 years. There were an equal number of males (8) as females (8) who participated. Four children identified as Aboriginal.

Parents had been sentenced and incarcerated for a range of crimes but predominantly for drug or alcohol related offences. A smaller number of parents had been detained for more violent offences. Parent prison sentences ranged from a few months to many years. However, for the parents of 14 children participating in this study, prison re-entry was a common occurrence. All of these children identified their father as the parent who was

either currently in prison or who had been previously incarcerated. Three children and young people reported that their mother had also been in prison.

In listening to children it became evident that children experienced three types of contact with their parents: regular contact including visits, telephone calls and letters; more infrequent contact including intermittent visits and telephone calls; and no direct contact where children received information about their parent from other sources (see author's work).

In line with the participatory approach embedded within the study, and to ensure children's voices remain central to the dissemination phase of the research process, children's words and stories are used throughout this paper to demonstrate particular findings of the research. To protect the confidentiality of participants pseudonyms have been used.

Findings

When discussing the impact of parental incarceration, many of the children and young people who participated in this study expressed feelings and thoughts that could be associated with the notion of stigma. Two principal themes were identified across the interviews with children and young people, internal experiences of stigma and external experiences of stigma.

The following discussion provides insights about how children and young people experienced these different types of stigma and concludes with the key strategies children and young people used to manage these experiences in their daily life.

Internal experiences of stigma

The following discussion explores the experiences of internal stigma common to both children and young people. These experiences were described by children and young people in the following three ways: altered perceptions of self, anticipation of judgement from others and feelings of being different to their peers.

Perceptions of self

All of the young people in this study described how their parent's incarceration had had a considerable impact upon how they perceived and understood themselves as individuals. They highlighted that knowing that their parents had engaged in criminal activity which had hurt others made them wonder whether they also had certain characteristics that made them a 'bad person' too. Young people spoke about how they had this sense of a 'damaged' or 'tainted' self, as though the biological link that they had with their incarcerated parent somehow affected or influenced who they were or what they were going to be.

Alongside this, approximately half of the children and young people also discussed how they felt concerned that they would also 'end up in prison' or 'committing an offence' because somehow they might be like their parent. These children and young people spoke about how, even though they believed they 'were not like' their incarcerated parent, they feared that there was some 'internal driver' that would send them 'off course' and they would end up in prison. They described that this made them feel anxious and not in control of their lives.

The apple doesn't fall far from the tree was a saying that the majority of adolescent males and a smaller number of females recited in their interviews. Over a quarter of the participants spoke about how they were already experiencing a life course similar to their

incarcerated parents. They described that from a young age they had been told by family members and other adults such as teachers that they would ‘end up’ like their incarcerated parent. Young people, reported that they believed that this expectation by others considerably contributed to their own negative internal beliefs about themselves and in turn contributed to their criminal behaviours.

Like everyone gives up on me ... they just know that I'm going to be exactly like my mum. My grandma does, everyone does. I got told since the age of eight that I'm going to be pregnant by the time I'm 14 ... at times I'm like I want to prove everyone they're wrong but at the end of the day I know me and I know that's too much fucking effort so fuck that I'll just have fun and die young, that's pretty much what I'm doing (Natasha, 14 years).

Anticipating judgement

The anticipation of how people might perceive and judge children and young people was another considerable worry for the older participants in the study. While a very small number of older young people said that other people's opinions did not matter to them, the majority of participants described feeling fearful about being judged or being treated negatively in some way by others, and were constantly alert to questions that may ‘expose’ them and their parent's criminality. Young people spoke about how this was more apparent where they shared the same family name with their incarcerated parent. Young people described being constantly alert to other people connecting them to their incarcerated parent and that this provided a relentless source of stress for them. This meant that they sometimes avoided going into new situations or meeting new people.

Then when people ask you, "Oh yeah what does your dad do for a living?" you're like hmmm. You're not really sure what you say to people, you don't want to be judged and you feel like if you tell someone

you're going to be shamed and embarrassed and humiliated (Julie, 15 years).

Feeling different

The last subtheme children and young people spoke about was how they felt they were different to their peers. The majority of young people spoke about how they felt lacking in some way and socially different to others. They described that having this feeling frequently prevented them from joining in at school or making new friendships.

For example, one young person felt that because their parent was in prison they were often the 'odd one out' and were often unable to participate in regular family activities and celebrations such as Father's Day. These children and young people also described how they would compare their family and themselves to others and would frequently feel worse off or lacking in some way.

Additionally, a number of young people described that they frequently felt more mature and 'grown up' than their peers due to the extra responsibilities they had at home when their parent was in prison. Children and young people reported that this altered their capacity to engage and connect with others of a similar age leaving them feeling alienated from friendship groups and activities that they believed they would otherwise be involved with.

I wish I had nothing to do with mum's stresses, it's hard to deal with, it's hard. It's kind of just like, I've just gone from a child to an adult in five months like that, and now I'm dealing with all these things I wasn't prepared for, and it's stressful, and I have bad anxiety, and that kicks in all the time now (Jessie Claire, 17 years).

External experiences of stigma

Accounts of external stigma provided by the majority of the children and young people in this study most frequently included experiences of discrimination and bullying. Examples provided by children and young people included emotional and physical abuse as well as online bullying and exclusion from friendship groups and other family members. These experiences and the influence of social media and news reporters are discussed below.

Bullying from both adults and peers was a common occurrence for all children and young people. Such experiences often began when children were young and at primary school. Eight of the young people reflected on how teachers would commonly make negative assumptions about them because of having their parent in prison. One young person described how, when asking for some assistance with homework, the teacher became aware of the fact that their parent was currently incarcerated. Rather than responding to the young person's needs, the young person described that the teacher reflected inaccurate and offensive ideas about the young person. A one young person noted:

It's not very common for somebody to tell you their parents are in jail, and that's [the reason] why you're struggling because you've had to take on all these responsibilities... So when you tell somebody they kind of take a step back ... Yeah. He [the teacher] just... started telling me stories about these children in the drug world and yeah I was just like, "Is that how you see me, is that like what you're visualising me as?" I didn't really know how to take it so yeah, it was just awkward, very awkward (Jessie Claire, 17 years).

Young people also described that teachers would also use the information about their parents as a way of managing young people's behaviour. Teachers would compare their behaviour to their incarcerated parent or suggest that incarceration would also be their future if they continued to behave in a particular manner. Young people described how this

was hurtful and made them feel angry and humiliated. This was particularly evident in the narratives of the three older males that participated in the study.

Even where young people did not disclose directly that their parents were incarcerated, they reported that they could still be discriminated by others. Four of the young people spoke about the shame of having a shared surname with their incarcerated parent. This meant for some young people that there were instances where particular services or institutions, including the police and other support services, identified the young person as a child of a 'known' prisoner and treated them in a way that resulted in them feeling discriminated against and devalued. One young person described how she went to report a theft at the local police station and how the police had subsequently treated her when they had found out who her father was.

My dad is well known in the ACT and they were treating me like a criminal and it got to the point where the police officer was telling me I was in the wrong, and my mum turned around and said, "She's not a criminal, she's nothing like her father, just stop" (Jane, 15 years).

Older young males in this study also described how they believed they were more likely to be 'targeted' by the police, compared to their friends, and that they often felt that they became the focus of police attention because of their parents offending behaviour.

Bullying by peers was also described as problematic by participants. The majority of children and young people spoke about how rumours and embellished stories would be spread about them and their family at school by other students. Children and young people discussed how some of their peer groups at school would 'bully' them when they found out about their parents being in prison; this ranged from direct physical abuse to being excluded from peer groups or recurrently being teased.

So it was really hard because every kid was teasing me and they're like, "I'm going to see my mum this weekend, what are you doing?" and then I'd be like, "I don't know" and they'd be like. "Well at least I get to see my mum" and then it'd just be really hard especially because there's lots of bullies in primary school and high school (Rebecca, 15 years).

The bullying by peers for children and young people was also compounded by newspaper and social media reports about their parent's incarceration. Over half of participants reported that their parent's criminal activities had been reported on the news or in the newspaper. While children and young people were not usually identified in mainstream media reports, there were often details about their parents which led to them being recognisable to others. Once identified, a small number of young people described how the bullying they experienced was exacerbated by social media channels such as Facebook. One young person described in detail how 'Facebook friends' would share information about them and leave derogatory comments for them to read. This young person described how they felt they had no privacy or protection and this further added to their feelings of shame and social exclusion.

So I felt really embarrassed that people I'd never even met before know who I am because of my dad. So I just want to change my last name because it's embarrassing. I don't have a criminal record, I've never done anything wrong but the police know who I am because of my dad's mistakes. Yeah, and even at work, like because it was published in a newspaper article about him, I didn't really appreciate that, whoever published it, because they said where I worked and they said my dad's name. And at work when I serve people my name comes up on the screen that they can see so actually like the week after that I started working again and these customers came in, like: oh, yeah, you're the girl that had the dad ... And I felt so embarrassed ... (Rochelle, 16 years).

Exclusion from extended family was also reported by many of the children and young people. Over half of participants spoke about how contact with family members such as grandparents and aunts and uncles had ceased when their parent had been incarcerated. A smaller number of children and young people described how they also had lost contact with step-siblings who had been removed by statutory child protection services and how this was sad and confusing for them. They further highlighted that losing family members also meant that they lost support networks and sense of family.

They kind of disowned me and my brother. If it wasn't for my dad I reckon I would be able to go and stay with that side of the family (Jane, 15 years).

Managing stigma

The majority of children and young people spoke about how they managed experiences of internal and external stigma. They described these coping strategies as self-protective actions which included keeping secrets and withholding information, self-exclusion and managing friendships.

Keeping secrets and withholding information

Keeping secrets and withholding information were the most common strategies that children and young people used to manage external experience of stigma. Children and young people discussed that a key way to manage feeling stigmatised was to ensure that all their personal information remained private. They indicated a strong desire for privacy, and said they rarely provided information about themselves and their family to their peers or to others who they came into contact with.

Over half of children and young people reported that keeping this information secret had been encouraged by their parents since they were a small child. For others, it had been a

personal choice to ensure that they were not teased. Eleven young people reported that they had not told peers or teachers at school about their parent's incarceration or, if they had told anyone, they had spoken to only one or two select friends.

However, over two-thirds of participants described that keeping secrets and withholding information created particular challenges for them. Children and young people described that it changed the way they interacted with their peers as they could not talk freely about their lives and frequently had to hide their feelings from their peers. This made it difficult for them to have any meaningful connection with friends. Additionally, these young people described that concealing the truth about their parent from friends created stress and guilt for them.

I just don't want them to know that. When I'm on the phone to my boyfriend, to my dad and stuff when I'm at my boyfriend's house it's really awkward, like I've got to walk away and stuff because I don't want them knowing what it's like to have a parent like my own. It's really embarrassing (Julie, 15 years).

Exclusion and self-reliance

Exclusion and self-reliance as both a consequence of keeping of secrets and as preferred self-protection strategies were discussed by the majority of young people. Young people highlighted that they chose to not access extra supports at school or participate in more generic support programs available in the community as they did not want to draw attention to the fact that their parent was in prison. Young people spoke about how they did not access supports such as school counsellors because their families, particularly non-incarcerated parents, were concerned about others knowing 'too much'.

As a result children and young people advised that they frequently chose to exclude themselves either from formal or informal supports in order to protect their families and to ensure that they did not need to disclose any information about their incarcerated parent. Instead they described their capacity to be self-reliant and look after themselves.

On the other hand, two young people indicated that when they were younger they had felt so overwhelmed when they thought about their parent in prison that they withdrew from situations or circumstances that made them think about it. They explained that their shame was so considerable that they could not imagine that any other person could understand such an experience.

Both of my parents are drug dealers and alcoholics and when my mum and dad went to prison, I didn't want to talk to anyone because I thought I would be the only kid that didn't have a mum and dad (Rebecca, 15 years).

Managing friendships

In addition to children's strategies of keeping secrets and self-exclusion, children and young people also described how they managed their friendships in order to protect themselves from future harm. Children and young people reflected on how they had been hurt or let down by adults and peers in the past, who had little understanding of their situation and who had made them feel ashamed or embarrassed because of their incarcerated parent.

Subsequently, children and young people felt that building friendships was often problematic because of the lack of trust that they had in individuals. For many participants there was often considerable caution in building peer relationships and four of the children

and young people described how they would set ‘tests’ for peers in order for them to know whether or not they could rely on them.

I know it probably sounds really stupid but like you make up a white lie and you tell someone and then if they go and tell someone else you know you’re left on the seat. You shut down that friendship. Well you don’t shut down the friendship you just can’t trust them (Jane, 15 years).

Despite such problems with making friends, children and young people described the importance of the good friends they had and how they relied on a small number of close friends to confide in and share their joys as well as their concerns. Frequently a good friend was described as someone who had shared similar experiences to them. This allowed children and young people to talk more freely about the issues they were experiencing. Young people spoke about how this sharing allowed them to be more authentic in their interactions and engage in a reciprocal relationship, whereby they could also help their friends in return for the support they received.

So [my friend] is like a sister I never had pretty much. So she’s always been there for me so I mainly came back to her... she is pretty much the same situation as mine, so we talk about it all the time, we compare our dads and how much of arseholes they are to us. It’s good to have someone there who knows what you’re going through (Julie, 15 years).

Conversely, five of the young people also described that while it was a relief for them to have friendships where they could be open about their experiences and not feel judged, being accepted in to some of these friendships brought other challenges for them. Adolescent male participants in particular highlighted that these peers could negatively influence their behaviours, particularly around drinking and drug use.

Discussion

This study draws attention to the subjective experiences of stigma for children and young people who have a parent in prison. While this study is limited in its scale and its use of a convenience sample, it does provide some interesting pathways for future research and policy and practice development.

It was apparent in this study that as children and young people became older and as their worlds became bigger, they also became more aware of their parents incarceration and the impact that this had on them. However, while young people had a larger number of experiences of stigma to describe, younger children also described similar experiences.

Earlier studies reflect many of the challenges faced by the children in this study (Loureiro, 2010; Jones & Wainaina-Woźna, 2013). Many of the children and young people in this study described feeling discriminated against, judged and shamed by their peers, family members, general community and the broader society for simply being associated with a stigmatised person, their incarcerated parent. These findings are consistent with Corrigan and Miller's (2004) idea of courtesy stigma originating from kinship and family connections and being underpinned by the notion of contamination. In addition children and young people who hadn't experienced tangible acts of discrimination, still identified that they experienced considerable anticipated judgement and fear of stereotyping. This perceived or felt stigma (Phillips & Gates, 2011) was described by children and young people as distressing as it was for those who had experienced direct discrimination.

Of interest this study also highlights that children and young people of prisoners vary in their responses to adopting these stigma typologies. Those children who were more connected to their incarcerated parent were more likely to report less feelings of shame and embarrassment. This was evident for both males and females. Both Manby (2014) and

Arditti (2015) have reported the importance of a supportive family environment for children with a parent in prison. Such findings suggest it is critical for those children who have safe and loving relationships with their incarcerated parent that good quality contact is maintained throughout the parent's incarceration (Saunders, 2017).

It has also been evident throughout this study that the coping strategies children and young people use to manage the stigma associated with parental incarceration further contribute to the continued silent and hidden challenges of this group. The findings suggest that children and young people go out of their way to conceal and manage the impact of parental incarceration by restricting their own access to formal and informal supports to avoid instances of enacted discrimination or felt stigma. Keeping secrets for a number of children and young people clearly acts as a protective mechanism; however, it is also evident that such strategies may leave children more vulnerable and isolated.

The findings of this study suggest that not only is there a need to enable children and young people to selectively disclose to safe and supportive individuals as identified in other research (Raikes & Lockwood, 2016) but there is also a need for more holistic interventions to be available to children and young people. As Phillips and Gates (2011) argue reinforcing an 'us and them' approach may further contribute to their experienced stigma. In other words, there is a need for children to be empowered to access interventions that respond to their needs as children and not necessarily as children of prisoners.

As well as empowering children and young people to seek support, there is also value in providing parents and professionals working with children with information and advice on how to assist children when their parent has been arrested and incarcerated (Jones et al., 2013). As reported by the children and young people in this study, teachers are well placed

to provide them with the support they need. However, there is need to educate teachers about the impact of parental incarceration on children so that they can be better placed to support them.

This research further reaffirms the important role that friendships and informal supports have for children and young people when their parent is in prison (Hagen & Myers, 2003; Loureiro, 2010). However, what the findings from this study also suggest is that the purposeful selection of friends with similar experiences by children and young people sometimes have negative consequences for them. Other research has demonstrated that the affiliation only with individuals from a stigmatised group limits access to opportunities and resources and prevents the acquisition of skills (Barker, 2012; Moses, 2010). Young people in this study acknowledged that they did not want to ‘end up’ like their parent in prison, but felt that they had limited opportunities to follow other pathways. While there is an argument for the benefits of children and young people with shared experiences supporting one another, it is also important that children and young people are provided with opportunities to access other networks and relationships that may be of benefit to them.

Conclusion

It is evident that children and young people experience a range of negative effects as a result of the stigma that arises from parental incarceration and this situation creates dilemmas for them in which they must weigh the costs of seeking support against others learning about their circumstances.

Helping children and young people to challenge the stigma associated with parental incarceration while providing them with the tools and supports to do this is an important undertaking for social workers and other professionals working with this group of children.

It is the responsibility of academics, policy makers and practitioners to work together to create the change necessary to better support this group of children and young people. Without challenging the attitudes and beliefs that currently surround this, children are at risk of remaining hidden and marginalised.

[END]

7.3 Chapter summary

This chapter presented a publication on children and young people's subjective experiences of stigma. The literature describes that families of prisoners including children and young people are stigmatised and that this stigma contributes to the negative outcomes associated with parental incarceration (Hannem & Bruckert, 2012). Yet few studies have directly sought the views of children and young people about this issue. The findings of this study highlight that children and young people in the ACT experience similar encounters of stigma and shame as those highlighted in other international studies (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). However, the findings from this study also illustrate how social media now perpetuates this experience. While this research highlights that children have found distinct ways to manage both the enacted and courtesy stigma that they experience, it remains evident that children and young people's experience of stigma continues to affect their day-to-day lives and in turn they may live more isolated lives due to their secrecy.

Chapter 8: Discussion and implications for policy and practice

Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.

Karl Marx, 1852

8.1 Introduction to the chapter

The previous three chapters detailed children and young people's experiences of parental incarceration. The 16 children who participated in the study provided detailed accounts of their experiences, including rich descriptions of the challenges that resulted from parental incarceration for both them and their family and the many ways that they managed and coped with this. The children and young people's accounts reinforce the need for a greater understanding of, and more sensitive responses to, children and young people when their parent is imprisoned. This chapter fully explores these issues and the implications of the research.

The chapter begins by outlining the theoretical contributions of the study: the new knowledge gained about this group of children and the strengths and limitations of adopting a social constructionist view of childhood. These understandings will greatly benefit professionals and researchers working with children and young people, who, for the most part, do not recognise or understand the many challenges experienced by children and young people when their parent is in prison. In addition to these theoretical contributions, the chapter offers key learnings for policymakers, practitioners and researchers, who have the potential to further improve responses to children and young people. The recommendations for improving responses to parental incarceration include recognition and acknowledgement of the issues experienced by children and young people,

in particular by the criminal justice and education systems, and the need to recognise and challenge the structural constraints imposed upon children, young people and their families. To conclude the thesis, the strengths and limitations of the study are outlined and future research directions are explored.

8.2 Overview of the thesis

This thesis was presented as a thesis by publication. Five articles were presented that contribute to new knowledge about children of prisoners. When I began this thesis, most of the research undertaken on parental incarceration had been conducted from an adult perspective, be that of a parent, carer or professional. There was limited research available about the experiences of children and young people with a parent in prison from a child's perspective. Few international studies existed; within Australia, research with young people about maternal incarceration was just beginning to be published (Flynn, 2008).

Over the past five years, there has been a rising interest in research about this population group and an increasing number of available dissertations (Mandby, 2014) and research projects that include children's perspectives, such as the COPING study (Jones & Wainaina-Woźna, 2013). The increased interest in children's participation reflects a broader trend in childhood research, which explores the lived experience and consequences of a wide range of adverse childhood events, such as parental separation and divorce and homelessness. Research into parental incarceration is now too expanding to include the voices of children. Yet the emergent body of research literature, presented in Chapter 2, highlighted a number of gaps and limitations about research with this group of children.

This study aimed to address some of the existing gaps in theoretical and empirical knowledge about children's experiences of parental incarceration, by allowing children

and young people to provide their accounts. A phenomenological approach, underpinned by childhood studies, was developed to enable the participation of children and young people. This research approach and the methods used were outlined in detail in Chapter 4. The current research describes that there are a variety of methodological and conceptual concerns in research with children and young people about sensitive issues—in particular, parental incarceration. As in other areas of research, there appears to be a privileging of quantitative over qualitative methodologies in the examination of parental incarceration, and only a small number of academic studies have included asking children directly about their experiences. Ethical and methodological reasons are frequently cited as reasons as to why children and young people have not been engaged in research about their experiences (Lewis et al., 2008; Tudball, 2000). The two publications presented in Chapter 4 make important contributions to the methodological and conceptual understanding of research with this population group, and future researchers may benefit from these insights.

The rich data revealed through the interviews undertaken with children and young people were outlined in chapters 5 to 7. This data comprehensively responded to the research question:

- ***What are the experiences of children and young people who have or have had a parent in prison?***

The findings described children's experiences of parental incarceration and provided important insights into how children and young people managed the many challenges that confronted them at the time of their parent's arrest, court appearances, imprisonment and release. Chapter 5 provided an over overview of the experiences of parental incarceration as perceived by children and young people. The two publications presented in chapters 6 and 7 focused on two larger themes which were consistent across the data and analysis.

These provided important contributions to understanding how children and young people made decisions about and maintained contact with their incarcerated parent and how children experience and manage the stigma associated with parental incarceration.

The aim of the study was, however, to go beyond just a description of the participants' experiences. Corsaro (2015) describes that the nature of the adult world has a profound effect on childhood and states that we need to ask "how can we, as adults, enrich children's appropriations, constructions and contributions? How can we make investments in children and their childhoods?" (p. 344). In keeping with this practice, the thesis aimed to have participants' views inform the way children's experiences are understood, researched and, importantly, supported into the future. This chapter addresses this aim and offers important contributions to how to approach this in both policy and practice. To highlight these contributions, the key theoretical insights gained from better understanding children's experiences of parental incarceration are first outlined, before detailing the key learnings which can be applied by future researchers and policymakers seeking to better address the needs of children and young people with a parent in prison.

8.3 Summary of contributions

This thesis and the five publications presented in chapters 3, 4, 6 and 7 address key gaps in the literature about parental incarceration and make several contributions to knowledge about this population group.

Firstly, this thesis adds to the growing literature relating to children's experiences of parental incarceration as reported from their perspective. Further, it offers the accounts of children and young people's experiences of parental incarceration in a jurisdiction underpinned by human rights standards, as detailed in Chapter 2. This jurisdiction has not before explored the experiences of children and young people.

Secondly, the study presents a detailed account of children and young people's life worlds as they followed their parents through the criminal justice process, which involved a series of steps beginning with their parents' arrest and ending with their release—frequently commencing again when conditions were breached or new crimes were committed. The accounts provided by children and young people highlight the shifting nature of their experiences, their resolve to manage the complex challenges they are faced with, and the social processes and structures that lead to their invisibility and, sometimes, considerable disadvantage. This view of parental incarceration provides another perspective to the dominant developmental and criminological perspectives currently found in research about this issue.

Finally, this thesis draws attention to the adversities that exist for children of prisoners and the increased vulnerability that these predispose them to. While the thesis has been underpinned by the childhood studies perspective that children and young people may be viewed as competent meaning makers in possession of agency and capacity, the findings of this thesis also highlight the tensions that exist in relation to how children enact agency and the way that they influence and are influenced by the social process and structures around them. It is proposed that, while a childhood studies approach is an important paradigm that provides voice to children's experiences, it can also minimise the vulnerability that children and young people experience and the roles and responsibilities that adults have in ensuring the wellbeing of children and young people. These contributions to and advances in knowledge are outlined in more detail below.

The recognition of children's rights

As outlined in Chapter 2, the ACT has the first prison in Australia to be built and managed in accordance with human rights principles and to meet human rights obligations set out in

the ACT *Human Rights Act*.⁸ The ICCPR is scheduled to this act. One right of particular importance to children of prisoners is the right to contact with family. This is provided in Article 23 of the ICCPR: “The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State” (United Nations General Assembly, 1966).

Children and young people also have rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, including the right to family life (Article 16); to know and be cared for by parents (articles 7 and 8); to be separated from parents only when it is in the child’s interests (Article 9); and to express their views in decisions that are being made that affect them (Article 12). Article 3.1 also states:

In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration (UN, 1989).

Children and young people’s insights into their lived experience of parental incarceration reveal that fundamental rights to family, to information about their parent, and to express their views in decisions that would affect them were lacking for the majority of children.

For the most part, the right of this group of children and young people to be looked after by their parents was restricted by their parent’s incarceration and decisions made by the state with regard to sentencing options. Long periods of time on remand prior to sentencing of their parent not only increased children and young people’s anxiety but also impacted on key areas of their lives, including economic, educational and housing

⁸ Currently there are no formal guidelines in place to make the prison human rights compliant, although the ACT government is currently addressing this by developing a set of standards to act as a benchmark

instability. Further, for a number of participants, their safety and wellbeing were repeatedly compromised by the absence of their parent.

While the *Human Rights Act 2004* provides that incarceration is a legitimate response to ensure public safety, the courts must also show that the rights of the children affected are taken into account and balanced with a decision to remove their parent. For a number of the participants in this study, it was evidently legitimate (and proportional to the child's safety) that participants were prevented from having contact with their imprisoned parent. However, what was also evident in participants' narratives was that stopping a child from seeing their parent involved a breach of the rights of the child (and the parent) that was not adequately explained or justified to them in a way that ensured that the child understood the reasoning behind the decision.

The commonality of experience across the group of children and young people in this sample indicated that children of prisoners were also generally invisible in the decision-making process of courts and prisons. They were also often not included in decisions made within their family, particularly when they were younger. In part, this may have been due to a number of non-incarcerated and incarcerated parents deciding to not reveal this information to children in order to protect them. Children and young people's experiences revealed that protection remained a key priority for parents. For others, though, it was due to police, prisons and courts failing to sufficiently prioritise the rights of children and young people so that they had information about, and understood the reasoning behind, their parent's incarceration as well as their right to participate in decisions that affected them. This study adds to the emerging literature focusing on how decision-makers recognise and respond to the rights of children of prisoners (Jones & Wainaina-woźna, 2013; Wallis & Dennison, 2015).

Children and young people's perspectives of parental incarceration

This study has highlighted key concerns experienced by children and young people with a parent in prison. Undertaking such research is an important step into the examination of an issue that has so far received little attention from policymakers and the service system.

While an increasing body of academic work and commissioned reports have explored the impact of incarceration on children and young people, as noted throughout this thesis, it is only very recently that children have been included in this discussion. Generally, few attempts have been made to engage children in discussions about these experiences and to understand how these experiences make sense to them. The importance of placing children's voices at the forefront so that the policymakers, practitioners and services that surround children can hear from the children themselves, and about what they regard as important, form the core of my findings.

One of the key issues identified within the previous literature is the need for researchers to disentangle the multiple disadvantages experienced by children of prisoners and to understand how parental incarceration impacts on children and young people, separate to other disadvantages they may experience (Phillips, Erkanli, Keeler, Costello, & Angold, 2006; Wildeman & Turney, 2014). As described in Chapter 2, much of the earlier research describes children's lives as having been impacted by considerable disadvantage prior to their parent being incarcerated. This was also identified in many of the lives of children and young people who participated in this research. Understanding the causal implications of parental incarceration is beginning to be explored; however, there remains limited data on the outcomes, needs and experiences of children of prisoners. Currently, research about children's antisocial behaviour is the only outcome that may be directly linked to parental incarceration, and the effect size is modest (Murray et al., 2012).

Despite this finding, it remains evident from the children and young people's perspectives provided in this study that many of the disadvantages they described experiencing prior to their parent's incarceration are compounded by their parent being put in prison. For some children and young people, the loss of their parent to prison and the associated social and emotional consequences this has not only led to their continuing disadvantage and vulnerability but further exacerbated the disadvantages they face. For others, though, it was apparent that parental incarceration created a previously unexpected experience of vulnerability.

The findings presented in Chapter 5 provided understandings of the difficulties that children perceived to experience before, during and after parental incarceration.

Confirming the findings of earlier international research (described in Chapter 2; Boswell, 2002; Chui, 2010; Manby, 2014; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008), this study found that children experienced a range of practical, social and emotional challenges, including financial and housing instability; increased caring responsibilities; disrupted family relationships; poorer educational performance; stigma; and emotional distress. This study also highlights the considerable risk factors that children and young people are exposed to by the behaviours of their parents, siblings and other family members, including parental drug and alcohol use, domestic and family violence, and mental health issues. The narratives of the children and young people who participated in the study provided compelling evidence that their lives were characterised by experiences of uncertainty, instability, the loss of important relationships, social exclusion and considerable disadvantage.

Chapters 6 and 7 looked at two particular themes which were consistent across the data and analysis. Chapter 6 provided insight into how children make sense of their relationships with their incarcerated parents and how this impacted their decision-making about maintaining contact with their parents. In recent years, research has focused on the

outcomes for children and young people who maintain contact with their incarcerated parent. This research has generally measured the emotional and behavioural outcomes for children visiting their parent (Poehlmann et al., 2010), the assessment of attachment behaviours between parents and children (Cassidy, Poehlmann, & Shaver, 2010) and factors associated with opportunities to visit (Poehlmann, Schlafer, Maes, & Hanneman, 2008).

The methodology of this study differed from those frequently employed within the research literature about children of prisoners in that it used a sociology of childhood framework to include the perspectives of children and young people. Children and young people explained that, despite the sometimes considerable risks incarcerated parents add to children's lives, many wanted some type of contact with their parent both throughout the duration of incarceration and after release. However, children and young people described that decision-making about having contact with their incarcerated parent was complex and changing, reliant on a range of factors such as the consent of other adults, including their incarcerated parent.

This thesis provides a unique contribution in two ways. Firstly, it explores and makes known the challenges children and young people experience in losing a parent to prison, regardless of whether or not they had previously lived with that parent. The children and young people who have a parent in prison and who do not have contact with their parent are not usually recognised by the prison services and are rarely considered in the literature.

Secondly, this thesis illustrates children's capacity to make decisions about maintaining contact with their incarcerated parent and to reach their own decisions about their future relationship with their incarcerated parent. The thesis demonstrates the interplay between children and young people's feelings and their interactions with the systems and people

around them. These shaped not only their understandings of their relationship with their parent but also their lived experience of being a child of a prisoner.

This is an important contribution to the study of parental incarceration that was achieved only by the recruitment methods I used. That is, I recruited children and young people not only from the prison visiting area and SHINE for Kids program but also by advertising in universal child and youth settings such as schools and youth programs. This meant that children and young people who did not visit their incarcerated parent also had the opportunity to participate in this study.

The publication in Chapter 7 draws attention to the subjective experiences of stigma for children and young people who have a parent in prison. Previous studies from adult perspectives indicate that stigma is a considerable barrier to children receiving support and further contributes to the continued silent and hidden challenges of this group (Link & Phelan, 2001; Phillips & Gates, 2011). This study concurs with these findings. The thesis highlights that the majority of children and young people in this study go out of their way to conceal information about their circumstances, which adds to their invisibility but is also associated with complex feelings of wanting to belong and needing to stay isolated. The thesis builds on previous knowledge by providing more nuanced understandings of how children and young people perceive stigma and what they do to mitigate and manage this. It adds new knowledge about how stigma continues to affect those children who no longer have contact with their parent.

Insights into research with children of prisoners

The two publications presented in Chapter 4 provide insights into the ethical challenges presented to researchers when engaging children and young people in research and the methodological and conceptual approaches utilised in this thesis. The approach used in this

study provides another perspective to the dominant developmental and criminological perspectives currently found in research on this issue. This study privileges children's perspectives—from the design of the study at the beginning of this process, as outlined in Chapter 4 and Publication 1 (in Chapter 3), to the analysis of the data and the final presentation of the findings in chapters 5, 6, and 7.

As outlined in Chapter 4, it is argued that the field of childhood studies has been built on the principle that childhood is a social phenomenon and that children have the capacity to be active co-constructors of their social world (Qvortrup, 2009). The childhood studies approach has been reasonably well received within academia, and a range of research focusing on other childhood adversities has been undertaken using this methodology (Hammersley, 2017). These studies that use qualitative research methods now routinely point to children's erudite and discerning awareness of their social worlds (Corsaro, 2005; James & James, 2004).

Reflecting on the interviews with children and young people, this study illustrates the capacity and competence of children and young people living with parental incarceration to articulate and reflect on their phenomenological experience of prenatal incarceration, for which earlier studies had previously regarded them as unable or too vulnerable. The study highlights children and young people's ability to provide highly developed understandings of the impact of parental incarceration and to apply self-initiated coping strategies. Through listening to children and young people, this study has found them to demonstrate not only capacity and competence but also resourcefulness, imagination and self-possession in an otherwise complex life.

Using this resourcefulness and imagination, children and young people demonstrated their ability to shape the environments that they lived in rather than simply responding to the

behaviour of the adults in their lives. In line with a childhood studies paradigm, the findings from the interviews with children and young people captured children and young people's active and self-initiated responses to (re)shape their lives—in other words, their agency. Conversely, I have also found that, while conceptually important, the concept of agency within the childhood studies paradigm provided an idealistic impression of the autonomy and choice that children and young people have. The central focus of this paradigm, the child as agentic, is problematic when children and young people's vulnerabilities are not considered.

Hammersley (2017) argues that children do not escape structural constraints and that, when children are ascribed agency and competency, there is risk that their vulnerabilities are ignored. The importance of the socio-cultural contexts in which the participants lived were evident in children and young people's narratives. The interactions they had with these structures, systems and individuals informed and shaped the ways children and young people understood and responded to the issues that resulted from parental incarceration and that they experienced in their life worlds. However, I also construe that children and young people's perceptions of their own vulnerability and need also acted as a basis for the agency that they demonstrated.

Using an interpretative phenomenological approach allowed a deeper reading and understanding of children and young people's reflexive capacity to interpret and understand the challenges and vulnerabilities they experienced as a result of parental incarceration. However, this study also highlights that it is misleading to simply take a view, as sometimes set out in the earlier childhood studies literature (Christensen & James, 2008; James & Prout, 1997), of childhood as dichotomous—that is, children are seen either as passive recipients or unconstrained in their choices and behaviour (Hammersley, 2017; Valentine, 2011). The accounts of parental incarceration children and young people

provided clearly explain their perceptions of hardship and disadvantage related to their lives before, during and after their parent's incarceration. However, their perceptions of self-determined action and deliberate choice, such as ceasing to have contact with their incarcerated parent, were not necessarily accounts of children and young people's capacity to enact agency with a view to achieving their individual preference. I would argue that their accounts of the decision-making, or the way they exerted influence, were frequently with respect to their conscious or unconscious recognition of their own vulnerability and capacity to assess risk. It is from the very essence of these experiences of being vulnerable, and the realisation by children and young people about the capacity and dependability of their incarcerated parent, that children and young people may be seen to 'act' to create different and sometimes uncertain ways of being.

More recent theoretical debates have begun to emphasise that agency is neither apolitical nor neutral but that, within childhood studies, children are often provided with the benefits of agency but not the obligations (Valentine, 2011). A number of the participants in this study were seen to demonstrate more 'constructive agency', in that children and young people's agency was directed towards maintaining conventional norms and protecting the status quo at home and at school. This was achieved by either minimising their contact with their incarcerated parent or keeping secret the knowledge that their parent was in prison. Conversely, others described a more self-defeating agency, where their choices resulted in even further disengagement and marginalisation.

Understanding children and young people's self-defeating agency in this study's context has mostly been addressed through the criminological and developmental literature about intergenerational offending and the transmission of particular risk factors (eg Murray et al., 2012). The childhood studies literature has been criticised for not considering the self-defeating agency of children and young people, particularly for those who are extremely

vulnerable and who have considerable constraints placed upon them (Lancy, 2012; Valentine, 2011).

Sayer (2011) argues:

... concepts of human agency emphasise the capacity to do things, but our vulnerability is as important as our capacities; indeed, the two sides are clearly related, for vulnerability can prompt us to act or fail to act, and both can be risky (p. 5).

As we study children and their childhoods, I argue—as have Bluebond, Langer and Korbin (2007)—that we need to confront the disorder and messiness of children’s realities and not diminish them by ignoring their vulnerability. In doing so, childhood studies need to move away from both essentialising and generalising the concept of agency.

Children and young people clearly have perspectives that need to be listened to, but as researchers we also need to understand the significant influence of vulnerability and risk in children’s decision-making. This has important implications for the ethical considerations in undertaking future research with children and young people as well as the research methods employed by those engaging children and young people. As adults, we need to be careful to support children and young people and not burden them with adult expectations and responsibilities that may devalue childhood.

[Re] Constructing Children of Prisoners

This research was motivated by my observation that children of prisoners remained largely invisible across the different policy and practice systems. The research literature that was analysed, largely regards itself to be objective or neutral in how it presents constructions of children of prisoners, but this research highlights that the literature is imbued with

normativity that builds on and reinforces particular social constructions of childhood. The theoretical perspective underpinning this research, social constructionism, has allowed me to pay attention to the multiple factors which contribute to the construction of children of prisoners, and what we know that shapes the lives of these children and to consider what is not apparent. Social constructionists teach that items we had thought were inevitable are simply social products (Hacking, 2001 p, 47). This thesis has unmasked and questioned what is already known about these children and has provided a new account and understanding from their perspective.

Publication 1 and each of the findings chapters provide a different illustration of how the research participants' lives have been constructed through a diverse range of experiences associated with parental incarceration. As a researcher I heard from participants how this experience has shaped them as individuals and in turn how they have reacted to that. It is evident that many of the participants' lives have been constructed and shaped by factors such as risk, vulnerability, policy and stigma. Participants provided accounts of *their understandings* of their lived realities which had been legitimised by policy and social processes. In other words, participants described that what they know to be true about themselves has in a large part been told to them by the social process and institutions that they have been engaged in. Their lived experiences of having a parent in prison were consecrated, reified and were formally recognised and shaped by social processes, policies and interactions with institutions. Through the knowledge of their own reality and through the various social processes which organise and make it objective, it is evident that participants 'know' the experience of parental incarceration in different ways. In some way the findings of this research demonstrate another example of social constructionism.

This thesis demonstrates that individuals negotiate and navigate their lives through weighing up their how their experiences and perceptions of themselves and lives are shaped, and constructed through interactions with the world that claims to know things about them. However, within this, this thesis demonstrates that this group of children and young people find their own understanding, as knowing subjects, sometimes resisting or contesting the way the world sees them.

This research is underpinned by a phenomenological perspective which has also allowed me to understand and demonstrate how children of prisoners know themselves and have expressed themselves within these social constructions. Participants spoke about how they internalised others perceptions and value of them and how in turn this influenced how they see themselves and their incarcerated parent. What kinds of knowledge participants know about themselves and the way in which they see this is both a content and theoretical contribution. Children of prisoners are both known subjects who are affected by the world that they live in, but they are also knowing subjects who shape their understanding of the world.

This thesis highlights the consequences of unwittingly perpetuating assumptions and claims to truth about people – it highlights the need to investigate the consequences of the way we construct a social group, which can only be done through asking them how their lives have been shaped by it. Researchers, policy makers and practitioners need to be cautious when making claims about the construction or understanding of this population group, children of prisoners. This research highlights that children and young people experience a range of assumptions made about them and their lived reality which result in sometimes unhelpful representations or constructions of them. There is a danger that in maintaining these constructions through policy and practice responses we can accidentally

create or shape children of prisoners to become what we assumed them to be. However, we know that they need not be this way and that by offering different constructions or ways of knowing, children of prisoners may know different realities. This thesis demonstrates that what can seem like a theoretical concern, to unpick social constructions, is the lived experience of human agents. The theoretical implications and contribution of this thesis is, in part, acknowledging that the seemingly theoretical exercise is a lived experience.

8.4 Policy and practice implications

This discussion of the ways that children and young people experience parental incarceration now turns to consider Corsaro's (2015) challenge, identified in section 8.2, about how we can enrich and invest in children's childhoods.

The findings of the thesis extend current understandings of parental incarceration and also provide key learnings to inform and improve the way we respond to children and young people. These learnings provide important information for policymakers, professionals and researchers. Although the study emerged from the criminal justice context, it is evident from the findings reported in chapters 5, 6 and 7 that children of prisoners are situated in a range of contexts and many remain invisible to the systems that they engage with.

This study highlights the need to work with children and young people more holistically in order for their needs to be met. These learnings raise important implications for any professionals or adults who work with any child and young person. The study findings demonstrate that the following areas are essential to improving responses to children of prisoners:

- system responses to children and young people; and
- direct interventions aimed at children and young people;

System responses to children and young people

Publication 3, presented in Chapter 3, provided a robust analysis of how children and young people are currently constructed and responded to (or not) in public policy. The policy analysis and descriptions from children and young people convey that, at best, they are currently responded to by policymakers as either falling into one of three categories—that is, ‘appendages to parents’, ‘children at risk’ or ‘future criminals’—or, at worst, as invisible to the systems that surround them. The lack of acknowledgement of the rights of children and young people was discussed in section 8.3, but what this section, Publication 3 and the overall findings of this thesis highlight is that there is no one system that takes responsibility for the children of prisoners—despite some of the understanding that the challenges they experience are the direct result of the removal of their parent by state intervention.

Over the past two decades it has been consistently noted within the literature that the neglect of the adult criminal justice process to consider the rights and interests of children and young people is not accidental but an intrinsic feature of a judicial system based upon the principals of individual responsibility and justice (Larman & Aungles, 1991; Wallis & Dennison, 2015). It is evident that the interests of children and young people and the interests of the adult criminal justice system do not necessarily coincide. With the growing international literature suggesting that parental incarceration is a risk factor for poor outcomes for children and young people (Murray & Farrington, 2005; Murray et al., 2011), the need for the greater consideration of children and young people by the adult criminal justice system is critical if the outcomes for children of prisoners are to improve.

The narratives of children and young people consistently demonstrated a lack of coherent and integrated responses available to them that recognised their separate needs and interests when their parent is incarcerated. Children and young people often spoke about

their experiences as a chronology of events beginning with their parent's arrest and ending with their parent's release. They described that some of the issues they experienced were apparent only at the time of the arrest, while other issues were connected specifically to the incarceration. Wallis and Dennison (2015) argue that the responsibility that the criminal justice system has to ensure the safety and care of children of prisoners is contentious, with children's needs mostly being referred by the criminal justice system to child welfare services. However, the problem with this response is—as Wallis and Dennison (2015) point out—that there is no reliable process to ensure that children and young people are adequately responded to.

It was also evident from the narratives of children and young people that they are not given proper attention or responses by police or courts and, while the ACT prison was recognised by some children as more child-friendly, prison visiting remained problematic. Similar to the Victorian findings by Flynn et al. (2015) and the European findings of Jones and Wainaina-Woźna (2013), the various parts of the criminal justice system could take a range of steps to acknowledge the needs of children and young people. For example, where police suspect that a child or young person may be home at the time of arrest, a responsible adult such as a social worker or other professional could accompany police to support children and young people during this time and afterwards to ensure that they have a responsible adult to care for them over the coming days and weeks. This is currently provided in the ACT for reports concerning domestic and family violence. It would be a reasonable approach to extend this to all crimes where children may be present at the time of arrest. Related to this, Flynn et al. (2015) report on a recent pilot of a computer assisted referral system in which police in Victoria make referrals for people they come into contact with when arrests are made. This may also be a useful strategy for children and young people to have access to.

As noted in section 8.3, this thesis provided compelling evidence that children and young people require much more information about their parent. The provision of information to children can and should take a variety of different forms. For example, developmentally appropriate language is critical, as are the methods in which the information is relayed. Children advise that they need to be in a safe space and emotionally supported when information is provided. It is important that information is provided in a way that takes into account what they need and wish to know.

This research also found that children and young people are involved in not only the adult criminal justice system but also many other systems. This is generally as a result of their parent's incarceration, as well as because of the multiple risk factors that they experienced prior to their parent's incarceration. The systems children and young people engaged in varied depending on their personal circumstances. For the most part, though, children and young people's access to supports was reliant on them identifying themselves as being in need of support services, rather than any service specifically asking them if they needed support. The exception to this was when children were identified as being at risk or risky; in that case, statutory child protection or youth justice services were engaged to work with the participant.

The role of schools in supporting children of prisoners has been a topic of recent interest within the literature (McCrickard & Flynn, 2016; Morgan, Leeson, & Carter Dillon, 2013). Schools have an important role in supporting children of prisoners. Not only do they have a critical role in the provision of education; they also provide opportunities to assist vulnerable children and their families as a universal, not stigmatising, service (Roberts & Louks, 2015). Schools also have an important role in promoting a sense of security and predictability for children in a sometimes otherwise chaotic period of time. In line with current research (Jones & Wainaina-Woźna, 2013), children and young people in this

study emphasised the need for extra support to be provided sensitively at school in order to create a more accessible learning environment. Children, and in particular young people, identified the need for flexibility to deal with issues at home and to maintain contact with parents while incarcerated. For this to occur, children and young people identified the importance of community awareness programs and education for teachers and students about the challenges experienced by children with a parent in prison.

Direct interventions for children and young people and their families

Consistent with social work values outlined in section 1.7, my focus on working with children and young people has always been underpinned by principles of social justice (AASW, 2010). The need to respond to the challenges experienced by children of prisoners and to understand what they perceive their needs to be has been a key driver for this thesis.

The role of social work is to facilitate social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people (AASW, 2013). Subsequently, all social work and social work activity is in some way connected to alleviating or preventing social problems and the effects that these have on the people (Alston & McKinnon, 2005). Mullaly (1997) argues that, although social work has a set of values that can be considered as progressive, its:

... definitions and approach to resolve social problems have not always been so. Rather, social work has accepted by default the mainstream definitions and explanations of social problems (p. 36).

While the structural social work approach has been discussed quite intensively since the late 1970s, Mullaly's ideas remain pertinent to me four decades later. In undertaking this thesis and listening to children and young people's phenomenological experiences of

parental incarceration, it has become apparent to me that their subjective experiences of hardship and disadvantage could be easily constructed as individual so-called deficiencies. Paying attention to individual actors and the challenges they face can quickly suppress the challenge for social work to go beyond the individual and family-level problems (Närhi & Matthies, 2016).

The narratives of children and young people in this study highlight compelling stories of how children and young people require direct assistance and support to manage the impact and consequences of parental incarceration. The participants' perceptions of parental incarceration further perpetuate the notion that they need to manage the problems and difficulties they experience, problems that are principally located within their family histories and relationships.

Rehabilitation and addressing individual deficiencies are key priorities of the prison system in the ACT (ACT Corrections, 2017). Yet one of the most striking findings of this research is that, because parents are imprisoned because of their individual deficiencies or behaviours, structures and systems are then imposed upon their children that test their capacity and ability to overcome the challenges that result as a consequence of parental incarceration. The interviews with children and young people identified that systems frequently fail to recognise the deep structural disadvantages imposed upon children and young people as a consequence of their parent's incarceration. Such structural impositions put children and young people at further risk—however, the system then further penalises them for it.

As a social worker, I would argue that such responses must be understood in the context of the political process as well as the analytical or problem-solving context. The extra supports that children and young people require and the many issues experienced by

children and young people described in this thesis are as a result of politico-cultural constructions. While clearly it is critical that children receive satisfactory housing and are supported to see their parent in prison by the provision of adequate transport, it is also important to acknowledge that these needs are not necessarily a result of children's lack of capacity or limited competence but also of the structural impositions placed on children's lives. Subsequently, to ensure that this research does not reinforce oppressive practice but instead espouses goals of social justice and human rights, any direct intervention undertaken with children and young people would need to be mindful of this issue.

With that said, this thesis is also underpinned by the need to honour children's voices and perspectives about their experiences. Children and young people spoke about their needs for further assistance but also highlighted, as identified in Chapter 7, the dilemmas they experience in weighing the costs of seeking support against others learning about their circumstances. This study has demonstrated that children are resourceful and seek to actively manage and mediate the impacts of parental incarceration in their own lives and in the lives of their siblings and non-incarcerated family members. Related to the privileging of children's voices throughout this study, an implication is that the capabilities of children of prisoners could be promoted by prioritising holistic policies and services that recognise children and young people's own individual needs and strengths. This suggestion incorporates the finding that children and young people's interests and needs are frequently disrupted by the priorities of parents and caregivers and the adult criminal justice system.

8.5 Strengths and limitations of the research

The findings of this study make an important contribution to the emerging literature about children and young people's experiences of parental incarceration. The study provided a unique opportunity for children and young people to describe their experiences of parental

incarceration and to provide detailed accounts of their life worlds. Children and young people's participation has allowed their experiences of parental incarceration to be considered beyond the criminological and developmental psychology perspectives that have traditionally dominated much of the literature.

The conceptual and methodological approach used in this study also makes a considerable contribution; important insights have been provided into how the ethical and methodological challenges of studying parental incarceration with vulnerable children and young people can be thoughtfully and carefully addressed. The adoption of childhood studies to theoretically guide and inform the study was essential for the establishment of the reference group and in developing participatory and child-centred methods. It is hoped that the publications presented in Chapter 4 may be utilised by others to inform future research and to encourage researchers to incorporate participatory approaches in the early stages of the study, which are currently lacking in this field.

This study also demonstrated the value of using an interpretative phenomenological approach to analyse the interview data presented by children and young people. This approach ensured that I was sensitive to both the verbal and non-verbal communication with children and young people which occurred within the interviews. This was particularly important for younger children, who were frequently not as articulate as older children and young people in their descriptions. This approach also allowed an essential interpretative element in the final stages of the analysis. This provided me with a process to consider the structural and systemic issues that were apparent in the context of children and young people's lives. This interpretative element also allowed me to compare the narratives of children and young people with the existing knowledge of this issue identified within the literature and to recognise how children and young people identified and responded to their own vulnerabilities when exercising agency.

The commitment to reflexivity, as outlined in publications 1 and 2, was supported by constant note-taking as I read about and listened to children's experiences of parental incarceration. These notes—which encompassed light bulb moments, further questions and reflections on issues raised by what I was hearing at the prison and from children and their families—were further supported by discussions with my supervisors, colleagues and workers at the prison. Reflecting on these notes throughout the research process assisted me in distinguishing between what children were telling me about their own experiences and how I then frequently provided my own level of interpretation. Co-reflexive exercises between me and the children and young people were also critical to the data analysis and final presentation of the research findings. Further information is provided in 3.2

Publication 1 – 'Representing children of prisoners in the public domain: Comparing children's views and policy documents' on page 63.

Of course this thesis also has limitations, some of which have been reported in the publications presented in the previous chapters. Firstly, methodological limitations must be discussed. Children and young people were interviewed only once, at a single point in time. Undertaking only one interview potentially impacted the quality of information revealed in the interviews, as the children had met me only once before, when we arranged the interview. Any trust and rapport built was based on that one interaction. Further, for a number of children these experiences had occurred some time ago.

Secondly, there are limitations to the study sample. The study was undertaken in one small jurisdiction in Australia. Sixteen children and young people were recruited to the study. Due to recruitment difficulties, the sample size is smaller than originally anticipated and includes a diverse range of ages and experiences.

A particular difference across the group was found in the type of relationships and contact children have with their parent. This study included children and young people who have relationships with their incarcerated parent and those who do not. Another noted difference across the group was the number of times a parent had been incarcerated. While the participants all had parents who were currently incarcerated and located in the same prison, the majority of the children and young people also spoke about times when their parent had been incarcerated in other prisons in other jurisdictions. The experiences of parental incarceration for children and young people may have differed from prison to prison.

In addition, differences were noted about the types of crimes parents had committed. Most children and young people described parents as having frequent short sentences for mostly drug related crimes, including theft and car crimes. Few parents of children and young people were serving very long sentences for very serious offences, although a number of children did describe crimes where violent acts were perpetrated. The experiences of the children and young people who experience parental incarceration only once in their lifetime may differ from the group of children who have parents who are routine offenders and from whom they come to expect this experience.

A further limitation to note is the small number of children and young people in the sample who were currently residing in out-of-home care. These children and young people's experiences and connections to their parents differed substantially and require further consideration. Further, the proportion of Caucasian children and young people in the sample does not reflect the diversity of the prison population in Australia. There is a disproportionate number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals in prison, and only four of the children and young people were Aboriginal. No culturally and

linguistically diverse children participated, so the cultural contexts of these children were not examined.

8.6 Future research

This thesis has presented an exploration of children's experiences of parental incarceration and has made substantive and meaningful contributions to the field. This thesis highlights areas of research that warrant future research. This study was a qualitative study comprising a range of experiences. Qualitative research often allows for inductive theory building, creating hypotheses on a limited sample that allows for detailed and nuanced analysis. Many of these findings can be tested in different contexts and explicitly differentiated between variables within the sample.

Further research can be conducted to determine how common the experiences of the young people in the present study are, and to comprehensively compare the different population groups within this study. Research with other population groups may be useful in identifying any differences in children's experiences of parental incarceration due to different economic circumstances or culture. The over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Australian prison systems remains an ongoing concern. Understanding how Aboriginal children's connections to family are supported when parental incarceration occurs is important in order to prevent the breakdown of social and cultural connections, as was identified for this group of children.

While this study notes that there were particular gendered experiences related to parental incarceration, further research is required to look at this in more depth. While a number of more recent studies have begun to consider children and young people's experiences, studies which focus on children's perspectives have largely ignored the differential impacts of parental imprisonment on gender.

Another finding of this study was related to the crimes parents committed and the social and emotional impact that this had on children and young people, as well as the relationships with their incarcerated parent. Inconsistent conclusions are evident in the literature (Manby, 2014; Sack & Seidler, 1976), and this study found that repeated re-offending and violent crimes were more likely to negatively impact on children and young people and perpetuate considerable social disadvantage. Further, the experiences of family and domestic violence evident within children and young people's lives was also seen to be a considerable issue. Future research could examine this further.

Lastly, children and young people in this study frequently identified that their siblings and other family members were also being imprisoned, with one young person noting that her father and brother had been incarcerated at the same time. Future research could consider the impacts of incarceration on children and young people with multiple incarcerated family members, including siblings.

8.7 Conclusion

This study responded to the lack of qualitative research into children and young people's experiences of parental incarceration. This research makes an important contribution to our understandings about the life worlds of children and young people, and their thoughts and feelings about what it means to them to have a parent in prison. It expands the developing knowledge of parental incarceration and contributes to the ongoing need to understand how we may best support and enrich the lives of children and young people.

In the course of this PhD research, I have met some remarkable children, young people, parents and workers. This research would not have been possible without the 16 children and young people who so generously provided me their perspectives about some of the key issues that they experienced from arrest to release, and sometimes back again. The

contributions of the five reference group members from the commencement of this thesis to the start of the interviews was invaluable.

The insights offered by children and young people about their experiences of parental incarceration provide important understandings of the often complex and challenging disadvantage that pervades these children's lives. The uncertainty and insecurity they experience across a range of life domains, despite whether or not they maintain contact with their parent, highlights the constant presence in their lives of the consequences of their parent's behaviours, which is compounded by their invisibility to the systems that surround them.

The study reinforces the importance of talking to children and young people. It demonstrates their capacity to consider and reflect on their experiences, articulate their needs, and find ways to mitigate and manage the challenges they so frequently experienced. This study also highlighted the need for researchers to consider the vulnerabilities of children and young people as well as their capacity. The quality and depth of their insights highlighted that many children and young people enacted agency and made decisions based on the vulnerabilities they experienced.

The distinct differences in responses from children and young people about parental incarceration in this study illustrates the heterogeneous nature of children's accounts of parental incarceration. Diverse experiences require diverse responses and encourage policymakers, social workers and other professionals to consider the provision of a person-centred and holistic response to meeting the range of needs of children and young people. Children and young people highlight the need to avoid assumptions and stereotypes that pathologise and construct them in unhelpful ways. Responding to children as future criminals or appendages to their parents prevents us from seeing the individuality of

children and young people and stops them being recognised and responded to as individuals in their own right.

The invisibility of the consequences of parental incarceration is now being challenged. The adult criminal justice system has a critical part to play in recognising the children of prisoners and in challenging how society acknowledges and responds to these children.

While there is no doubt that some children and young people express that they are safer without their parent in their life, no child or young person described that their wellbeing was improved. Many of the children and young people continued to experience considerable disadvantage. To underpin these changes, policymakers and practitioners need to consider how they can influence the broader social context and to alleviate the significant costs of parental incarceration for children and young people.

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Appendix A: Research Portfolio

A1: Thesis output – Papers included in the thesis

Publication 1

Saunders, V., & McArthur, M. (2018). Representing children of prisoners in the public domain: Comparing children's views and policy documents. *Australian Social Work*, 1–13. doi: 10.1080/0312407X.2018.1492623

Publication 2

Flynn, C., & **Saunders, V.** (2015). Research with children of prisoners: Methodological considerations for bringing youth in from the margins. In S. Bastien & H. B. Holmarsdottir (Eds.), *Youth 'at the margins': Critical perspectives and experiences of engaging youth in research worldwide* (Vol. 4). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Publication 3

Saunders, V., McArthur, M., & Moore, T. (2015). Not seen and not heard: Ethical considerations of research with children of prisoners. *Law in Context*, 32, 108–125

Publication 4

Saunders, V. (2017). Children of prisoners: Children's decision making about contact. *Child & Family Social Work*, 22, (S2), 63–72. doi: 10.1111/cfs.12281.

Publication 5

Saunders, V. (2018). What does your dad do for a living? Children of prisoners and their experiences of stigma. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 90, 21–27. doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.05.012

A2: Thesis output – Statements of contributions to
jointly published work

Chapter 3: Publication 1

Saunders, V., & McArthur, M. (2018). Representing children of prisoners in the public domain: Comparing children's views and policy documents. *Australian Social Work*, 1–13. doi: 10.1080/0312407X.2018.1492623

I acknowledge that my contribution to the above paper is eighty percent (80%).



Vicky Saunders

I acknowledge that my contribution to the above paper is twenty percent (20%)



Prof. Morag McArthur

Chapter 4: Publication 2

Flynn, C., & **Saunders, V.** (2015). Research with children of prisoners: Methodological considerations for bringing youth in from the margins. In S. Bastien, & H. B. Holmarsdottir (Eds.), *Youth 'at the margins': Critical perspectives and experiences of engaging youth in research worldwide* (Vol. 4). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

I acknowledge that my contribution to the above paper is fifty percent (50%).



Vicky Saunders

I acknowledge that my contribution to the above paper is fifty percent (50%)



Dr Catherine Flynn

Chapter 4: Publication 3

Saunders, V., McArthur, M., & Moore, T. (2015). Not seen and not heard: Ethical considerations of research with children of prisoners. *Law in Context*, 32, 108–125.

I acknowledge that my contribution to the above paper is eighty percent (80%)



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I acknowledge that my contribution to the above paper is ten percent (10%)



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Dr Tim Moore

A3: Thesis output – Presentations during candidature

Saunders, V. (2017, March). More than just contact: Children's experiences of maintaining relationships with their incarcerated parent. International Coalition of Children with Incarcerated Parents, New Zealand.

Saunders, V. (2015, September). The kaleidoscope of daily problems: Shaping holistic responses for children of prisoners. Social Policy Research Centre Conference, Sydney.

Saunders, V. (2015, June). Participation in research: Children of prisoners. International Children and Youth Research Network Conference, Cyprus.

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Saunders, V. (2013, September). Children of prisoners. International Society Prevention Child Abuse and Neglect, Dublin.

A4: Outputs external to candidature and relevant to thesis topic

Presentations

Saunders, V. (2014, May). Children of prisoners. ACT Health presentation.

Saunders, V. (2013, November). Children of prisoners. SHINE for Kids annual general meeting, Sydney.

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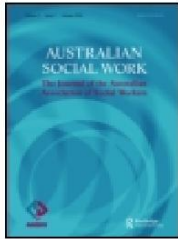
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Non-referred articles

Saunders, V., & Barry, E. (2013). Children with parents in prison. Research to Practice Series. Issue 4, December. Canberra: Institute of Child Protection Studies, Australian Catholic University.

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Representing Children of Prisoners in the Public Domain: Comparing Children's Views and Policy Documents

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ABSTRACT

Australian adult prisoner numbers continue to rise to what have been described as unprecedented and unsustainable levels. Research highlights that there are wide-ranging consequences of incarceration for families, and particularly for children. Despite the available research describing the negative impact of parental incarceration on children, it has been argued that these children remain virtually invisible to policy makers and social programs. Using a combination of policy analyses and findings from a research project undertaken in the Australian Capital Territory aimed at identifying the needs of children who have a parent in prison, we examine how this group of children is constructed and responded to by the systems that surround the children. It is argued that it is only when children are seen in a more holistic way that systems can respond more collaboratively to effectively support children.

IMPLICATIONS

- Children of prisoners have needed to rely on adults to recognise the problem of parental incarceration and petition for them.
- It is time for those who inform and develop social policy to consider the impact of current policies on children.
- It is only when children are seen in a more holistic way that systems can respond more collaboratively to effectively support them.

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Global prison rates are on the rise, with both the number of people incarcerated worldwide and the global rate of incarceration continuing to increase in every region (Allen, 2015). Australia has not been immune to this and has also seen an increase in the imprisonment rate in most states and territories (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Recent Australian research highlights that when we imprison adults, we are frequently imprisoning parents (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2015) and over a decade ago, it was estimated that 5% of children in Australia experience parental incarceration within their lifetime (Quilty, 2005). With rising incarceration rates it is likely that this number is higher now. Unsurprisingly, this has wide-ranging consequences for the families and children of those incarcerated (Flynn & Saunders, 2015) and research highlights the multiplicity of problems experienced by children with a parent in prison (Arditti, 2012; Flynn, Naylor, & Fernandez Arias, 2015).

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The United Nations identified children of prisoners as one of the world's most vulnerable groups of children (Jones & Hirschfield, 2015). Yet despite this international recognition and a national call to better understand and respond to this group of children (VACRO, 2011), it is argued that there has been a limited policy response across Australia (Eriksson & Flynn, 2015) and that children remain invisible. This paper begins by considering the different constructions of children and young people commonly found in social policy discourse (Hendrick, 1997; Wyness, 2012).

We then aim to answer the research question "how are children of prisoners constructed and responded to by the systems that surround them?" We do this in two stages: firstly, drawing on publicly available Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and national policy and legislation we explore how children of prisoners are discussed, framed, and their needs identified in publically available documents. Of particular interest is whether children of prisoners as a group have become recognised or not and therefore responded to and addressed by social policies.

We then provide an analysis, from a study conducted in the ACT, with a sample of children whose parents have been incarcerated to explore how they experience the systems that surround them. By comparing how children of prisoners are evident or not in policy documents to how children experience the service systems sheds light on how well systems are developed to meet this group's specific needs. We argue that the way children are constructed generally and children of prisoners specifically, effects the policy response. This policy response is problematic if children's needs are to be responded to effectively.

Constructing Children in Policy

Social policies play a key role in the lives of children, yet their position within society has meant that their particular needs and concerns can remain hidden and often unacknowledged (James & Prout, 2015). James, Jenks, and Prout (1998) have been influential in broadening the scope of childhood to a sociological level that defines childhood as a social category. Childhood theorists have reflected on the varying constructions or understandings of childhood within society over the centuries and how these understandings have influenced the theoretical and political positioning of children (Hendrick, 1997; Wyness, 2012). Depending upon the prevailing perspective, children are viewed in ways that may or may not contribute to their visibility (Skevik, 2003). The following section describes the key ways children can be constructed in policy. Understanding such constructions will provide a framework to analyse the question of how children of prisoners are constructed in policy and how they have been responded to.

Children as Appendages of Parents

Mayall (2006) argued that the rhetoric of social policy in Western developed countries has led to children being understood mainly within the parent–child relationship. There is an assumption that children are essentially the property and responsibility of the parent and children's rights and welfare are seen to be subsumed under those of their parents (Doyle & Timms, 2014). The ambivalence about children's separate needs and interests to those of their parents can be linked to the supposed relationship between the family and the state

(Foley et al., 2003). Within Western developed countries, the family remains the key institution in which children are—in theory—both provided for and protected. Social policy aims to support parents rather than to undermine their authority and intervention is deemed as legitimate only where children are at risk of significant harm. Where families experience disadvantage, it is assumed that children's interests are the same as their parents, and therefore policy and service responses tend to be geared toward parents with the intent that children will also benefit by a “trickle down” effect.

Children at Risk

Where parents are no longer able to care for their children it then becomes the responsibility of the state to ensure that they are looked after. However, Ellis (2016) described that interventions designed for children are largely based around conflicting notions of childhood. In social welfare policies, children are frequently constructed as either being “at risk” of abuse or as “risky” and out-of-control and dangerous (Morrow, 2011). The notion of children being constructed as victims or “at risk” of abuse is underpinned by the prevailing idea that children are inherently vulnerable, defenseless, and have limited capacity to foresee, negotiate, and overcome ever-present dangers (Scott, Jackson, & Backett-Milburn, 1998; Sorin, 2005).

Construing children as vulnerable may result in an overemphasis on “rescuing” children, leading to responses that may protect children from harm but also prevents them from “acting with agency in favour of the adult who knows best” (Sorin, 2005, p. 13). This has led to children increasingly becoming the subjects of both explicit as well as covert regulation and governance (Cobb, Danby, & Farrell, 2005). Rose described:

Childhood is the most intensively governed sector of personal existence ... the focus of innumerable projects that purport to safeguard it from physical, sexual and moral danger, to ensure its “normal” development. (Rose, in James et al., 1998, p. 7)

The category of “at risk” has also been used to describe or identify young people who engage in particular behaviours or who are “troubled” by disadvantage or particular social problems, such as crime, homelessness, substance abuse, and early pregnancy (Bessant, 2001). These groups are thought likely to fail to achieve a satisfying and fulfilling adult life, and while still understood as vulnerable, are also constructed in ways that require more punitive social control (Wyness, 2012). The assumption that the individual young person is central to “the problem” (of, for example, crime, homelessness, or substance abuse), means that disciplinary policy interventions by “the state” are then legitimised (Bessant, 2001).

Children as Rights Holders

More recently theories of childhood have focused on recognising that children have separate needs and interests from those of their parents and that they have the right to have these needs and interests responded to. The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child promotes social justice and empowerment for children, and it helps to make children's interests visible to government and other institutions (Freeman, 2011). When the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) came into force in Australia in

1990, children were recognised as rights bearers for the first time. Apart from its ethical and moral force, the Convention is a legal document that sets out standards, and assigns responsibility for ensuring these standards are met. By ratifying the treaty, Australia has obligations to realise the rights in the Convention for children. The increased recognition that children are rights bearers has influenced in some policy domains a growing commitment toward the participation of children in decision-making processes.

Children as Future Adults

Policy and legislation concerning children is frequently developed to ensure that children are equipped for a successful adulthood. For example, the job of schooling and youth development is to build and support the individual competencies and characteristics most strongly associated with adult success. Furthermore, much of our nation's economic health is linked to investment in strategies that help equip children with the skills and knowledge to fully contribute to society as an adult. This way of responding to children emphasises children as "becoming" adults, which infers the "incompetent" and "incomplete" notion of the child, and as one who must be developed (Uprichard, 2008).

Identifying the key ways children can be constructed in policy: as appendages of parents, at risk, as rights holders or, as future adults, provides a framework to analyse the question of how children of prisoners are constructed in policy and how they have been responded to. Before providing this analysis, the broader research project that aimed to identify the needs of children of prisoners in the ACT is described.

Methods

To answer the question of how children of prisoners are constructed and responded to by the systems that surround them in Australian policy two sources of data were considered: an analysis of national and local policy documents and interview data from children who have a parent in prison to explore how they experience the service system.

Policy Analysis

An analysis of national (Australian Federal government) and local (ACT) legislation and policy documents that have been released over the last decade was completed. Documents included reports, government publications, census data and program documentation from the policy domains of child welfare, education, criminal justice, and Indigenous and youth affairs. It would be expected that these are the policy domains that may identify this group of children who have a parent in prison. The search strategies included searching online databases, journals, Google Scholar and ACT and Federal government websites. Initial search terms used were combinations of the following:

- Child*
- Mother
- Father
- Family/Families
- Parent*

- Prisoner*
- Incarceration
- Needs

To ensure an accurate search of the issues other terms used included; policy, interventions, under 18 years of age, programs, experiences, reunification, case conference, transition, social connectedness, inclusion, exclusion, primary carer, care plan. Many keywords used were interchangeable, such as prisoner/inmate/offender, incarceration/imprisonment, and reunification/resettlement.

Children's Study

The data analysed for this paper were collected by the authors for a study commissioned by SHINE for Kids, an advocacy and support service for children of prisoners. This study aimed to understand children's experiences of parental incarceration, their social, emotional, and psychological support needs and how these were currently being responded to (or not). The study was carried out in the ACT and was conducted with the approval of the Australian Catholic University Human Research Ethics Committee.

Semistructured interviews were conducted with 16 children and young people between 8 and 18 years of age. Practical and ethical challenges associated with identifying and recruiting children of prisoners in research are well-documented in the literature and this study had similar difficulties (Al Gharaibeh, 2008; Lewis, Bates, & Murray, 2008; Tomaino, Ryan, Markotic, & Gladwell, 2005). This subsequently led to a smaller group of children being interviewed than originally anticipated.

Consent was obtained from each participant and parental or guardian consent was obtained where possible. Interviews lasted approximately an hour. All children and young people interviewed had experienced the incarceration of their father, three children had also experienced their mother imprisoned.

Data Reanalysis

The original children's study's research question was "what are the experiences and support needs of children with a parent in prison?" The question asked in the reanalysis was "how are children of prisoners constructed and responded to in social policy?" This type of qualitative secondary analysis "transcends the focus of the primary data from which the data were derived" to consider "new empirical, theoretical or methodological questions" (Heaton, 2004, p. 39). It involves the researcher re-engaging with the data through rereading transcripts and documents and listening to audio recordings again. It is critical that the researcher try to be "freshly open to what could be going on" and to consider the data in new ways (Wästerfors, Åkerström, & Jacobsson, 2014). Informed by a literature review about how children are constructed in policy, a deductive analytic approach was undertaken. Children and young people frequently described how they felt they were perceived by systems or individuals that could potentially offer support. These concepts, words, and phrases were identified within each of the transcripts and were subject to thematic analysis using NVIVO a computer assisted data software package.

A key limitation to this study was that the findings cannot be considered as representative of other states and territories in Australia as only national and ACT policy and

legislation were analysed. In addition, these analyses were reliant on documentation publicly available and accessible online.

The results of the data-gathering process are presented in the following sections. First the findings from the policy analysis are provided followed by the thematically analysed interviews with children and young people.

Findings

Children of Prisoners—Legislation and Policy

Children's interests span across a broad scope of social policy domains including health, education, welfare, and housing. However, the principle system that impacts this group of children is the criminal justice system (CJS).

The Criminal Justice System

Within the CJS in the ACT, legislation including the *Bail Act 1992*; *Children and Young People's Act 2008*; *Crimes (Sentence Administration) Act 2005*; *Human Rights Act 2004* and the *Corrections Management Act 2007* were examined. Similar to findings from other Australian jurisdictions (Flynn et al., 2015) children of prisoners in the ACT are not explicitly responded to by the CJS. As Flynn et al. (2015) reported, in respect of other states in Australia (Victoria and NSW), there is a "systemic predisposition to ignore children" (p. 15) within the adult criminal justice system. No direct references are made to the welfare of children of prisoners in the legislation except in decision making about whether or not a child may reside with a female parent in prison in the ACT.

The *Corrections Management Act 2007 (Women and Children Program) Policy 2015* does acknowledge the harm that children may experience due to the loss and separation of a parent when incarcerated. This policy makes provisions for children under the age of four years to reside in the prison with their mother. The policy states that the best interest of the child is the primary consideration when applying this policy (ACT Parliamentary Counsel, 2015). To date no application has been approved for a female prisoner to care for her child in the prison although there have been 3 applications from 2010 to 2014 (Watchirs, McKinnon, Costello, & Thomson, 2014).

In *The Crimes (Sentence Administration) Act 2005*, Section 116ZF the needs of a family are taken into account when a voluntary community work order is made for a fine defaulter. In regards to the *Bail Act 1992* there are a range of considerations taken when determining eligibility of bail for an offender. In Section 22 of the *Bail Act 1992*, the criteria for bail includes a subsection that allows the officer of the court to have regard to the likely effect of a refusal of bail on the person's family or dependents. Other than this section, there is no reference to children where the primary carer has been incarcerated.

Two ACT government reports have been released, one in 2004 (Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity, 2004) and another in 2008, that specifically consider children in the ACT affected by parental incarceration (ACT Government, 2008). Both documents highlight the lack of support children experience when their parent is incarcerated and both make a number of recommendations, which include the need for better data collection concerning children of prisoners, and the need for future research and the review and development of protocols within Corrective Services

regarding children of incarcerated parents. The standing committee (2004) also recommended as a matter of priority that the Government appoint a Children's Officer within ACT Corrective Services to promote the needs of children when they have a parent arrested and subsequently incarcerated so that appropriate responses can be made to ensure their safety and wellbeing. Currently this appointment has not been made.

Other Policy Domains

Outside of the CJS most ACT social policy documents that may relate to children of prisoners give broad directions for service providers and government who work with "vulnerable" client groups. While strategic documents are often broad frameworks, internal policy and procedure documents of the departments within the ACT Government that work with these target groups also lacked detail about children of prisoners. The policy review found it difficult to publicly access documents, such as policy directives, and, existing internal documents were not available freely, unlike other jurisdictions in Australia, such as Queensland, Victoria, and Western Australia. It would appear that there is very little information available in the ACT about children of prisoners, whether about, for example, their needs, strengths, or ways of including them in the systems in which they move around and operate within.

Responding to Children—What Children Say

While studies conducted over the past few decades were interested in the impact of incarceration on children and young people, researchers described that they frequently found it difficult to speak to children directly, often due to ethical concerns or difficulties obtaining consent from parents or carers (Loureiro, 2010; Saunders, McArthur, & Moore, 2015; VACRO, 2006). Subsequently few studies have based their assessment of need on the voices of children themselves. While data collected from carers, parents, or service providers highlight issues and problems the children of prisoners face, it is acknowledged that children's direct experiences and perceptions can differ from adult's perceptions of their experiences, with children often having different worries and concerns to those of their carers (Dallaire, 2007; Mackintosh, Myers, & Kennon, 2006).

Considering how children perceived the ways in which they were responded to by the different systems they interacted with provides some indication of how they are currently constructed in both local and broader level policy reflecting the lack of acknowledgment of the issues they face. In re-examining the interview data it was evident that the children in this study were concentrating on managing the day-to-day issues, including their relationship with their incarcerated parent. They experienced a range of challenges across all life domains and regularly collided with systems, such as those of adult criminal justice, child protection, education, housing, and income support.

Criminal Justice System

Children described how they were not considered or responded to by any part of the criminal justice system. From the time of the parent being arrested to the time of the parent's release, children spoke about the challenges they experienced and how their needs were frequently ignored. The challenges that children described were dynamic in nature, often being present at different periods of their lives and occurring for different lengths

of time. Children spoke about their experiences of the criminal justice system as a process, involving a series of steps beginning with their parents' arrest and ending with their release, and as frequently commencing again when conditions were breached or new crimes were committed. They described that some of the issues affected them only at the time of arrest and others were linked specifically to incarceration. Other new unexpected issues were also identified when parents were released.

Children highlighted that throughout this process there was no-one to support them or inform them of what was going on, and that there was a need to rely on family members, friends, and media to access information and support.

No-one told me or anyone I know. I went to my friend's house on Tuesday I think ... and I didn't hear from him or I didn't know he [dad] was in jail till Friday. I didn't see him until about a month later, yeah, a month. I found out through the internet ... I didn't even get told, I had to look it up myself which I ended up finding a big article on Dad and I'd never been told by anyone, I didn't never get contacted. (Matt, aged 14 years)

Children also spoke about other interactions with the criminal justice system where a number of young people had had to report crimes to the police that had been perpetrated against them. Police had responded to them as "future criminals" by connecting these children to their incarcerated parent through surnames or addresses leaving children feeling discriminated against and further stigmatised.

Child Protection

A small number of children that participated in the study had been placed into out-of-home care as a result of their parent's offending behaviour and because of parental incarceration. Children in care reported that decisions made about whether contact occurred with their incarcerated parents, and the frequency of this contact, were subjective and often dependent on the caseworker or the court.

Children also described how this system failed them and their families in that it often did not understand or meet their needs. Moreover children described feeling disempowered and unsafe.

No, they don't actually keep me safe and even if their definition of safe—like taking me from a place and putting me in another—I'm just going to do what I want to do. There's nothing they can actually do, they're just annoying, if anything they're wasting their time, they don't even bother with me anymore. (Clare, aged 14 years)

Education

All children described difficulties with school. They highlighted that the distress and extra responsibility they experienced when a parent was incarcerated severely impacted their ability to achieve the academic success they aspired to.

Few children felt confident enough to let teachers know about their parent's incarceration due to the shame associated with this. Therefore, the support that children received at school was dependent on the relationships they had with teachers. If young people did not trust the teachers, then they were unlikely to seek any assistance. Where they did seek extra support they were sometimes met with unhelpful judgments about their situation.

He just started telling me stories about children ... in the drug world and yeah I was just like, "is that how you see me, is that like what you're visualising me as?" I didn't really know how to take it so yeah; it was just awkward, very awkward. (Jane, 17 years)

Housing

A number of young people described having to live with friends, boyfriends, or in refuges due to no longer being able to live with one parent when their other was incarcerated. This was often due to the stressful relationships that children had with the other parent. Such decisions were often made within the privacy of the family, however, these children described receiving no support from child protection because of their age (15 years and above). Subsequently, whilst children were put in contact with support services, they were expected to then negotiate and navigate the service system alone, leaving them more vulnerable and confused.

I would go to a refuge, but personally I think they're scary. I know there is good people in them, but it's the bad people that scare me, people who've come from a background like mine but even worse. So they've come from domestic violence at home and all that stuff, it just scares me. I don't really want to be associated with scary people. (Sarah, 15 years)

Income Support

A number of children reported how the imprisonment of a parent impacted significantly on family finances. For those who described themselves as homeless this was particularly problematic. Whilst a number of participants described coming from families that already had low incomes, nearly all stated that the incarceration of the other parent either reduced joint incomes or inhibited the remaining parent's capacity to work. Low incomes also prevented some young people from accessing services and other social opportunities. It also meant that young people were put in the position of having to ask for financial support in order to participate in regular school activities.

Discussion

The objective of this article was to explore how children and young people are currently constructed and responded to in policy when a parent is incarcerated by examining policies, legislation, and the direct experiences of children affected. Using the key ways that children are currently constructed in policy; as appendages of parents, at risk, as rights holders, or, as future adults, we can begin to develop a more nuanced understanding of their positioning in social policy.

It is evident from the policy and legislation analysis in the ACT, and from the interviews with children, that the criminal justice system does not see itself as being responsible for the children of prisoners. Similar to other jurisdictions, the focus of the ACT adult criminal justice system is on the rehabilitation and reform of the individual prisoners' criminogenic behaviour rather than working more holistically with the family. This "individualised" construction of prisoners creates what Wallis and Dennison (2015) described as, "a kind of blindness" (p. 96) within the criminal justice system to the effects of incarceration on children. The focus on seeing criminals as "individuals", alongside a "tough on crime" approach, promotes a powerful discourse that essentially

overshadows the needs of children of prisoners. Children as right's holders remain invisible to this institution, despite the obligations that the CRC places on institutions such as the criminal justice system to ensure that children's separate needs and interests are met. Social work's commitment to social justice and human rights makes it essential for the professionals working within this system to address this.

Where children are "recognised" in the criminal justice system, they have been reduced to being seen as an appendage to their parent and are then responded to accordingly. The findings from this study highlight that children may (or may not) have their needs met through being involved in interventions that focus on their incarcerated parent. An example of this is found within the ACT policy and legislation, which provides opportunity for some parents to be able to continue caring for younger children while in prison. The nature of incarceration also inherently removes the amount of responsibility a parent can maintain to care for their child. The data in this study highlight how the child's position then changes to one of "at risk".

Such and Walker (1999) argued that in policy, parents "are the providers of care and are responsible for children's moral upbringing" (p. 54). Yet when state intervention removes the parent and their capacity to care for a child, the question remains as to whose responsibility it is then to ensure children's rights are promoted as well as protected. It is apparent from the interview data from children that having a parent incarcerated frequently positions children as "being at risk"; at risk of harm and at risk of doing harm. Children's interview data highlight the potential of intergenerational criminality and that children with a parent in prison are frequently responded to as future criminals. Uprichard (2008) argued that the construction of the "becoming" child places importance on that which the child will be rather than that which the child is, which may omit or neglect children's present needs. Providing children with early interventions that meet their present needs may reduce the experiences of intergenerational offenders.

Such examples as identified in this article demonstrate how the different constructions of children shape the responses offered to them. At best children are seen as appendages to their parents with the hope that there is a trickledown effect from interventions; at worst we see constructions that fail to acknowledge that children and young people have unique needs and challenges that are separate from their incarcerated parent.

From the analysis of current policy and legislation, and the interviews with children, children of prisoners have needed to rely on adults to recognise the problem of parental incarceration and petition for them. In doing so adults have traditionally asked other adults about children's experiences and in doing so have constructed and responded to them in the following ways: as children "at risk", as appendages to parents, and as future adults or future "criminals". Although these categories provide some level of response for children, they fail to promote children's rights or always recognise their separate needs and interests.

Conclusion

The evidence concerning the needs of children affected by parental incarceration is growing, yet the uptake or recognition of this remains limited in policy. Children experiencing parental incarceration deserve, and undeniably have a right to receive adequate support and assistance wherever possible to ensure their safety and wellbeing and to

reduce some of the negative impacts that they have endured as a result of having a parent incarcerated. However, the way in which policy makers and professionals, such as social workers, respond to such issues is challenging. Given social work's mission to work with and on behalf of society's most vulnerable it is time for those who inform and develop social policy to consider the impact of current policies on children generally, as it is only when children are seen in a more holistic way that systems can respond more collaboratively to effectively support them. Little progress can be made until policy processes allow for more holistic characterisation of social problems to occur.

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Appendix C: Publication 2

Flynn, C., & Saunders, V. (2015). Research with children of prisoners: Methodological considerations for bringing youth in from the margins. In S. Bastien, & H. B. Holmarsdottir (Eds.), *Youth 'at the margins': Critical perspectives and experiences of engaging youth in research worldwide* (Vol. 4). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Research with children of prisoners: methodological considerations for bringing youth in from the margins

INTRODUCTION

This chapter draws from the authors' independent experiences of two research projects¹ with Australian children whose parents had experienced incarceration². The chapter is grounded in a discussion of current thinking and prevailing methodological approaches to research with children. Current approaches to research with children of imprisoned parents are critiqued and examined in relation to current suggested practices. The chapter concludes with a focus on utilising the authors' research experiences to outline how meaningful research with marginalised children/young people³ can be constructed and implemented in ways that ensure an ethical and empowering approach to the incorporation of children's voices.

CHILDREN OF IMPRISONED PARENTS: UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

An ongoing "binge" in incarceration has been described in the US, with growth noted in prison populations on all five continents (Walmsley, 2013). Australia, where both authors are based, has seen increases in most states in recent decades (ABS, 2013). In Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), where our research has been conducted, most recently we have seen some concerning trends emerging. The ACT had one of the highest growth rates in the country in its prison population between 2011 and 2012 (ABS 2013). While the growth in Victoria's prisons did not feature so significantly during that particular period, recent policy shifts towards a 'tough on crime' approach, combined with the political decision to embark on one of the

¹ These two projects are: *Children of Prisoners: Exploring the needs of children and young people who have a parent incarcerated in the ACT*. This study was conducted by Vicky Saunders in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and sought to examine the needs of children aged eight to eighteen years who had experienced parental incarceration; and *Waiting for mum: the impact of maternal incarceration on adolescent children*. This study was conducted by Catherine Flynn in the state of Victoria (VIC), and sought to establish knowledge about the specific experiences of adolescents whose mothers had experienced incarceration. Throughout this chapter the studies will be referred to as the ACT and VIC studies, whilst the authors will be referred to by their first names.

² Some aspects of the current chapter have been reported elsewhere: Flynn, C 2010 'Young people who have experienced maternal imprisonment: ensuring their well-being and voice in research', *Advances in Social Work and Welfare Education*, 12 (1): 52-72.

³ For the purposes of this chapter we use the term 'children' inclusively, to refer to children up to the age of 18 years, including young people. We are aware that children are not a homogenous group and that the experiences and implications of parental incarceration as well as research strategies vary.

biggest prison expansion programs in the state's history (Butcher, 2013) have seen burgeoning prison numbers.

Limited official data is collected in Australia, or in most other jurisdictions, regarding both the numbers of parents who are incarcerated and the number of children who are affected by parental incarceration. While some prison systems ask adult prisoners at reception if they have children, such data gathering is not systematic or widespread, nor is this information widely available or well utilised. In a recent Australian survey of prisoner health and wellbeing twenty-eight percent of prisoners reported having at least one dependent child (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2013). Other estimates are higher, and accurate numbers remain unclear. What is clear is that whichever way that numbers are estimated, no data are collected about these dependent children.

The need to gather formal data on (but not necessarily from) the children of prisoners has been recommended in a number of jurisdictions, but follow-through has been poor. As such, researchers and service providers alike rely heavily on estimates in attempting to gain some sense of both the scope and nature of the experience of being a child of a detained parent. In Australia, somewhere in the region of 5% of children are estimated to experience parental incarceration in their lifetime (Dennison, Stewart, & Frieberg, 2013; Quilty, 2005), with indigenous children's risk being considerably higher. Estimates from the other countries, such as the UK and US, are even higher. This is a concerning issue requiring focused but global attention to address increasing parental absence as a result of incarceration during critical periods of childhood, including the transition to adulthood.

Nevertheless, this is not a new problem. Acknowledgement and concern about the impact of parental imprisonment on children has circulated since the 1960s (e.g. see Morris, 1965; Zalba, 1964). Research has consistently described a range of problems for these children: isolation, behavioural difficulties at school, anxiety, insecurity, withdrawal, mental health concerns and anti-social behaviour (see Murray, Farrington, & Sekol, 2012). Despite this research, some five decades on our understanding of the needs of such children and how best to respond remain poor. Currently, in Victoria and the ACT, there is no formal accounting for the welfare of children when sentencing and imprisoning their primary care-giver. No systematic data is collected on or from these children. Nor is there any feedback on or monitoring of their placements, progress or outcomes. This paucity of knowledge is shaped by the very fact that these children and their current circumstances are not the responsibility of any specific statutory body, in any international context. Meanwhile, no public policy recognizes their potential vulnerability. This scenario is also shaped by the lack of involvement of children in the majority of research conducted, which purports to examine and understand their experiences. This renders this population largely invisible, as their views and experiences are not routinely sought or heard.

PREVAILING METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO RESEARCH WITH CHILDREN

Historically research with children has been dominated by methodologies that focus 'on' children and have been framed in discourses of vulnerability and incompetence (Coyne, 2010). While similar patterns have been noted with other 'vulnerable' groups, including women in days past (Oakley, 2002, any further comparison is beyond the scope of this chapter. Such beliefs however have been, and continue to be, disputed and challenged by researchers and practitioners working and researching

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with children and young people (Danby & Farrell, 2004; Greig, Taylor, & MacKay, 2013). Over recent decades the literature regarding research with children and young people has grown exponentially and illustrates that there is now an established body of evidence that promotes children as able and competent research participants (Alderson & Morrow, 2005; Barker & Weller, 2003; Christensen & James, 2008; Farrell, 2005; Kellett, 2005; Solberg, 1996; Tisdall, Davis, & Gallagher, 2009).

Understanding children as competent and as capable of participating in research studies in their own right is largely due to the influence of sociological studies about childhood and the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The associated Childhood Studies paradigm stems from a constructivist approach that conceptualises children as social actors who have the ability to shape their own lives and participate in the construction of their own childhood (Greig et al., 2013). This approach contends that children have distinct capabilities to understand and explain their experiences. This paradigm has questioned the appropriateness of adults representing children's understandings, and it has encouraged researchers to rethink the ways in which perceptions of children are constructed and the ability of young people to meaningfully participate in research gauged (Solberg, 1996; Greig et al., 2013).

The widespread acknowledgement of children's rights has also played an integral part to the inclusion of youth in research (Alderson, 2005; Hill, 2005). Indeed the principles of the UNCRC have created (Trussell, 2008, p. 166):

a research space and a culture that emphasizes children's and youth's competencies and the importance in providing them with the opportunity to give voice to their own experiences, meanings and interactions.

The most important considerations for consultation and participation are highlighted in Articles 12 and 13 that state a child's right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them and for their rights to be listened to and given due consideration (United Nations, 1989).

Children's active participation in research has also been shown to have a range of benefits that go beyond the traditional. Children's participation enhances the quality and integrity of the research by providing a more 'whole' account of an issue (Kirby, 2004). Children may have different perspectives about issues than adults and as a consequence researchers may develop understandings that would have not been considered before (Tisdall et al., 2009). Furthermore, by incorporating children's views about issues that affect them, policy-makers and service providers alike are better able to develop and implement more effective responses that better meet the needs of children (Cockburn, 2005).

Involving children in research also has benefits on a more individual level. Some have argued that participation in research can be a transformative practice in itself. Nieuwenhuys (2004) describes how children's participation in research can be seen as a process of empowerment and consciousness-raising, as well as an opportunity to develop knowledge and skills that will not only contribute to their development as individuals, but also increase their self-esteem.

Yet despite these well-established arguments, children frequently continue to be the objects of research rather than its subjects (Christensen & James, 2008). Children are widely viewed as more vulnerable than adults and more at risk of exploitation and abuse in research than adult participants (Gallagher, 2009). It is argued that children are disadvantaged due to their subordinate role in society and in both

cultural and legal structures; hence there is continued hesitation from some about the inclusion of children in research (Gallagher, 2009).

Within Australia, the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) (2007) highlights that research involving children and young people raises particular ethical concerns that are different to those of other groups. Key ethical issues discussed in the literature focus on children's capacity to provide consent, the protection of children, power relations, anonymity and confidentiality, and payment of research participants (Alderson & Morrow, 2011; Hill, 2006; Lindsay, 2000). It is not possible in this chapter to fully address the debates concerning each of these issues, however researchers emphasise that ethical research with children is more than a 'to do list' or a codified set of principles. Ethical considerations when researching with children are of an ongoing nature, researchers need to be aware of possible ethical issues that may arise throughout the entire research process through ongoing questioning, acting and reflecting (Gallagher, 2009; Moore, 2013).

It is argued that ethics and effective methodology go hand in hand (Thomas & O'Kane, 1998). Whatever the different ontological, epistemological and methodological positions a childhood researcher might take, the research and its methods should be appropriate for the children or young people participating in the research (NHMRC, 2007). In designing ethical research with children, researchers have turned their attention to developing qualitative methodologies and methods that 'hear' children's voices, including the need to be aware of the impact of our own adult ('parentist') language on children's participation (Solberg, 1992, cited in Oakley, 2002). They have sought to promote children's rights and support their capacity to express their ideas and experiences (Christensen & James, 2008). Such methodologies are often referred to as 'participatory research methods' and are geared towards planning and conducting the research process with the children whose life-worlds and meaningful actions are being explored. The term

'participatory research with young children' has many different interpretations; however, most would agree that it has to involve listening to children and hearing their voices (Levy & Thompson, 2013, p. 3).

However it is also important to note that a number of childhood studies have also criticised participatory approaches as often being tokenistic rendering of children's experiences, for children particularly when it come to the analysis, interpretation, and use of research findings. Indeed Gormally and Coburn (2013) state that 'there needs to be a conscious effort that participation in research is real and useful, not simply consultative and tokenistic' (p.15).

Consequently, if childhood researchers are to be sincere about accessing the voices of children, then they must also be resolute about ensuring that the methodology and methods they use allow for this to be fully realised (Levy & Thompson, 2013). Children's participation should be regarded explicitly as an underlying value base in researching their lives.

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CURRENT APPROACHES TO RESEARCH INTO THE EXPERIENCES OF CHILDREN WHOSE PARENTS ARE IN PRISON

Such a value base, however, has been slow to be realised in researching the lives of children who experience parental incarceration. While a growing body of international research has described the characteristics of the children of prisoners over the past 50 years, what is known about these children has been gleaned largely from research conducted from the parent or care-giver perspective (Bloom & Steinhart, 1993; Kingi, 1999; McGowan & Blumenthal, 1978; Tomaino, Ryan, Markotić, & Gladwell, 2005; Tudball, 2000; Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (VACRO), 2006). Research, as noted previously, appears to have been challenged by how children are conceptualised and subsequently dichotomised, as either invisible or vulnerable. As such, much of the research has either failed to comment on the lack of data from children, or it describes avoiding including children as study participants.

As alluded to earlier, this was typical of broader research 'on' children's lives in past years. While there has been considerable development in research with children since this time, meaningful participation and having a voice remains problematic for this specific group of children. When considering the lives of children who experience parental incarceration, it would seem clear that to understand any problems experienced by children more fully and to formulate helpful responses, there is a need to expand the data sources on which there is current reliance. Depending solely on the reporting of incarcerated parents and/or the children's care-givers may provide a skewed view of family relationships and the experiences and needs of children.

Reliance on Parents and Carers

An underestimation of children's problems has been one outcome of relying on data solely from adults to examine the impact of parental incarceration on children. This has been acknowledged by researchers who have included imprisoned parents (Baunach, 1985; Henriques, 1982; Sack, Seidler, & Thomas, 1976) and care-givers (Kampfner, 1995). More recent research by Catherine (Flynn, 2008) expands on this and finds that beyond a simple estimation of problems and their severity, there is a more widespread disjuncture between the views of children and their imprisoned mothers across many areas of their lives. By way of example, in her study, when mothers described family life prior to imprisonment, they described the chaos that is typically reported in previous research, while children described a more 'normal' scenario - spending time with friends and going to school. This disconnection is explicable in a number of ways: children may be simply unaware of broader family problems (perhaps being 'protected' by their parent/s), or unwilling to expose these family problems to a researcher. Either way, children express a different understanding of their family life and circumstances. It is a viewpoint we need to engage with and understand if we are to influence and ground policy decisions (Couch, Durant, & Hill, 2012) that meaningfully intervene in the lives of these children and families.

Including Children

Few authors internationally have commented on their reasons for excluding children from research. Two studies facilitated by the Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (VACRO) (Tudball, 2000; VACRO, 2006) cite a lack of specialised resources and skills to conduct research with children. Tudball (2000) also described a focus on knowledge development when she argued that:

As this was the first study of its kind in Victorian prisons, initial investigation of the need of children through surveying parents and caregivers was considered to be critical. (p. xi)

She provides no further explanation of this statement or why the views of parents were considered of greater significance than the views of children. Ethical concerns are noted by Lewis, Bates and Murray, (2008); as well as by Al Gharaibeh (2008) and Tomaino et al. (2005) as precluding the interviewing of children. Lewis et al. (2008) state that children were not included due to 'ethical restraints on involving children in focus groups' While Tomaino et al (2005) reported that:

The project team was mindful of ... the potentially exploitative nature of raising traumatic events with a child during a one-off interview conducted over 30-60 minutes (p. 40).

Studies which have sought to include children in research about their experiences of parental incarceration report a range of difficulties with recruitment (Boswell, 2002; Brown, 2001; Loureiro, 2010; McCulloch & Morrison, 2002). Care-giver reluctance to expose children to the research experience is a problem commonly reported when using adult gatekeepers (Greig, Taylor and Mackay, 2013). This was an issue noted by Gursansky et al. (1998). Although the 24 mothers in that study had a total of 43 children, permission was obtained by mothers/care-givers to interview only eight of these children. The level of children's involvement in this decision is unknown. Similarly, despite the views of children being the planned focus of their study, and subsequent obtaining of data from at least 40 women with 78 children, Cunningham and Baker (2003) were able to recruit only seven children directly to participate in their Canadian study. Advertising their study to families via agencies working with women involved in offending and in public places failed to attract participants. The researchers concluded that the poor participation was likely due to the women not having custody of children, being embarrassed, or not having told their children about their imprisonment. These reflections would also seem to indicate that relying on an adult-oriented process of recruitment and consent, as well as adult gatekeepers creates barriers to children's participation.

Powell, Fitzgerald, Taylor and Graham (2012) describe a more recent questioning of this reliance, along with the suggestion that the usual gatekeepers be bypassed in research which is considered to be sensitive. They further argue (citing Alderson, 1995: 16) that such a process would address the silencing of children 'who are dependent for the most part on someone else being sufficiently motivated to give consent for them to participate'.

Conversely, Nutbrown (2011) suggests that researchers need to consider parents and other adults as 'Research Guardians' instead of 'Gatekeepers,' and that researchers have responsibility in ensuring that these guardians have the information

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necessary to act in the best interests of children. This is best done by ensuring that researchers have a trusting, honest and reliable relationship with the adults who see themselves as safeguarding children's interests (formally and informally) (Grieg, Taylor and MacKay, 2013). Another issue noted by researchers is the apparent reluctance on the part of children, and parents alike to self-identify and put themselves forward for research. McCulloch and Morrison (2002) remind us that the situation is more complex than children being unwilling:

Alongside young people's often desperate desire to keep the imprisonment of their relative from other people, their inaccessibility indicates the hidden nature of the problems discussed in this report (p.6).

Such hidden populations often become known as 'hard to reach' (Brackertz., 2007), with the onus of being 'reached' (or not) placed upon the researched. Yet Zea, Reisen and Diaz (2003) argue that 'being hard to reach' is often not due to any particular characteristic of the group itself, but rather the researchers' 'distance from that population'. Bridging this distance is ultimately the responsibility of the researcher. It requires us to reflect upon and ask questions about how we might better establish relationships and connections with hidden populations, as well as better design inclusive and non-stigmatising research methodologies.

Other researchers describe having included children in their data collection, but on examination, involvement is minimal. For example, Henriques (1982) describes having 'seen' 15 children in her study of imprisoned mothers' views of their children's situations. She gives a detailed description of the study's methodology and the interview process with the children, but does not include any data from them. Later, she states that many were too young to provide meaningful information about their situations. King (2002) sought to gather and examine children's views on parental imprisonment in Dublin, Ireland. However, as she began interviewing adults for the study, she reports it became clear that the majority of children were not aware that their parent was in prison. As a consequence, many parents and care-givers were predictably reluctant to consent to children's involvement in the study. Subsequently King (2002) conducted informal interviews with just six children in the prison visitors' centre. This data seems incomplete: it failed to address how children viewed their parents' imprisonment, or its effect on them, despite this being the intended focus of the study. The information gathered focused instead on the children's views about the visitor's centre, which was not identified by the researcher in discussion with any children as belonging to a prison (because of the lack of clarity about children's understanding of their parent's imprisonment). It is unclear how the purpose of the study interview was explained to the children, or in what kind of activity the children believed they were involved. How children's consent or assent was obtained is also not discussed.

The majority of studies examining the impact of parental imprisonment on children have sought to illustrate adult concerns for children, most often identified in terms of their behaviour, or visible emotions. While these studies highlight a range of common issues, they typically fail to include a child's perspective. This is a significant gap in the knowledge base, and leads researchers to rely on speculation about how children make sense of their parents' incarceration and live with this experience (Cunningham & Baker, 2003). The research conducted with children (Kampfner, 1995; Brown, 2001; McCulloch & Morrison, 2002) indicates that adults who have significant roles in the lives of these children often discourage them from

speaking about their parent or the imprisonment. Thus the capacity of these significant adults to provide a complete picture of the consequences for these children must be questioned and limitations acknowledged. As noted above, where the views of children have been obtained, they differ markedly from those of the adults.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM RESEARCH WITH CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS

So far, we have considered some of the complexities that have prevented or challenged successful research with children who have experienced parental incarceration. While not offering prescriptive methods, the following section seeks to raise and discuss ethical and methodological issues that the authors have struggled with when engaging children who have experienced parental incarceration, offering some insights into how such issues were addressed.

Strategies: Developing and Shaping Research

Children's participation in research. There is much critical work around children's participation in research that has been undertaken globally in the last decade. One of the issues often directed toward participatory research relates to the 'how and when' children should participate in research (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010; Greene & Hogan, 2005; Greig et al., 2013). Some authors highlight the advantages of engaging children and young people in the pre-planning stages of research projects, arguing that research questions can ultimately influence the structure and design of a study, and subsequently the findings and possible recommendations of the research. However, in our experience, including children at the very earliest stage of the research process is not always possible. For pragmatic reasons, the original research proposal for the ACT study was developed by adults, without the participation of children, and as a result the research questions held a number of pre-conceived ideas about what needed to be studied and, to some extent, how the study was to be conducted. Subsequently in order to ensure that the research was meaningful and beneficial for the children participating, a 'children and young people's reference group' was established to inform and guide the research process. The establishment of a reference group for the ACT study was assisted by a youth worker who knew a number of local children who had experienced parental incarceration and who would also be interested in participating in such a group. Subsequently Vicky was able to recruit five participants aged between 13 and 15 years old who were keen to assist with the guiding and shaping of the research project. All the children knew one another prior to the meeting and this assisted with the group formation.

Scoping the context with children - Children and Young People's Reference Group. The participation of children and young people not only as participants in research but also as co-constructors or 'experts', has been promoted by a number of authors (Fraser, 2004; Kellett, 2005). In most successful participatory research projects, adult researchers see themselves as learning alongside children (Davis, 2009). The five children engaged in the ACT reference group were conceptualised by the research team as 'experts': experts on being children and experts on knowing what it was like

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to have experienced a parent in prison. Drawing on this knowledge, Vicky and other researchers worked with the 'children's reference group' during the initial pre-implementation phase of the study to shape, guide and scrutinise the proposed study. Jones highlights that (2004, p. 117):

as with children and young people's participation in other spheres of social life, research is not isolated from the structures and processes that affect their involvement.

As the reference group participants had not had any prior experience of being involved in research, the reference group meeting also provided a space where children could learn about the research process and gain an understanding of their role as a reference group member as well as discuss and to some degree influence the processes in which they were to be involved. Although not able to change the research questions, children were involved in a range of tasks that were designed to consider and challenge the adult assumptions made about the research; reflect on the possible ways for children to participate; identify the potential barriers and enablers for participation and to consider other stakeholders and the impact of the research on them.

Developing child friendly and ethical methods with children. One of the key challenges of any research conducted with children is the use and appropriateness of language. It has been our experience that often the terminology used in research questions can distance young people from the project and prevent their full engagement. Subsequently another key role of the children's reference group at the commencement stage was to provide feedback on the language children would prefer to use during the research. Interestingly while children in the ACT study reported being comfortable with the use of the word 'prison' or 'jail' in the research questions, when they spoke to each other in the reference group about their experiences, they spoke using acronyms and specific organisation names rather than using the words prison or jail. Listening to the children, there appeared to be a common language that existed between them, of which Vicky had been unaware until attending that reference group meeting. As a result, where appropriate, we were able to use the words that children used to describe prison. In turn, this made the research questions more typical and reflective of their everyday worlds.

In addition to the discussion concerning appropriate terminology, children were also able to provide feedback regarding a range of potential methods researchers had considered possible for data collection. Enabling children to actively engage in research allows researchers to develop a greater understanding about their lived experience and a deeper understanding of the challenges and concerns that affect their lives and those of their families and communities (James and Christensen 2008). Therefore, it was critical that the methods employed to elicit the information required were not only robust, but also meaningful to children.

In line with a participatory approach, a range of flexible and creative methods for data collection have been utilised in research with children (Fraser, 2004; Tisdall, Davis & Gallagher, 2009). Methods such as photography, drama, DVD and music production, writing diaries and drawing can serve as constructive tools that generate discussion about children's experiences and provide a focus on which researchers and children alike can make meaning. However children in the reference group

highlighted that such methods might be more appropriate for younger children, and they as adolescents would simply be happy to discuss their experiences with researchers in a one-on-one interview. Focus groups were identified as potentially useful, but might not necessarily provide the right environment to discuss sensitive issues. The children participating in the ACT study discussed the need for methods that did not involve 'too much writing or drawing', were visually stimulating and enabled the participant to get to know the researcher.

The importance of building relationships, rapport and trust prior to any data collection is highlighted by Milne, Munford and Sanders (2001), who state that one lesson they have learnt is that,

good research information comes out of carefully constructed relationships ... A one-shot interview is unlikely to yield much useful data. However, once a trusting relationship has been established, high quality data can be generated in large volumes (p. 5).

The children in the reference group believed that researchers meeting children prior to interviewing them was the best method in which to achieve this.

Recruitment. The practical and ethical difficulties associated with identifying and gaining access to children who have experienced parental or sibling imprisonment have been well-documented and outlined earlier in this chapter. Couch et al. (2012) argue that it is generally agreed that this process of gaining entry to a group, as an 'outsider', is one of the first and most difficult steps in doing research. These authors describe research with young sex workers, whereby the researcher attempted to address this challenge by immersing himself 'into the culture of [this group] enabling him to understand the culture as an insider' (p.49).

For many researchers, there is a distinct dichotomy between insider and outsider, and a clear value position that being an insider gives more valid and valuable data. There is likely merit in this claim with children of prisoners, with Tudball (2000) finding that 'insider' knowledge and understanding is sought and valued by the families of prisoners when seeking to speak to someone about their needs and experiences. It is questionable, however, whether spending time 'as if' the researcher were one of them, allows a genuine insider view.

In the VIC study, Catherine held the position of 'informed outsider' - not immersed, but able to hear what children had to say, bringing the ability to see from a different perspective. She had no direct personal experience of imprisonment, but had conducted research with women exiting prison and had nuanced knowledge of the prison system. In recruiting children whose mothers she had met previously in a research role she drew on insider knowledge and previously established relationships. This was the most direct and effective strategy, given the lack of success reported in previous studies. She was however, cautioned by Hepinstall's (2000) advice that relying on adults as gatekeepers can lead to those adults making decisions about children participating, without the children necessarily being consulted. Further, the possibility of coercion by adults was present because of the pre-existing relationships between Catherine and mothers as adult gatekeepers (Curtis, Roberts, Copperman, Downie, & Liabo, 2004).

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These concerns were addressed in Catherine's study in two ways. Firstly, this issue was specifically named and discussed with the mothers. Secondly, all potential child participants were met with in an environment of their choice, separately to their mother. They were encouraged to discuss and query the research and their own participation; and they were advised that they could choose not to participate.

As indicated in the ACT study, using this time to establish a transparent and honest relationship with children prior to them deciding whether to participate in the study was vital. While this should be a feature of all research, this group of children brought particular histories and challenges. The children of prisoners are often not told, or not told immediately, about their parents' imprisonment (e.g. see King, 2002, discussed earlier in this chapter); or they are often actively discouraged from speaking about this experience as discussed (Brown, 2001; McCulloch and Morrison, 2002). Transparency and honesty were deemed vital to respectful engagement and the creation of real choices for young people about participation. These characteristics were demonstrated in a number of ways. Catherine's interest in the study was explained to young people, along with her previous involvement with their mothers in another research project. This proved to be an important issue for 13 year old Keira, who needed to 'place' the researcher. Catherine reflects on this process:

In the discussion about participating in the study, we talked about a range of issues: the research itself, other children I'd met, but she was also keen to know how I'd met her mother, and what teaching I did at the university. Shortly after we had been talking about my teaching, she asked "Were they nice?" I didn't think she was referring to the students I was teaching, but I wanted to be sure, so I asked "Do you mean my students or the women I met, like mum, who had been in prison?" It was the latter. Although there are other ways of thinking about this, my interpretation of this question was that she was doing two things: seeking to establish my position on 'prisoners'; as well as thinking about her own views on how people end up in prison. I told her the truth: that I had met really nice people in that project, who had all been in prison.

These issues clarified, the Keira was happy to engage and participate; the interview continued. Some chose not to participate. One mother advised that her son was interested in doing an interview and provided his mobile phone number. But when contacted a few days later, after some discussion he was able to state that although he would like to participate he didn't want to "start thinking about that again – thinking about mum and stuff, when I should be thinking about my life". Overall, this transparent approach and being heard allowed young people to make active and informed decisions about participating in the VIC study.

Remuneration. There is no clear agreement in the literature on whether children should be paid for participating in research (Kellett & Ding, 2004) or about what kinds of rewards are appropriate (Gallagher, 2009). The use of remuneration in research with children is a contentious issue, mostly because it is seen as potentially coercive and can exaggerate the power differential between an adult researcher and a child participant (Rice & Broome, 2004). Yet it remains the most common approach (Seymour, 2012).

In the VIC study all children were given a \$20 gift voucher. The rationale was one of equality: all mothers who had participated had been compensated in this way.

Was the children's time, effort and data to be seen as less valuable? This was indeed the successful argument made to an Ethics committee who questioned the provision of gift vouchers for the children. Couch et al. (2012) expand on this to argue that monetary compensation, particularly for young people who are marginalised, provides indirect benefits. Being perceived and treated as experts/consultants is seen to augment their self-esteem.

In the ACT study, both the children's reference group and research participants alike received \$40 vouchers in return for their time and expertise. However participants were not told of the payment until after their consent to participate had been obtained so that it was not perceived as an incentive to participate or likely to affect their consent. Furthermore participants were also told that even though they had been given this voucher they still had the right to stop at any time and were still able to keep the voucher. In discussing remuneration with the children's reference group, children stated that they believed financial remuneration was fair recompense for their time, however they also identified that if the research was important to them they would participate anyway.

Strategies: Gathering Data

Data collection: individual, focused interviews. Although research indicates that there is no one 'right' method for conducting research with children (Hill, 2006) there is some argument that individual interviews, which provide a private research environment, may be valuable when the research is examining a sensitive or personal topic (Gallagher, 2009; Punch, 2002). This certainly reflects the feedback from the ACT study reference group, who also highlighted that this approach allows young people to get to know the researcher. Cousins and Millar (2006) suggest it to be an appropriate method as it can 'enable overlooked and disempowered individuals to express their views freely' (p.452, citing Hill, 1997). Yet this is not the dominant trend within research into the direct experiences and needs of the children of imprisoned parents. This has resulted in a significant gap in our knowledge.

Research into the experiences of young people with a family member in prison (McCulloch and Morrison, 2002) found that these adolescents felt that adults avoided asking them about their feelings and experiences, and seemed afraid of what they might express. Bearing this in mind, individual interviews were developed as the method of data collection in the VIC study. This meant data could be gathered in a private and safe environment. Although it is suggested that it is best when interviewing children to '[enable] them to take the lead in discussion rather than simply responding to questions' (Thomas & O'Kane, 2000, p. 829), it was decided for the purposes of this study, to be very focused about the specific needs of the research, the participant group, and the topic. Specifically, a structured approach gave young people a better chance to understand what they were agreeing to, in terms of the general terrain of the interview. This approach was mindful of the likely educational experiences of these participants, and did not presume advanced literacy or verbal skills. Young people could respond as briefly or as lengthily as they wished. The focused interview schedule provided clear parameters around topics. This was essential given the findings by McCulloch and Morrison (2002), that for many young people 'the interview was one of the few places they had ever talked about their experiences' (p.11); this also reflected what Catherine had been told by

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the mothers. It was also informed by the understanding that the provision of a dedicated listener and a safe space in which to talk (Goulding, 2004) for individuals who may be quite isolated may lead to over disclosure (Daley, 2012), that is disclosing 'too much' in an interview and then regretting it later. The strategy was successful, with all participants able to contribute meaningfully and complete the interview. This is in contrast to the findings of Gursansky et al.'s (1998) research with the children of imprisoned mothers, which indicated that children frequently found interviews distressing, with many opting out early.

Interviewing skills: the ability to listen. As noted above, some research has highlighted an identified lack of skills in researching with children. Recently, it has been argued that care theory (Noddings 2003 cited in Daley, 2012) can assist researchers when gathering sensitive material in interviews with young people, allowing researchers to navigate challenges which arise during the interview process. To simplify and summarise, this approach is based on the view that 'ethical actions are those which stem from caring for the other' (pg 29). This is an excellent starting position, if caring underpins listening with care. Drawing on her 10 years of experience as a social work practitioner, Catherine reflects that an unstated question is embedded in much communication with young people: 'Can you understand me?' This is particularly the case where there is seen to be some social distance, as often occurs between researchers and children participating in research.

Catherine recalls an illustrative interview from the VIC study, with 12 year old Joel approximately 18 months after his mother had been released from prison, where he began to cry and Catherine also had an emotional reaction.

In that moment I decided to share with Joel that my reaction had been prompted by what he was saying; this had made me think about how sad I was when I was his age, and my father was taken away to hospital, and I couldn't go with him, and I couldn't visit him for quite a long time. I believe this brief and straight-forward disclosure reduced social distance, and reassured Joel about my capacity to hear and understand his experience. Joel was able to continue the interview and went on to discuss a range of issues about foster care, how he managed at school, the day his mother came home, and his own father's 'illness'.

Actively engaging with, and not being afraid of, the emotional responses shared by Joel and other children allowed these experiences to be heard and validated, perhaps for the first time. Placing herself as an informed outsider allowed Catherine to have enough room for an emotional response to the material but... not [be] driven by it (Cashmore, 2013). This created a safe space for children.

Interviewing: responding to a range of needs. A commitment in the VIC study to being responsive to the needs and wishes of children was a key concern both in the research environment and for the time that was set aside for interviews. These were conducted wherever the youth felt safe and comfortable; young people were also encouraged to have a support person present if they wished. Interviews took place in a range of settings: including homes, at the park, in fast food restaurants, in group interviews with sibling/s, or with other family members present. Flexibility also extended to practical matters, such as collecting a child from school, transporting a mother to collect methadone, or being available for an early morning interview

because the young person worked a night shift. These actions by the researcher established a measure of reciprocity. Flexibility and attentiveness to how young people felt comfortable communicating was also significant. One mother advised the researcher that her son did not want to speak about his experiences, but wanted to be able to participate in the study by completing a written questionnaire. The interview schedule was duly amended and the young person actively participated.

A flexible approach to time was a key aspect of both studies: time to engage and to listen. Although information was collected in single interviews, there was no set time limit on these and the length of interviews was dictated by the wishes of the individual participant. This approach to data-gathering further contributed to minimising the power imbalance between the researcher and the young person by giving the latter control over this aspect of the interview.

In the VIC study, Catherine was mindful that many of the young people were likely to have experienced difficult and forced separations in the past, making it important that interviews ended in a positive manner. The interview schedule was structured to enable participants to tell their story in a chronological order: 'what happened before, during and after the parent went to prison'. This ensured that participants were focused in the present at the end of the interview. A winding-down phase of the interview then followed, focused on identifying hopes and plans for the future. In all interviews, young people were given the final say, being asked if they had anything else they wanted to add, or anything else they thought the researcher could or should have asked. A number of young people were able to outline hopes for their futures, including careers as well as reflecting on the process of being interviewed. This allowed them to close the interview.

Strategies: Data Analysis and Reporting

Working with children to construct meaning out of data. Children's active participation in research should not end with the collection of data. Children's involvement in the analysis of the data generated is important and discussing findings with them in the post data analysis phase of a research project is essential for both methodological and ethical reasons. Punch reminds us that 'Particular care must be taken when interpreting children's views' (Punch, 2002, p329) so that in interpreting findings, authority is given to the child's voice. There are a number of ways of doing this. The New South Wales Commission for Children and Young People suggest meeting with a small group of participants at the data analysis stage to explore their ideas about the research findings (2005). Other practices identified within the literature include enabling children to choose comments and quotes to be included in reports (Thomas & O'Kane, 1998), inviting children to review their interview transcripts for accuracy, meaning and emphasis (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2005), and (Morrow & Richards, 1996, p. 100):

using methods which are non-invasive, non-confrontational and participatory, and which encourage children to interpret their own data.

One of the values of working with a reference group is that the group is able to indicate what they think of the researcher's original interpretations of data. However this approach is not without its challenges. It was the intention of the ACT study for the children's reference group to return and discuss the findings together in order to reflect on and ask questions about why particular aspects of the research might be

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emphasised, whether the language used reflected and represented participant's experiences, and whether the recommendations were in line with what children wanted. However, due to the length of time it took to complete the project and the often difficult and challenging lives that reference group members experienced, it became problematic for the reference group to return together to achieve this.

In order to ensure the rigour and credibility of the research (Padgett, 2008) Vicky contacted each of the participants to discuss her interpretations of the findings and to 'check in' with each participant as to whether or not these interpretations resonated with their experience. The time spent with children checking and discussing key themes provided Vicky with a greater depth of understanding about the issues experienced by children and ensured that these were represented fairly and accurately in the final report.

Dissemination of research. Research organisations are increasingly aware of the need to get research messages across into policy and practice environments (Roberts, 2004). As part of a move for more ethically and morally responsible research (Cloke, 2002), the inclusion of appropriate dissemination strategies is now an integral part of research process for many funding bodies. Despite the greater inclusion of participatory processes in research with young people, there appears to be little evidence for similar discourses regarding children's participation in dissemination strategies. Yet they are often deeply concerned about how the research they are involved in can be used to influence and create change.

Two key issues arose from the ACT study concerning dissemination of the research: the first being that while the research project aimed to be as participatory for children as possible, its ultimate aim was to inform adult stakeholders about children's needs. As a result, limited funding was available to develop any resources that could be used in the dissemination of the findings to children (or their families). While children accepted this constraint, they also highlighted that if more funding had been available, they would like to have accessed the findings in an easy-to-read format through posters or pamphlets clearly available at the prison for both themselves and their families.

The second issue arose at the time of the publication of the report when media releases were sent out providing information to newspapers, TV and radio about the imminent release of the study. Morrow (2008) describes how, at the level of dissemination, children may be misrepresented in sensationalised accounts, revealing a need for researchers to protect children from such experiences and challenge any negative tones or misrepresentations. Media interested in the findings of the ACT report were particularly interested in asking questions that potentially constructed children of prisoners as the 'next generation of criminals' or as 'vulnerable and problem saturated'. Ensuring that the research was represented fairly and accurately was essential and researchers were keen to, without negating the difficulties children experienced, provide opportunities to talk about the strengths of children and how they, as other children do, have dreams and aspirations for their future.

CONCLUSION

We hope to have contributed to an increased awareness of this issue in the community, including among service providers and researchers, allowing us to see into

a world lived parallel to the ordinary world, but ... hardly known about or understood ... This is a world vibrant with unhappiness and pain but also shot through with hope and love. A first step towards changing that secret world for the better... is to open a door so that we cannot overlook these parallel lives any longer (Billington, 2002 cited by Katz, 2002/03, p. 19).

In Australia, a clear understanding of the needs and experiences of children whose parents are imprisoned is extremely limited, particularly from the perspectives of the children themselves. At a time of increasing incarceration and speculation about the longer term costs—to the children and the community—such understanding is vital to underpin effective policy and practical interventions.

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Appendix D: Publication 3

Saunders, V., McArthur, M., & Moore, T. (2015). Not seen and not heard: Ethical considerations of research with children of prisoners. *Law in Context*, 32, 108–125.

Not Seen and Not Heard: Ethical Considerations of Research with Children of Prisoners

Vicky Saunders, Morag McArthur and Tim Moore

The ethical complexities associated with research with children are well recognised and have been debated extensively within the childhood literature. However, ethical issues occurring in research with children about sensitive issues, such as parental incarceration, and the practical solutions required to address such issues, are less well described. This paper draws on recent experiences of a research project conducted in the Australian Capital Territory exploring the needs of children of prisoners. It discusses three key interrelated methodological and ethical challenges observed by the researchers. While there is no doubt that considerable care needs to be taken to identify ethical and effective ways to undertake research with this group of children, we argue that applying a process of ethical reflexivity will assist researchers in planning and conducting ethical and methodologically valid research with children of prisoners.

I INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades there has been a considerable shift in understandings about children and childhood. The importance of children's participation, their opinions and perspectives are now seen to be essential in the development of both social policy and service delivery. Current understandings of childhood highlight that children often have different views from adults and that understanding and incorporating these is critical if we are to respond effectively.¹ Current understandings also emphasise the need for children to be provided with opportunities to participate in dialogue and to have their views heard.² However, Masson³ makes the point that researchers cannot simply focus on children who are readily accessible or who are articulate. Children's views are particular to the childhood they experience and researchers need to ensure that they include children from a range of backgrounds.⁴ Therefore, facilitating

1 Ann Graham and Robyn Fitzgerald, 'Children's Participation in Research: Some possibilities and Constraints in the Current Australian Research Environment' (2010) 2(46) *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* 133.

2 Nigel Thomas and Claire O'Kane, 'The Ethics of Participatory Research with Children' (1998) 12(5) *Children & Society* 336.

3 Judith Masson, 'The Legal Context' in S Fraser, V Lewis, S Ding et al (eds), *Doing Research with Children and Young People* (Sage Publications, 2004).

4 Ibid.

meaningful participation of children who are hard to reach, and talking with them about their lives requires particular attention to ethical and practical challenges.

Many of the ethical and methodological challenges associated with research involving children are well recognised and have been debated extensively within the literature.⁵ While a number of these challenges are common to research with all children, many of them are more problematic and some are even unique to research with children whose social positioning renders them particularly vulnerable.⁶ As more and more children experience social and emotional challenges to their wellbeing it is likely that social researchers will increasingly be required to conduct research with children about these difficulties or sensitive issues (eg child abuse, homelessness, domestic violence).⁷ While there is more literature regarding the ethical and methodological challenges experienced by researchers when engaging children generally, this lacks any real analysis or discussion of how such challenges relate to, or may be addressed for, children about sensitive issues.

This article focuses on the interrelated ethical and methodological issues that occur when research with children interfaces with research on sensitive topics. Drawing on a recent study conducted in the Australian Capital Territory,⁸ which explored with children their experiences of parental incarceration, this article describes three key barriers to engaging children observed by researchers over the course of the research: the invisible nature of children of prisoners; the role of gate keepers; and the need for children to be protected. While there is no doubt that considerable care needs to be taken to identify ethical and effective ways to undertake research with this group of children, we also make the argument that through applying a process of reflexivity, researchers will be in a better position to respond to both ethical and methodological issues as they arise throughout the research process.

II INVOLVING CHILDREN IN SENSITIVE RESEARCH

Until recently, the parenting status of Australian prisoners has been poorly considered. However, Australian and international criminological policy and research is now more focused on the role that families play in the wellbeing, re-offending and rehabilitation of prisoners.⁹ This growing

5 Priscilla Alderson and Virginia Morrow, *The Ethics of Research with Children and Young People* (Sage Publications, 2011).

6 Pranee Liamputtong, *Researching the Vulnerable: A Guide to Sensitive Research Methods* (Sage Publications, 2006).

7 Ibid.

8 The Australian Capital Territory is the capital of Australia with a population of 350,000 people.

9 Nancy G La Vigne, Rebecca L Nasser, Lisa E Brooks and Jennifer L Castro, 'Examining the Effect of Incarceration and In-prison Family Contact on Prisoners' Family Relationships (2005) 21 *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 316.

body of research has considered family connectedness from a variety of perspectives and the emerging evidence of its positive impact on mental wellbeing, and social, health, and criminological outcomes for prisoners.¹⁰ There is also growing interest in the reciprocal impacts of imprisonment on families, and particularly on children.¹¹ It has been recognised that prisoners need to be seen in the context of their family and parenting identities if a range of preventative, restorative and rehabilitative imperatives are to be fully achieved for the prisoner and for their children.¹²

Current research has found that children whose parents are imprisoned are likely to be affected by higher levels of disadvantage than their peers; for example, they are more likely to experience multiple and complex health, social and welfare problems, including poverty, family violence, substance abuse and mental health issues.¹³ While a growing body of international research has described the characteristics of children of prisoners, what is known about these children has been gleaned largely from research conducted with adult professionals, or from the parent or care-giver perspective.¹⁴ While this research is important, there have been very limited efforts to include children themselves in research.

The value of engaging children directly in research about their lived experiences has been recognised only recently. Historically, research with children has been dominated by methodologies that focus 'on' children

- 10 Oliver Robertson, 'The Impact of Parental Imprisonment on Children', Women in Prison and Children of Imprisoned Mothers Series. (Quaker United Nations Office, 2007); Emma Stanley and Stuart Byrne, 'Mothers in Prison: Coping with Separation from Children' (2000) Paper presented at the Women in Corrections: Staff and clients' conference, Adelaide 31 October - 1 November 2000; Jeremy Travis, Elizabeth McBride, Amy Solomon, 'Families Left Behind: The Hidden Costs of Incarceration and Re-entry' (Justice Policy Centre, Urban Institute, 2003).
- 11 Julie Poehlmann, Danielle Dallaire, Ann Booker Loper and Leslie D Shear 'Children's Contact with their Incarcerated Parents. Research Findings and Recommendations (2010) 65(6) *American Psychologist* 575.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 J Mark Eddy and John B Reid, 'The Adolescent Children of Incarcerated Parents' in J Travis and M Waul (eds), *Prisoners Once Removed: The Impact of Incarceration and Re-entry on Children, Families, and Communities* (Urban Institute, 2003) 233-258.
- 14 B Bloom and D Steinhart, *Why Punish the Children? A Reappraisal of the Children of Incarcerated Mothers in America* (National Council on Crime and Delinquency, 1993); Venezia Marlene Kingi, 'The Children of Women in Prison' [PhD thesis] (Victoria University of Wellington, 1999); Brenda McGowan and Karen Blumenthal, *Why Punish the Children? A Study of the Children of Women Prisoners* (National Council on Crime and Delinquency, 1978); J Tomaino, S Ryan, S Markotic and J Gladwell, *Children of Prisoners Project: Steering Committee's Report to the Justice Cabinet Committee* (Justice Strategy Division, Attorney General's Department, 2005); Nola Tudball, *Doing it Hard. A Study of the Needs of Children and Families of Prisoners in Victoria* (VACRO, 2000); Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (VACRO); *Children: Unintended Victims of Legal Process – A Review of Policies and Legislation Affecting Children with Incarcerated Parents* (Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders, 2006).

(where adult conduits spoke about and on behalf of children in the research space), and which were framed by discourses of vulnerability and incompetence.¹⁵ Over the past 20 years there has been an increasing quantum of work that promotes children's agency and conceptualises them as able and competent research participants with views different to adults.¹⁶ This position has been framed in part by the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which asserts that children have 'the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them'.¹⁷ At the same time, the 'New Sociology of Childhood' and 'Childhood Studies', have influenced how children are constructed as social actors who can shape their own lives and can also influence others. These approaches identify how children have distinct capacities to understand and explain their lives. It has also been recognised that children conceptualise and experience the world differently to adults and have distinctly different experiences and concerns. It is only by engaging children directly in research that a more complete picture of their life worlds is possible. These theoretical arguments have led to the increased participation of children in research, including their more active participation in the design and implementation of research.¹⁸

Nevertheless, while there has been a shift in how children are constructed, which has led to their increased involvement in research, there are still many areas of social experience that are often regarded as too sensitive to explore with children, or which are even taboo, such as research exploring sexual abuse, violence, drug use or homelessness.¹⁹ Concerns about the sensitive nature of these life experiences have meant that these groups of children have traditionally been excluded from participation in studies exploring these issues. For many researchers, this is motivated by a view that childhood is marked by vulnerability, in that children may be seen as 'lacking the ability to make personal life choices, personal decisions, maintain independence and self-determine'.²⁰ In the research context, this has meant that in an attempt to protect children, adults have been wary of allowing children to participate in research, due to a perception that children may not be in a position to act in their own best interests and to opt out of studies if they cause discomfort or concern.

Punch²¹ states that children are marginalised in an adult-dominated society due to the unequal power relations with adults and are therefore seen as being particularly at risk of exploitation and abuse by adults. It is also evident that for some groups of children, their life circumstances

15 Allison James and Alan Prout, *Theorizing Childhood* (Teachers College Press, 1998).

16 Allison James and Pia Christensen, *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices* (Routledge, 2008).

17 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Geneva, 1989).

18 Mary Kellett, *Rethinking Children and Research* (Continuum, 2010).

19 Liamputtong, above n 6.

20 Linda Weaver Moore and Margaret Miller, 'Initiating Research with Doubly Vulnerable Populations' (1999) 30(5) *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 1034-1040.

21 Samantha Punch, 'Research with Children: The Same or Different from Research with Adults?' (2002) 9 *Childhood* 325.

and social positioning further marginalise and disadvantage them, hence making them 'doubly vulnerable'.²²

Subsequently, it is argued that these children's participation in research may potentially pose more emotional and social threats, and further vulnerability.²³ This means that the obligations and responsibilities that researchers have towards participants may be different, which becomes even more pronounced when a child is identified as already 'damaged by their experiences'.²⁴ However, we contend that researchers can act in ways that respond to these vulnerabilities and enable children to participate. Researchers have a responsibility to protect research participants from harm no matter their age, capacity or experience. By ensuring that research is child-centred, responds to the unique needs of particular groups of children, and that potential risks and harms are balanced with benefits to children as a group and as individuals, we (and others) argue that children's participation in research on sensitive issues can be conducted ethically and appropriately.²⁵ Further, researchers contend that by excluding children from research on sensitive issues, and by not directly talking about these topics, the research community may be acting unethically, as children's voices are silenced and they remain in a powerless position.²⁶

Being a child who has a parent in prison is clearly in this category of social research. Few authors have commented on their reasons for excluding children of prisoners from their research. Three international studies highlight the ethical concerns involved in such research, such as the notion of raising traumatic events, or the risk of exploitation due to the research methods utilised.²⁷ Others highlighted a lack of specialised resources and skills required to conduct research with children.²⁸

Planning and conducting any research with vulnerable groups of children and young people raises dilemmas and tensions that are common to most research with children. There are, however, specific issues that are particular to research with children who experience parental incarceration. For these reasons it is argued that children require particular safeguards to protect them from harm, and that the obligations and

22 Liamputtong, above n 6.

23 Claire Renzetti and Raymond Lee, *Researching Sensitive Topics* (Sage Publications, 1993).

24 Liamputtong, above n 6.

25 James and Prout, above n 15.

26 Tim Moore, et al, 'Championing Choice – Lessons Learned from Children and Young People About Research and their Involvement', (2011) 4 Child Indicators Research.

27 Fakir Al Gharaibeh, 'The Effects Upon Children in Jordan of the Imprisonment of their Fathers. A Social Work Perspective' (2008) 51(2) *International Social Work* 233-246; Sarah Lewis Selina Bates and Joseph Murray, *Children of Prisoners – Maintaining Family Ties*. (Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2008); above n 13.

28 Eddy and Reid, above n 13.

responsibilities that researchers have towards participants are different.²⁹ Within Australia, the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC)³⁰ highlights that research involving children and young people raises ethical concerns that are different to those of other vulnerable groups. Ethical issues relating to research with children discussed in the literature focus on capacity to consent, power imbalances, confidentiality, beneficence and non-maleficence.³¹ It is not possible in this article to fully address the debates concerning each of these issues, however, researchers emphasise that ethical research with children is more than a 'to-do list' or a codified set of principles.³² Ethical considerations when researching with children are of an ongoing nature. Researchers need to be aware of possible ethical issues that may arise throughout the entire research process through ongoing questioning, acting and reflecting.³³

The process of questioning, acting and reflecting provides researchers with a process through which they can challenge what they know and how they know it. According to Berger,³⁴ the process of reflexivity is:

commonly viewed as the process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researchers' positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome.

Furthermore, it is argued that reflexivity is a way of developing an awareness of self-knowledge, of observing the self and the impact of one's own prejudices, beliefs and personal experiences and an understanding of how these influence the development of new knowledge.³⁵ In order to recognise and respond to the ethical and methodological challenges and issues in this project, researchers engaged in ongoing internal dialogue and critical self-reflection, through which the researcher's positionality was made

- 29 Jo Aldridge, 'Working with Vulnerable Groups in Social Research: Dilemmas by Default and Design' (2014) 14 *Qualitative Research* 112-130.
- 30 National Health and Medical Research Council, *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007).
- 31 Priscilla Alderson and Virginia Morrow, *Ethics, Social Research and Consulting with Children and Young People* (Barnardos, 2nd ed, 2004); M Hill, 'Children's Voices on Ways of Having a Voice: Children's and Young People's Perspectives on Methods Used in Research and Consultation' (2006) 13 *Childhood*.
- 32 Sandy Fraser, Vicki Lewis, Sharon Ding et al (eds), *Doing Research with Children and Young People* (Sage Publications, 2004).
- 33 Michael Gallagher, 'Ethics' in EKM Tisdall, JM Davis and M Gallagher (eds), *Researching with Children and Young People. Research Design, Methods and Analysis* (Sage Publications, 2009) 11-28; Tim Moore, 'Keeping them in Mind: A Reflexive Study that Considers the Practice of Social Research with Children in Australia' (2013) Australian Catholic University.
- 34 Roni Berger, 'Now I See It, Now I Don't: Researcher's Position and Reflexivity in Qualitative Research' (2013) *Qualitative Research* 2.
- 35 Heather D'cruz, Phillip Gillingham and Sebastian Melendez 'Reflexivity, its Meanings and Relevance for Social Work: A Critical Review of the Literature' (2007) 37 *British Journal of Social Work* 73-90.

explicit and accounted for.³⁶ The remainder of this article discusses a recent study conducted with children whose parents are incarcerated to highlight specific ethical and methodological issues and how researchers managed the complex and sensitive context. We make our observations based on our own reflexive observations and from feedback we have received directly from children and carers.

III CHILDREN OF PRISONERS: THE STUDY CONTEXT

The study described in this article received ethics approval from Australian Catholic University's Human Research Ethics Committee and permission from the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC).³⁷ It was conducted in 2012 within the ACT in partnership with a non-government organisation, SHINE for Kids. SHINE for Kids provides a range of support services to children of prisoners across New South Wales and Victoria which aim to support and strengthen the lives of children and families of prisoners. With the commissioning of a new prison in the ACT in 2009, SHINE for Kids wanted to establish appropriate and meaningful services to support children and young people who experience parental incarceration in the ACT, similar to their Victorian and NSW sites. The aim of the study, therefore, was to develop an understanding of the needs and experiences of children with a parent in prison in the ACT in order to assist SHINE for Kids to develop and implement appropriate supports for children and young people. SHINE for Kids obtained funding from the ACT Health Directorate under the ACT Health Promotion Grants Program to commission this study.

A Research Approach

The study was informed by a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is primarily concerned with the study of experience and aims to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in a situation.³⁸

In line with our commitment to participatory research approaches, a Young People's Reference Group (YPRG) consisting of five young people aged between 13-16 years was established. Recruitment of the young people was possible with the help of a youth worker. The YPRG advised researchers on a range of issues, including the language to use in regard to parental incarceration, sensitive issues for researchers to be aware of, and potential interview tools. The YPRG also provided feedback on ways to ensure that all young people who participated would feel adequately

36 Mats Alvesson and Kat Skoldberg, *Reflexive Methodology New Vistas for Qualitative Research* (Sage Publications, 2nd ed, 2010).

37 Commissioned in 2009, the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC) is a prison and remand centre complex located in the ACT.

38 Stan Lester, 'An Introduction to Phenomenological Research' (Stan Lester Developments, 1999).

supported and safe throughout the interview, and in a manner that was appropriate to them.

The qualitative methods employed in this study included semi-structured interviews informed by a focused literature review, and were developed in consultation with the YPRG and a Project Reference Group. The sample size of this study included fifteen children and young people aged eight to eighteen years who have or have had a parent incarcerated in the ACT, and twelve interviews with parents or caregivers (eg grandparents).

B Recruitment

It is acknowledged that facilitation by service professionals who are known to clients is a useful strategy for recruiting participants into research as it helps to establish contact and trust between researchers and participants.³⁹ Currently, the only specific program working with children and young people who have parents incarcerated in the ACT is SHINE for Kids. However, this service had only recently been established at the commencement of the research project, which meant that they too were in the process of identifying children and families to work with, and did not have a readily available 'sample' for the research team to access.

Subsequently, the study was advertised widely across the ACT and the project information was circulated using a range of strategies. Whilst this method of recruitment was partially successful, recruiting the required sample of 20 participants remained problematic, owing to the fact that many services in Canberra either did not consider they had 'children and young people like this' within their programs, or felt that the children and young people within their programs were 'too vulnerable' to participate in an interview. Where possible, we met with these services to discuss the benefit of our study and to provide them with information and assurances that our approach was ethical and appropriate.

IV RESPONDING TO ETHICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

Access to research participants can be one of the most difficult stages of research with children.⁴⁰ We observed through interactions with ethics committees, institutions, organisations and families that three inter-related ethical and methodological issues made access and recruitment particularly problematic for this project: the social visibility of the issue being researched, the role of gatekeepers, and concerns about protecting children.

39 Priscilla Alderson and Virginia Morrow, *Ethics, Social Research and Consulting with Children and Young People* (Barnardos, 2nd ed, 2004).

40 Priscilla Alderson, 'Ethical Issues' in S Fraser, V Lewis, S Ding, M Kellet and C Robinson (eds) *Doing Research with Children and Young People* (Sage Publications, 2004).

A *The Invisible Nature of Children of Prisoners*

The social visibility of the research problem is often a significant methodological challenge for researchers to address, and must be confronted in order for the research to be successful. Many research populations have high visibility, such as school children or children with disabilities. While it may not always be easy to access them, it is clear where they are located. Other groups, because of sensitivities surrounding behaviour, moral or legal issues, have very low visibility and subsequently present some critical problems for locating and contacting potential participants.

Until very recently, children of prisoners in the ACT have been a largely unrecognised group at both a research, policy and practice level. Currently there is only one specialist service (SHINE for Kids) within the ACT that specifically works with children of prisoners. However, they only work with children who visit the prison, and based on the numbers of children who have a parent in prison, as identified in the 2010 ACT Health Survey; this is only a small proportion of children of prisoners being supported. Consequently, obtaining a group of participants for this study relied on the goodwill and knowledge of other local organisations, adult programs associated with the prison, youth workers, child protection services and community agencies who work with disadvantaged clients. However, relying on the willingness and capacity of professionals to recruit participants also created a number of challenges.

Due to the single focus design of many services, organisations rarely see the 'full spectrum' of children of prisoners. For example, not all children and young people have contact with their detained parents, so recruiting from the only prison program for children meant that those who did not have contact, or those who only have infrequent or sporadic contact with their detained parent were potentially excluded from participating. Furthermore, many marginalised groups do not use or have access to mainstream services, and so by default were not included in the recruitment process.⁴¹

Additionally, not all children are aware of their parent's incarceration. When asking detainees for permission to interview their children it became apparent that some parents had not told their child that they were incarcerated and did not want their child to know that they were currently in prison. One family member described the great lengths they had gone to prevent the children from finding out. This was particularly evident in families with younger children. Some carers with younger children reported that they would avoid telling them the truth:

We used to say daddy was fishing and mummy was at work, and they accepted that. (Clare, Grandparent)⁴²

41 Rowland Atkinson and John Flint, *Accessing Hidden and Hard-to-Reach Populations: Snowball Research Strategies* (Social Research Update Department of Sociology, University of Surrey, Guildford, 2001).

42 All children and caregivers have been provided with a pseudonym.

This isn't just his sentence – it's my sentence too. I do not want my kids knowing and being affected by this. (Sarah, Parent)

Likewise, professionals working with children and young people do not always know that their client has a parent in prison. Services and workers do not, as a matter of course, ask children and young people if they have experienced a parent in prison. Much of the time it is left for children to provide this information to workers. Parental incarceration has been highlighted as a potentially stigmatising and shameful experience for children and young people.⁴³ Research from the United States highlights that children frequently articulate experiences of stigmatisation as well as experiences of bullying and shaming; most frequently from peers but also from teachers and neighbours.⁴⁴ Similar experiences were discussed by the children and young people in this study, and as a consequence of this, many children and young people preferred to keep the knowledge of their parents' incarceration a secret. The withholding of such information further contributed to the invisibility of their experiences and in turn made it more challenging for researchers to locate them.

Conversations with workers also highlighted that there were often unspoken assumptions held by workers about what children of prisoners would 'look like' and how they would be known to the service. Even though services did not collect data on children and parental incarceration, they frequently stated when asked to assist with recruitment that they did not have children 'like that' using their services. Although we did not explore what was meant by this statement, it was evident in interviews conducted with children and young people that a number of the workers who children had approached for support also held particular views about what it meant to be a child of a prisoner:

He was kind of shocked, yeah kind of like gobsmacked, didn't really know what to say so... He just started telling me stories of these children in the drug world and yeah I was just like, 'is that how you see me, is that like what you're visualising me as?' I didn't really know how to take it so yeah, it was just awkward, very awkward. (Jessie, Young person)

To make the invisible more visible, researchers worked with stakeholders, services and institutions (eg attended staff and network meetings) to raise their awareness that children who experienced parental incarceration may be accessing their services even if they were not readily identifying themselves as a child of a prisoner to workers. As part of the initial contact between researchers and services, we gently challenged the possible stereotypes that may exist about children of prisoners and asked services to consider how they would know if a child had a parent in prison. Asking workers to think about their experiences and to question their ways of knowing enabled them to be more open in asking children and families to be involved in the research project. Furthermore, engaging workers who

43 Gwyneth Boswell, 'Imprisoned Fathers: The Children's View' (2002) (41) *Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*.

44 Ande Nesmith and Ebony Ruhland, 'Caregivers of Children with Incarcerated Parents' (2011) 4 *The Open Family Studies Journal*, 105-116.

were asked to recruit research participants to participate in this process of shared reflexivity enabled a greater awareness of this population group and the issues they potentially face. This also proved to be a successful strategy in the recruitment process in that it increased the number of referrals of potential participants to the research project.

B *Gatekeeping*

In research with children and young people, the issue of negotiating access through 'gatekeepers' is one that has been widely discussed.⁴⁵ Where participants are recruited through organisational settings, such as schools or other services, access has to be negotiated to determine the most effective and ethical way for potential research participants to be approached and invited to take part in an interview. Our experience has been similar to other children's researchers' experiences, in that these 'gatekeepers' often come in the guise of ethics or research committees and the organisations through which children and young people are accessed. However, we also found that family members played a considerable gatekeeping role in and out of the prison. As well as their parents and caregivers, children's siblings also censored their participation.

The first stage of our research project involved gaining the approval of a number of Human Research Ethics Committees (HREC) and research committees⁴⁶ located in the ACT. The University HREC required particular amendments and clarification about how researchers would manage issues such as the disclosure of illegal activity, and the potential emotional distress that they believed children may experience if they participated. This HREC indicated through their questions to researchers that they believed that by discussing the nature of these children's lives with them directly, researchers could cause psychological distress such as depression or feelings of guilt. However with appropriate care and safeguards in place they agreed that children had the right to discuss such issues and granted approval. Unfortunately, the two other ethics/research committees did not approve the research (even for an ethics application to simply request the advertisement of the project in support services located in the ACT). Both decisions indicated there was a significant risk of the research causing harm by further stigmatising the children who participated and thereby increasing their vulnerability.

In addition to ethics/research committee concerns, children and young people were also prevented from participating by other gatekeepers such as parents and workers of organisations. Three young people (aged 13-16 years old) who had seen the project advertised contacted researchers to see if they could participate. However, because the young people were

45 Rachel Balen, Eric Blyth, Helen Calabretto et al, 'Involving Children in Health and Social Research' (2006) 13(1) *Childhood* 29-48.

46 Research committees are established in organisations such as child protection services and education departments that make judgments about the usefulness, strategic benefit or risk of proposals.

reluctant to ask for the parental consent needed in order to participate, they had to be excluded. These young people had been told by their parents that they were not allowed to discuss the issue of incarceration outside of the family home. Young people reported that there were strong beliefs in their family that the parental incarceration had to be kept secret as it was embarrassing and shameful for the family, and could have far-reaching consequences for all family members.

Other young people acted as gatekeepers for their own siblings, reporting to researchers that they believed that their siblings would be uncomfortable talking about their lives and the impact of having a parent in prison. Young people in the YPRG also spoke about some of the difficulties they foresaw in recruiting children for this project.

A. To be honest I can't see our little sisters doing this because my sister would flip and she'd be out the door in a second.

A. Same with [my sister].

Q. Why would that be?

A. Because my sister is very intimidated, really easily and like my dad pretty much disowned my sister the day she was born because she is a lot darker than him and she believes my mum cheated on him.

A. Yeah that's the same as my sister. She doesn't want to have anything to do with Dad because he's been in jail and she's all against that sort of stuff. She wouldn't want to be reminded of it. (Reference Group Participants)

Parents also played a role in stopping their children's participation. While no non-detained parent explicitly refused to allow their child to participate, a small number of parents were unable to be followed up after they had initially provided consent for their child to participate. For practical reasons, parental consent was usually obtained from the non-detained parent as it was easier to speak with parents in the community. However, caseworkers at the prison also asked a number of parent detainees if they would consent to speak to researchers about the project to consider consenting to their children being interviewed. No parent detainee agreed and caseworkers reported that detainees were unlikely to agree to their children participating in research if there was any danger that the research could gain information that could risk their sentence or parole.

Workers were the last group of gatekeepers. While many organisations were enthusiastic about this project, certain workers purposefully chose not to refer or discuss participation in the research with potential participants. These workers believed that children were too vulnerable to participate in the research, or that those children's lives were too busy.

Access to children for this research has required negotiation with multiple layers of gatekeepers at different stages of the research process. In order to gain trust and understanding about the project, we spent considerable amounts of time in attending to and addressing gatekeepers' concerns. Considerable time was taken to build relationships with workers and family members. Indeed we found that once researchers had gained the trust of some key families connected to the prison, other families were more likely to consent to participate.

Clearly all gatekeepers have the power to allow or restrict researchers' access to children when they have concerns about the possible negative impact that research participation may have on children. This is despite research that has indicated that this is a low risk. Research which quantifies such impacts is limited but generally suggests that psychological distress is unusual and short-lived.⁴⁷ A number of studies have shown that children exposed to traumatic life events experience the research process in ways not dissimilar to children without such exposure and rarely reported feeling upset as a result of their participation.⁴⁸

This study found that such gatekeepers exercised considerable influence over whether children and young people are given the opportunity to decide whether to participate in research about their lives. However, silencing these children by constructing them as 'too vulnerable' and unable to cope with their vulnerability could also perpetuate the exclusion of the most marginalised groups from research and denies them their right to articulate their views and concerns.

C *Protecting Children*

Much of the literature available concerning gatekeepers discusses their roles in either censoring children's right to participate⁴⁹ or ensuring that children are protected from research that could potentially be exploitative, invasive or coercive. Due to the fact that these gatekeepers are also increasingly at risk of consequences (legal, financial, emotional and reputational) for failing to provide children with protection, parents and other adults have becoming increasingly risk-averse and have often chosen to restrict children's participation, and as an unintended consequence, any potential benefits that their participation might allow. Added to this are parents' concerns and fears about allowing their children to discuss such stigmatised matters or issues that expose matters that families wish to remain private. Subsequently, whilst a number of parents identified that the project might benefit the individual child, other individual children, and children as a group; it was evident that many more parents had concerns of varying degrees that prevented them consenting to their children's participation.

The NHMRC highlights that research may lead to harms, discomforts and/or inconveniences for participants and/or others.⁵⁰ Whilst there is not an exhaustive list of harms, the NHMRC classifies harm as being physical, psychological, social, economic, or legal. Gatekeepers in this project were particularly concerned with social and psychological harm

47 David Finkelhor et al, 'Ethical Issues in Surveys About Children's Exposure to Violence and Sexual Abuse' in CA Cuevas and C Rennison (2013), *Wiley Handbook on the Psychology of Violence* (Wiley-Blackwell Publishers, 2012).

48 Ybarra, ML et al, 'Impact of Asking Sensitive Questions About Violence to Children and Adolescents' (2009) 45(5) *Journal of Adolescent Health* 499-507.

49 I Coyne, 'Research with Children and Young People: The Issue of Parental (Proxy) Consent' (2010) 24(3) *Children & Society* 227-237.

50 Above n 27.

of children participating. Social harm includes damage to social networks or relationships with others; discrimination in access to benefits, services, employment or insurance and social stigmatization.⁵¹ Stigmatisation is often identified as one of the impacts of parental incarceration on children and young people. Stigmatisation has been described as a process which distinguishes and labels differences with negative attributes in order to perpetuate differences in social, cultural, political and economic power.⁵² Research is one process which makes these differences noticeable. Indeed, research can often reinforce ideas about difference. As Phillips and Gates highlight, the term 'children of incarcerated parents' has become more than a descriptor, it is now a label that signifies a group of children based 'upon a stigmatised characteristic shared by their parents'.⁵³ The issue for researchers and ethics committees is to understand and articulate clearly what safeguards need to be in place that protect children and young people from harm, and that do not negatively contribute to 'further' stigmatisation, but allows researchers to explore this group of children's needs and experiences in order to better support them.

D Balancing Safeguarding and Stigmatisation: Strategies Implemented

1 Flexible Methods to Respond to Concerns

As identified earlier, researchers employed a reflexive approach throughout the duration of this research project. Researchers asked critical questions of both themselves and other stakeholders about assumptions held not only about the research questions but also about the possible methodologies available to researchers to fully consider the research question. Such critical reflection was designed and used to understand and minimise risks of the research, particularly for the children and young people who were rendered vulnerable due to their age and also their social positioning. While many of the challenges we experienced we had broadly anticipated and addressed in our research proposal, we still encountered issues, particularly with recruitment, which necessitated adapting the research process.

For this project, the methodology and methods were considered for their appropriateness and safety through a number of 'controls'. Collaboration between the YPRG and the researchers ensured that questions, tools and activities were sensitive to the issues that children experienced. In this study, both researchers and the YPRG reflected on how the recruitment of participants and the development of the research questions could influence or impact children's identities and perceptions

51 Ibid.

52 Bruce G Link and Jo C Phelan, 'Conceptualizing Stigma' (2001) 27 *Annual Review of Sociology* 363-385.

53 Susan Phillips and Trevor Gates, 'A Conceptual Framework for Understanding the Stigmatisation of Children of Incarcerated Parents' (2011) 20 *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 286-294.

of stigmatisation. Questions were designed to elicit information about the impact of parental incarceration and also to understand the child or young person's experience from a holistic perspective, ie seeing them for more than this characteristic of their life. Ethics committees and an 'adult' reference group comprised of experts also provided feedback on the questions and methods.

Discussions also occurred with young people about how they might like to talk about their experiences of parental incarceration. Researchers spoke with the YPRG about activities and tools, and whether face-to-face interviews were more preferable than focus groups or online questionnaires. Young people like the concept of chatting over Facebook and thought that the information provided to researchers may be more truthful.

Well they feel bigger and tougher and they have more confidence in themselves over the internet because they're not face to face. (Reference Group participant)

However, they also recognised that the internet was not always safe, so after much discussion decided that face-to-face interviews would be preferable.

2 Safety Scaffolding

To ensure children and young people's safety, clear parameters were put in place around the sample at the beginning of the research process. This study only engaged children and young people who were fully aware of their parents' circumstances and who had an informed understanding of what parental incarceration meant for them. This was determined by parents and workers who had referred the young person to the study. It was important to not stigmatise children by recruiting them in ways that identified them to others as 'a child of parent who is incarcerated'. This was ensured through the recruitment methods and the way the project was advertised.

Once involved in the research, in line with best practice, children were afforded a safe and secure environment in which to discuss with the researcher their experiences of parental incarceration. Through discussions with the YPRG, researchers were aware of the types of venues and places that were acceptable for children and young people to be interviewed in, and how children and young people travelled there. For many children and young people, school was identified as one of the most convenient and safest places. However this was not possible, as approval had been declined by the Education Directorate, and subsequently, researchers were not authorised to speak to children in the public school environment. This meant a number of children and young people were excluded from the research as alternative venues were not readily available. For a small scale qualitative study this was problematic in that it affected the sample size and our opportunity to speak to children in an environment that they considered familiar and safe.

At the completion of the research process, researchers also have a responsibility to ensure that children have the opportunity to debrief. Researchers regularly 'checked in' with children throughout the interview and at the end of the interview asked them to choose a facial expression carved into a rock, which represented how they felt. All children and young people identified that the interview had been a positive experience, although for some it was clearly an emotional experience:

Well I'm kind of tired so I'm going to pick that one too but I was happy to do it and I like this rock. (Shelley, young person)

At the end of the interview, children and young people were offered access to further support. The support offered included referrals to other services. Before the commencement of the interviews, the YPRG alerted us to the possible issues that might arise and cause distress for participants. They also identified possible avenues of support that existed, should participants become distressed, such as the school counsellor or Kids Helpline. Subsequently, researchers were prepared with relevant and current information about the possible avenues of support for children and young people. Only one young person, after hearing about the study, declined to be interviewed because they did not wish to discuss the topic, believing it would distress them. No child or young person who did participate in the interviews became distressed, with all participants describing the experience as useful and worthwhile.

3 Dissemination

Finally, dissemination of findings is a critical component of keeping children and young people safe in the research process, which is not always sufficiently addressed. Much discussion in the literature about research dissemination considers the need for the widest possible dissemination of the research, in the most effective manner, and at the earliest opportunity.⁵⁴ This includes the need to translate research into practice. Researchers and those who commission research are acutely aware of the need to identify the problems or difficulties that particular groups experience in order to obtain funding for programs and support. In constructing research findings about problems or negative issues, researchers run the risk of stigmatising or causing further harm to participants and the population groups they are researching. Consequently, it is important for researchers and their commissioning bodies to be aware of the impact and the unintended consequences of research on participants and the population groups they are researching. Further, reinforcing the belief that children of prisoners are different to other children who experience the loss of a parent or identifying them as a specific group that needs

54 P Cloke, 'Deliver Us From Evil? Prospects for Living Ethically and Acting Politically in Human Geography'. (2002) 26(5), *Progress in Human Geography*, 587-604; Virginia Morrow, 'Ethical Dilemmas in Research with Children and Young People About their Social Environments' (2008) 6 *Children's Geographies* 49.

'fixing' has the potential to cause a range of inadvertent challenges for children and young people with such life experiences.

The dissemination of research findings is therefore another opportunity in the research process which may be appropriate for children and young people to participate in. However, there is little evidence in the literature concerning parental incarceration to suggest that children and young people have any involvement in this stage of the research. Researchers are increasingly coming from a perspective framed within the social studies of childhood,⁵⁵ and as a result, recognise the need to work with rather than on children.⁵⁶ The children's rights agenda, emerging from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, advocates children's involvement in decisions that affect their lives, and this has had implications for the ways in which children are now included in all stages of research.⁵⁷ This has resulted in innovations that seek to empower young people in the research process, including through dissemination of research findings.⁵⁸

For this study, informed by the principles and practices of child-centred research, the researchers asked children and young people from the reference group to check the meaning and emphasis of the interview data, the adult interpretations of what children and young people said, and what children and young people wanted to see included in the final research report. Enthusiastic discussions were held with children about what should be included in the report. Children wanted to be described as aspirational, strong and independent. They wanted the research to highlight the difficulties they suffered without diminishing the successes they also experienced. Agreeing with the themes identified by the researcher, they also wanted the findings to be presented as dynamic so that people could understand the changing, fluid nature of their lives.

Children and young people described to the researcher how they appreciated being involved in this stage of the research. It was also important as children have the right to know the findings and conclusions of the research. If children are to be conceptualised as agents in their own life, they need also to be conceptualised as exerting agency in respect of research,⁵⁹ especially when it concerns the representation of their own views.

55 SL Holloway, and G Valentine, 'Children's Geographies and the New Social Studies of Childhood', in SL Holloway and G Valentine (eds) *Children's Geographies: Playing, Living, Learning* (Routledge, 2000).

56 Deborah Harcourt and Jonathon Sargeant, 'The Challenges of Conducting Ethical Research with Children' (2011) 2(3) *Education Inquiry* 421-436.

57 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Geneva, 1989).

58 Morrow, above n 54, 58.

59 Priscilla Alderson, 'Research by Children: Rights and Methods' (2001) 4(2) *International Journal of Social Research Methodology: Theory and Practice* 139-153.

V CONCLUSION

This article has considered the complexities of the issues in research with children and young people who experience parental incarceration. The article does not offer prescriptive methods or try to suggest any formula of how to do research in this area. It does, however, seek to identify and discuss some of the key ethical and methodological issues we have struggled with when engaging children and young people in research about issues concerned with parental incarceration.

Enabling children and young people to actively engage in research allows researchers to develop a greater understanding about their lived experience and a deeper understanding of the challenges and concerns that affect the lives of children and those of their families and communities.⁶⁰ Many issues encountered in this study are similar to those found in other research with children, however, researchers found that research with children and young people experiencing parental incarceration presented additional challenges. The invisible nature and lack of recognition that these children and young people experience from policy-makers and services, paternalistic constructions of risk and vulnerability that discriminates and excludes children and young people from being provided information about participation in research, the secrecy and the stigma attached to children and young people's lives that result in some children and young people not wishing to participate, as well as the need for time to build robust and trusting relationships, all significantly influenced how research is conducted with this population. By taking a reflexive and responsive approach to research, we were able to respond simultaneously to the ethical and methodological issues encountered, thus ensuring the research remained rigorous, ethically sound, and most importantly benefited both participants and their communities.

VI ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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60 Allison James and Pia Christensen, *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices* (2nd ed) (Falmer Press, 2008).

Appendix E: Publication 4

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Children of prisoners – children's decision making about contact

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ABSTRACT

Children commonly experience considerable disruption to their care when a parent is incarcerated. Maintaining relationships between children and their incarcerated parents can present particular challenges, and for a growing number of children, continuing contact with their incarcerated parent is a key issue. Most of the research about children's experiences of parental incarceration is filtered through adults who may or may not have spoken with children. This article draws on data collected for a research project which aimed to build an understanding of the needs and issues facing children and young people living in the Australian Capital Territory, who have experienced parental incarceration. This paper considers one key finding: children and young people's perspectives on contact with their incarcerated parent. This was reflected in four thematic clusters: quality of relationships; participation in decision making; the challenges and benefits of contact and practical issues.

INTRODUCTION

As prisoner numbers in Australia rapidly increase (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2015), it is expected that more children and young people will experience parental imprisonment (Flynn & Saunders 2015). While children of prisoners have attracted some interest among policymakers, researchers, and practitioners in recent years, there remains no systematic collection of data about the numbers of children affected by parental incarceration in Australia, and researchers and practitioners have relied on estimates. A 2004 cross-sectional health survey reported that approximately 5% of children experience parental incarceration in their lifetime, with Indigenous children's risk being considerably higher (Quilty 2005). A more recent survey found that 28% of prisoners identified as a parent with at least one dependent child, and 5% reported having four or more dependent children at the time of entering prison (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2013).

Increasing numbers of children experiencing parental incarceration raises the question of how decisions about contact between children and incarcerated parents are made (Poehlamn, Dallaire, Loper & Shear, 2010). The right for children to maintain a relationship with their incarcerated parent is underpinned by Article 9 of

the *United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child* (United Nations 1989). Yet, maintaining relationships between children and incarcerated parents can be complex and 'present particular challenges for families and legal and welfare decision-makers' (Sheehan & Levine 2009, p.4).

There remains a lack of understanding about what influences or prevents children from wanting to visit or have contact with their incarcerated parent. Drawing on data collected for a research project undertaken in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) with children and young people in 2013 about parental incarceration, this paper reports on children's experiences of contact and their relationships with their incarcerated parents.

BACKGROUND

Research suggests that children who experience parental incarceration are more likely to experience considerable disadvantage and are at risk of increased mental health problems, poor educational outcomes and behavioural issues that may lead to incarceration (Dallaire 2007; Tomaino, Ryan, Markotic, & Gladwell, 2005). Parental incarceration may contribute to unstable care and living arrangements for children, attachment insecurity,

difficulties maintaining contact with incarcerated parents and problematic family relationships (Glaze & Maruschak 2008; Murray & Murray 2010; Shlafer & Poehlmann 2010).

For many children, life prior to parental incarceration is characterised by low income, mental health problems, family violence, substance abuse and child abuse and neglect (Stanley & Goddard 2004). Relationships between children and their parents are often problematic and disrupted (Sheehan & Levine 2009). Parental incarceration further compounds such difficulties and may extend to children feeling shame, guilt and anger (Murray 2007). Maintaining contact between incarcerated parents and their children involves a complex pattern of factors, rather than a straightforward, easily understood occurrence. Contact is most likely to benefit the incarcerated parent, as they are often more motivated to change; experience lower recidivism rates and better outcomes after release (Healy *et al.* 2000; Shlafer & Poehlmann 2010), while research about the benefits for children is mixed. Whereas some research identifies that contact between children and their incarcerated parents reduces children's anxiety (Snyder *et al.* 2002), other findings question the benefits (Poehlmann *et al.* 2010).

In recent decades, the issues of contact and maintaining relationships with non-resident parents have been a focus of other policy areas such as out-of-home care and family law (Smyth 2009; Taplin 2005). Research about contact between parents and children has generally been based upon theories of attachment, bringing attention to the challenges that separation between children and parents can have upon a child's health and wellbeing (Taplin 2005). The reliance on this theoretical perspective has led to considerable attention being paid to ensuring that children have the right to know both parents and that parenting is a shared responsibility, provided that this is in the child's best interest (McIntosh & Chisholm 2008).

What little is known about contact and relationships between children and their incarcerated parents is largely gleaned from the opinions and experiences of parents, caregivers and professionals working with families. A small number of studies about parental incarceration include children's perspectives, offering insight into children's views about contact (for example see Beck & Jones 2007; Boswell 2002; Flynn 2014; Nesmith & Ruhland 2008). This literature is limited and provides mixed accounts. In one study conducted by Nesmith and Ruhland (2008), it was reported that nearly all children wanted to maintain an active relationship with their incarcerated parent, even if they felt upset towards their parent. Conversely, Shlafer and Poehlmann (2010)

found that children in their study expressed uncertainty about seeing their incarcerated parents, and no child who had recently visited their parent described a positive experience.

It is evident from this emergent literature that children are less likely to have contact if there are relationship difficulties or conflict between their carer and incarcerated parent (Nesmith & Ruhland 2008). Children report that their carer often becomes a 'gatekeeper' for their relationship with their incarcerated parent, which is pivotal as to whether this relationship is maintained.

A recent Australian study of women prisoners and their children (Flynn 2014) concluded that while practical support is required to maintain children's visiting, it is not enough on its own to encourage some children to visit their mother in prison, particularly older children (e.g. 10 - 14 years). Further, young people visited their parent in prison less frequently, even when supports were available (Flynn 2014; and McCulloch & Morrison 2002). An earlier US study by Casey-Acevedo & Bakken (2002) hypothesised that older children are less likely to visit their parents due to competing interests, or because they can develop 'negative attitudes' about visiting prison; although there is insufficient evidence available to reach any firm conclusions.

RESEARCH APPROACH

Methodology

This qualitative study was informed by a phenomenological approach which attempts to understand how the everyday, inter-subjective world is experienced by participants (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin 2009). Its purpose is to identify the core meanings of the shared experiences of individuals within a particular phenomenon (Lester 1999). This approach was particularly useful for this study, as it allowed for a nuanced exploration and analysis of individual instances, and how such experiences were similar or different across participants.

Ethics

This study, conducted with the approval of the Australian Catholic University Human Research Ethics Committee was carried out between 2012 and 2014 in the ACT¹. An informed consent process was undertaken with children and where possible, their parents or carers. Children were provided with information about the study and an explanation of their rights. Researchers also provided information about the participants' protection, privacy, anonymity and confidentiality (France 2004).

Semi-structured interviews

The interview schedule was informed by a literature review and developed in consultation with a Young People's Reference Group (YPRG) and Adult Project Reference Group. The YPRG provided an important forum for researchers to gain an understanding about how to ethically and effectively explore and understand children's views from their perspective (Moore, Noble-Carr, McArthur 2015; Moore, Saunders, & McArthur 2011). It included five children aged 13–16 years, who advised on the language to use in regard to parental incarceration, potential issues to discuss and sensitive issues that researchers needed to be aware of (for further discussion of this see Flynn & Saunders, 2015).

The interview schedule and accompanying interview tools were also tested with this group. Semi-structured interviews focused on three core areas: children's experiences of having a parent in prison, the types of supports they currently used, and the types of supports they needed but were unable to access.

The interviews lasted one hour and were conducted in environments usually chosen by the children. With the children's consent, interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder. The interview process used several tools, including drawing materials and picture cards that were responsive to children's differing ages and needs. The picture cards were most useful with children who had difficulties in describing their experiences, and were often used as an 'allegory', representing and illustrating the complexity of emotions that young people experienced.

Data analysis

The analytic process used a set of processes and principles common to a phenomenological approach that included "moving from the particular to the shared and from the descriptive to the interpretive" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin 2009 p. 79). Data analysis was assisted by NVivo, a qualitative analysis program, which allowed for data to be sorted, matched and linked; for questions to be asked of the data and to see it in new ways (Bazeley & Jackson 2013). The development of themes involved a careful reading and re-reading of interview transcripts (Rice & Ezzy 1999). We were interested in what children's experiences were, and how they discussed them. Data were then coded, compared and contrasted (Biggerstaff & Thompson 2008). Themes were developed deductively, using knowledge gained from a literature review, and inductively, using an iterative and inductive cycle that examined data for emergent patterns and relationships.

The resultant themes identified in this process were taken to a small number of individual members of the YPRG for discussion and 'checking'. Employing 'experts', i.e. those who know most about their lives, to verify and confirm findings has been widely endorsed (Whitehead 2004).

To ensure children and young people's voices remain central to the dissemination phase of the research process, participants' quotes and stories are used throughout this paper to exemplify particular research findings. The quotes and stories selected are indicative of the broader themes found within the study. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the confidentiality of participants.

Participants

The practical difficulties of recruiting children with incarcerated parents into research projects meant that the sample of children was smaller than anticipated with the group ranging in age from 8 to 18 years. Nonetheless common experiences were identified across the sample. Children aged 8–18 years, who resided in the ACT and who either currently or previously had experienced parental incarceration were eligible to participate. The research was advertised widely across the ACT. Although the recruitment of children was problematic (see Flynn & Saunders, 2015), 16 children and young people participated in the research. Participant characteristics are detailed in Table 1.

FINDINGS

The larger study commissioned by SHINE for Kids² aimed to build an understanding of the needs and issues facing children experiencing parental incarceration. Several themes were identified, and have been discussed more fully elsewhere (Saunders & McArthur, 2013). This paper focuses on the findings about relationships and contact with incarcerated parents.

In listening to children it became evident that children experienced three types of contact with their parents: Regular contact including visits, telephone calls and letters; more infrequent contact including intermittent visits and telephone calls; and no direct contact where children received information about their parent from other sources. Children were not directly asked about the contact they had with their parent but each child reflected on this when they spoke about their experiences of parental incarceration. Across these groups there were key issues reflected in four thematic clusters: quality of relationships; participation in

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of participants

Demographic characteristic	Number (N = 16)
Cultural Background	
Aboriginal	4
Caucasian	12
Gender	
Female	8
Male	8
Age	
8-10	3
11-14	3
15-18	10
Gender of incarcerated parent	
Female	3
Male	16
Living Arrangements	
Living with mum and step-dad	7
Living with other family member	3
Residing in out-of-home care	4
Homeless	2
No. of times parent has been incarcerated	
Once	2
More than once	14

decision making; challenges and benefits of contact and practical issues. Participants' insights about these are summarised below.

Quality of Relationships

Children's experiences of family relationships emerged strongly from the data. Children spoke about how the quality of family relationships was a key factor influencing whether they had contact with their incarcerated parent. This included the relationship with the incarcerated parent, with other family members, and the relationships between other family members and the incarcerated parent. Participants reported family as comprising of a range of people including parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, foster carers, cousins, step-parents, friends and ex-partners of parents. These different family relationships and how they facilitated contact with incarcerated parents are discussed below.

Children and young people discussed that their families experienced several challenges prior to and after their parent's incarceration, including family violence, child abuse and neglect, parental unemployment, mental illness and parental drug and alcohol use. They reported how these issues had impacted and shaped their relationships with their parents.

The young people who had close supportive families prior to, and throughout the duration of their parents'

incarceration reported having regular contact with their parent. These participants had mostly been adolescents when their father was first imprisoned. Participants described that this contact was usually supported and facilitated by their other parent, typically the mother. In the interview, these young people spoke about their relationships with parents prior to incarceration as being close and loving. They also reported that their families had separated, sometimes many years prior to the parent's incarceration, although relationships between both parents were congenial and children described being able to successfully maintain good relationships with both parents.

Oh she (mum) actually encourages me to stay in contact with him - they have an ok relationship. (Jason, 9 years)

Other children reflected on how the discord between their parents after the relationship separation affected their capacity to maintain a meaningful relationship with their incarcerated parents.

Mum, instead of talking me and my brother into going to see him, she'd be more like just get rid of him, cut him out of your life, you don't need that. So that's also why we lost contact with him. Mum was a major influence on not seeing him and stuff. (Julie, 15 years)

Those who had more uncertain relationships with their parents prior to imprisonment described their relationships with incarcerated parents as continuing to be problematic and sometimes breaking down completely. Children discussed that their relationships with their incarcerated parents were influenced by the actions of the other parents or caregivers; and reflected on how they related to their parents prior to and during the incarceration(s), and how this impacted on their ongoing relationship and contact.

Children talked about how as their relationships changed with their incarcerated parent across the time of the sentence, this influenced their need and desire to see them. Children who had already strained or difficult relationships with their parents described that they experienced further challenges the longer they were away from their parent. Some young people discussed how distant their relationship was with their incarcerated fathers, and felt that was demonstrated by the parents' limited interest in or lack of understanding of their life.

I just don't feel comfortable around him anymore because it's just been so long, and because I'm so old now, he's missed all my little childhood years and missed pretty much everything. (Natasha, 15 years)

For others, the knowledge that their parent was in prison gave them the opportunity to reconnect, because

for a time their parent would be in a known place and accessible for regular contact.

Like him going in is probably the easiest side of things, like it might sound a bit backwards... but you know where he is... but when he's out, like finding out he's coming out and he hasn't even contacted me that's the worst... (Julie, 15 years)

As influential as parental relationships were on the participants' contact and relationships with their incarcerated parent, other family relationships were also instrumental in supporting children's relationships and contact with imprisoned parents. Children spoke about how helpful other family members and friends could be in supporting relationships between them and their fathers. Other family members assisted children with travel to visits and provided emotional, financial and practical supports.

Decision making and contact

Children described their involvement in decisions about contact with their incarcerated parents and the amount of influence they had in the decision making. This influence reflected a continuum where some children made independent decisions about when and how they would have contact with their incarcerated parent; to others who had no influence at all, where adults made all the decisions about if and how contact would happen.

Children expressed the view that the younger they were when their parent went to prison, the less likely they were to have any choice in whether or not they had contact or how they would have contact with their incarcerated parent. Almost half of the children interviewed had difficulty remembering the age they were when their parent was first incarcerated and all but three children described being very young (before and during primary school) when this had first occurred. Children also discussed that their incarcerated and non-incarcerated parents had made decisions for them when they were younger, about the amount of information children had about their parents' incarceration, the type of contact they would have whilst their parent was in prison and how frequently this would occur.

A number of children reported that when they were younger they had not been told about their parents' imprisonment. For some children, this meant regular face to face contact with their parent (usually the father) ceased without any explanation. Children said that they had been left to 'work it out' for themselves as to why they no longer saw their parent. As these children grew older, they began to piece information together, learnt

from family, friends and media, and realised at some point in their childhood that their parent was or had been in prison. Other children reported that their incarcerated and non-incarcerated parents had decided that prison was an inappropriate place for children to visit and therefore phone contact and letter writing would be the only form of contact that occurred. Only a small number of the children remembered visiting their parent in prison when they were very young.

As they grew older, young people described how their parents or caregivers provided them with more information about their incarcerated parent and gave them more choices about contact and visitation. Becoming 'older' enabled some young people to make decisions about whether or not they continued to have contact with their parent and how this would occur.

Q. Do you have contact with dad now?

A I could have if I chose to.

Q But you don't?

A Yeah... It was pretty bad finding that out and it was pretty sad to know that someone with my blood could do something like that. (Sarah, 15 years)

Decision making about continuing contact with parents who recurrently re-offended and were frequently re-incarcerated was also problematic. Participants described how adults often wanted them to cease having contact with their parents, as these parents were construed as unreliable and their behaviours problematic. Some said they felt unsupported by their non-incarcerated parents and caregivers when they had decided to maintain contact with their 'unreliable' parents.

Young people discussed the reasons why family members, particularly siblings, had decided to no longer have contact with their incarcerated parent. They described emotions such as shame, fear, hatred and a lack of attachment that considerably influenced whether or not they wanted to see their parent. Such choices were evidently not always supported by other siblings or family members. A number of children described the pressure placed on these siblings by other family members (including themselves) to see their parent even when they had clearly stated they did not want to. Children spoke about how they would make their siblings feel guilty or 'push' them into speaking to their incarcerated parent.

My sister hates my dad for [the crime he committed] and doesn't talk to dad at all unless we force her to talk to him. (Jasmine, 15 years)

No child or young person identified having any support outside of their family to help them make decisions

about contact with their incarcerated parents. Children and young people in formal state care reported that decisions made about whether contact occurred with their incarcerated parents, and the frequency of this contact were often dependent on the caseworker or the court.

Children living at home and who wished to maintain contact with their parent in prison but who did not have the support of their other parent or caregiver also found the decision to have contact problematic. Current ACT prison policy does not allow children under 18 years to visit their parent without an accompanying adult. Children talked about the difficulties this caused for them and how it removed their right to have regular and meaningful access to their parent.

I honestly think it's a bit slack. It can be like fair enough if the kid is like four years old but like we should have the option to go and be able to see them without like a parent - like have the parent's permission but go by ourselves. (Max, 14 years)

Benefits and challenges of contact

Children and young people discussed the benefits and challenges they experienced when having contact with their incarcerated parent. For children who described close relationships and strong attachments with their parents prior to incarceration, maintaining a relationship with them when they were in prison was an important goal; contact was a priority for both them and other family members. For those who described more problematic relationships with their parents prior to incarceration, and where attachment and positive caring relationships between the child and their parent fluctuated, children spoke about the challenges of contact. Children conveyed that the limited amount of direct contact that they had with their parent was upsetting and this was compounded by the lack of understanding from adults who just assumed children were better off without that parent in their life.

Young people spoke about their need for connection with their incarcerated parents, most frequently their father. For those who had infrequent and sporadic contact there was still a sense of biological connection between them and their parents, that children considered important to acknowledge and preserve. Even those who no longer saw their incarcerated parent spoke about how they would always be connected to them by virtue of being their child.

Yeah, like I always tell my mum he's always going to be my dad - there's nothing that's ever going to change that. (Julie, 15 years)

While many children and young people spoke about how little their incarcerated father contributed

financially to their lives, older children, even those who had infrequent contact identified financial support as a benefit of having some contact with their parent. A number of young people were quite pragmatic in their approach, acknowledging that as their parent didn't support them emotionally or psychologically, they just 'took' what they could get.

Yeah I could have used my dad back then for stuff like riding my bike, tying my shoes and like when I was ten I could have used him for help with my assignments and education. I look at it like now and I don't really need you for anything more than funds. (Jasmine, 15 years)

Those children who had limited or sporadic contact with parents while in prison and after their release also spoke about the enormous emotional consequences this had for them. For some there was a constant hope things would be different - that their parents' criminal behaviour and lack of interest in them would change so that they could assume a more meaningful relationship with them. However, for the most part, children and young people spoke about how this hope was rarely realised and they were often left feeling disillusioned and rejected once again.

It makes you think what they're going to do when they get out, are they going to make life better or just go back down that bad track. It took him nearly a month after he got out to actually get in contact with me again and I was just like I just shut down...I felt alone. (Julie, 15 years)

Nevertheless, this did not stop young people seeking contact with their parents. If direct contact was not possible, hearing stories from other family members or through social media had to suffice. Knowing what parents were up to or where they were gave children a sense of 'closeness' to their parent, hope for change and the opportunity for contact with them, even if this was never realistically able to be achieved. The sense of hope fuelled by intermittent contact enabled children to dream about having a relationship with their parent that fitted the social norm. Yet it also contributed to children experiencing profound loss and sadness each time their parent disappeared again.

And then I remember I looked down the hallway and I just saw mum was walking up and I just dropped to the ground. I didn't know what to do because I hadn't seen her for so long and I just started crying and she started crying too and then picked me up and hugged me. And she's like, "I'm never leaving you ever again". And then, yeah, six months later, she's gone. (Stella, 18 years)

There was a small group of children who had positive contact with their imprisoned parents, due in part to the strong pre-incarceration relationships. However, this did not mean that children were not affected adversely

when they saw their parent in prison. One girl talked about that although she and her brothers had strong and positive relationships with their incarcerated father, her brother's behaviour had significantly deteriorated at school.

His grades have dropped dramatically; he's just been naughty at school, swearing at teachers and yeah. (Clare, 17 years)

Children who had regular contact with their parent also experienced a range of difficult emotions, including anger, sadness, shame and embarrassment associated with their parents' incarceration. Children discussed overwhelming feelings of anger which they experienced when they had any news about their parents. Such feelings resulted from disappointment in their parent, embarrassment and shame about what their parent had done and the powerlessness they felt about their situation as well as the lack of influence they had on changing it. Some children described how they 'acted up at school' and took their emotions out on their friends.

After the game I kind of came to realise that I was being a complete bitch to my own team and my friends but I apologised. I was a big enough person to apologise to them but I didn't explain anything, I was just like I have family issues at the moment and they're like huge and everything... (Julie, 15 years)

A number of young people felt it was easier to not think about their parent or have contact with them. Children expressed that coping with these feelings was challenging and not worth the pain and stress they experienced when trying to make sense of them.

I'm just numb and don't have many feelings, I don't give a fuck. I have just cared too much... And when people haven't cared about me as much as I've cared about them it's like I just won't be upset then, I know, it's just easier to show no emotion and just be like that, it's just easier to block everything off and kind of de-personalise yourself. (Rachel, 14 years)

A group of children were also aware of their own and other family members' safety when it came to having contact with incarcerated parents. Children discussed how their incarcerated fathers' behaviours and criminal activities made it difficult to want to have contact with them and other family members. For example, when there was a history of domestic violence, mothers were often understandably reluctant to facilitate contact between the offending parent and the child.

My mum and dad didn't end on good terms because he broke my mum's nose and I was standing in a room when he did it. He ran my mum over and I was in the car. (Rebecca, 15 years)

For one child, witnessing family violence was enough to decide they no longer wanted contact with their father.

For others, this did not necessarily mean they wanted to forgo their relationship with their father even where parents had separated. Nevertheless, because mothers in this study were typically the principle facilitators of contact, this often meant that children, particularly young children, were denied the opportunity for contact when the other parent was in prison. As they grew older, children described how they would regularly attempt to try to renegotiate different forms of contact with their father through social media or other family members.

Children also spoke about how their decision to have contact with their incarcerated parent was often influenced by the perspective of their other parent or caregiver. The quality of the relationship between the incarcerated parent and the caregiver was often instrumental as to whether or not, particularly younger children, had contact with their parent while in prison. This also impacted their decision making as they got older. If they believed that their caregiver/parent would be unduly affected by their decision to have contact then they would often not pursue this for fear of upset, even though they also expressed feeling sad about this decision.

Because it would upset my mum, even though me and her don't really get along. (Sarah, 15 years)

Practical issues

Children described a number of practical issues that affected contact, similar to those identified in other studies (King 2002; Tomaino *et al.* 2005; Flynn 2014). Children reported that the physical constraints and the environment of the prison often affected the quality of the visits with their parent. Prison visiting times meant that some children missed out on school. Young people also identified that the lack of age-appropriate activities, physical contact and privacy was problematic.

I think that's the biggest part about it is just yeah, we need more one on one time with dad without being, feeling like we're watched all the time by the screws, and every time we do just one thing wrong, like lift your knee up on the chair or something, you get yelled at. So you feel really uncomfortable being there... The hour visits are nothing, you get there and kind of like don't know what to say for an hour and then leave – it's just kind of like... Dad's like 'oh how's school been?' And kicks you up the butt if you've done something naughty, and yells at you and then you leave. So it's just, yeah it's kind of like not that relationship anymore. (Clare, 17 years)

Children and young people also identified difficulties getting to the prison on public transport or finding people to take them if they were under 18 years of age.

The transport out to the jail is horrible. There's only two Action buses a day that go out there, so maybe like a bus or something, like a communal bus would be good to have for children, like if my brothers want to go out there by themselves on say the family day, transport is probably a big thing, when everybody is at work during the day. So that's probably a big thing as well, getting out there, because it is so far away. (Gary, 16 years)

Where children reported being satisfied with contact with their incarcerated parent, they also had support to visit. A small number of children and families were provided with financial support from organisations such as Prisoner's Aid to cover costs of travelling to and from the prison.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings described in this paper provide insight into how children make sense of their relationships with their incarcerated parents and how this impacts their decision making about maintaining contact with their parents. Many of the children participating in this study were subjected to a number of considerable risks, such as poverty, family violence, and substance misuse prior to their parent being incarcerated. Such risks frequently precede a parent's imprisonment (Miller 2006), and subsequently, many of the parent-child relationships were already faltering prior to the parent being incarcerated. Despite these difficulties, the majority of children and young people in this study continued to want contact with their parent both throughout the duration of incarceration and after release.

The qualitative insights of children's experiences of contact in this study highlight the complexity of their feelings and behaviours. Although this study indicated that positive contact existed for children who had strong parental attachments pre-incarceration, this did not predict children's behaviours after contact. Older children whose parents were regularly incarcerated reflected on the emotional consequences this had for them, for which they rarely received support. Those who experienced sporadic contact often reported feelings of profound sadness and loss, and those with no regular contact relied on symbolic relationships, and as in Bocknek, Sanderson and Britner's 2009 study, the ambiguous loss associated with parental incarceration considerably impacted children and young people. Some children felt contact in any form was preferable to no contact at all, and others felt that incarceration provided the chance to cease contact.

For a number of children in this study, prison was a reliable place in which to re-connect with their parent.

While most children did not expect to live with their father after release, they had aspirations to maintain a connection with them and this was often left to children to negotiate as the justice system did not provide opportunities or supports for children to maintain this after release. These insights illustrate children's active participation in seeking out contact with their incarcerated parent and the challenges that arise from this. The support of the non-incarcerated parents/ caregivers is instrumental for younger children in facilitating contact with their incarcerated parents (Enos 2001; Arditti & Few 2006). Yet it is evident that as children become older, for the most part, they felt unsupported by both their caregivers and the systems that surrounded them in their choices about contact with their incarcerated parent.

This has significant implications for families and caregivers, the criminal justice system and service systems that surround children. Currently, children are not reliably recognised or responded to within the adult criminal justice system (Flynn 2014). Many children remain unsupported and responsible for themselves to negotiate dysfunctional family relationships.

Correctional policies regarding contact represent an important aspect of the child's capacity to maintain a relationship with their incarcerated parent. The prison visiting environment as well as the timing, access and cost of visits affects the quality and frequency of ongoing contact. There is a need for innovative and child-focused responses within the criminal justice system to improve and sustain parent-child contact, throughout the duration of a parent's sentence and after release.

It is critical that the criminal justice system supports caregivers and incarcerated parents to help children to understand and manage the complexity of feelings experienced when their parent is imprisoned. As not all family members share the same views about the importance of contact, it is essential that parents are supported to focus on their children's needs as well as their own. Where safety issues exist for families and where contact with an incarcerated parent is contrary to the best interests of the child, it is important that children be given age appropriate information and long term supports to understand and manage this loss. Given the importance of contact, future research with longitudinal designs are needed to examine incarcerated parent-child contact over time. Additional research may also usefully explore the effects of the different types of contact for children and to consider child characteristics such as age and gender. Understanding these phenomena in more depth is critical for designing interventions that can meaningfully build and maintain relationships between incarcerated parents and children over time.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author has no involvement in any organization or entity with a financial or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

ENDNOTES

- 1 The Australian Capital Territory has a population of 345,000
- 2 SHINE for Kids is a not-for-profit organisation for children and young people affected by family member involvement in the criminal justice system.

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Appendix F: Publication 5

Saunders, V. (2018). What does your dad do for a living? Children of prisoners and their experiences of stigma. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 90, 21–27.

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What does your dad do for a living? Children of prisoners and their experiences of stigma

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ABSTRACT

Stigma has frequently been described as one of the unintended consequences of parental incarceration yet little research has been conducted on this issue with children and young people. This article examines and conceptualizes the experiences of stigma for children who have experienced parental incarceration in the Australian Capital Territory, Australia. The article reports on the findings of a qualitative study designed to investigate children's experiences of parental incarceration. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 16 children. The results of this study demonstrate that stigma associated with parental incarceration manifests in children's lives in different and distinct ways. Despite these differences, children and young people describe three key strategies to manage the stigma that they experience: maintaining privacy and withholding information; self-exclusion and self-reliance, and managing peer relationships. The policy and practice implications of these findings are discussed.

1. Introduction

A significant and increasing number of Australians are affected by incarceration each year, with the national imprisonment rate reaching a ten year high (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015). A recent prisoner health survey reported that 46% of prison entrants have children who depend on them for their basic needs (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2015) and it is estimated that around 5% of all children will experience a parent imprisoned within their life time (Quilty, Levy, Howard, Barratt, & Butler, 2004).

Yet for a long time this group of children have remained invisible, neglected or forgotten (Robertson, 2012). Debates about our increased use of incarceration have focused predominantly on its value in reducing crime rates rather than the adverse consequences for children and families. More recently though, there has been an emergent interest from researchers, policy makers and practitioners about the impact and consequences of parental incarceration on children (Arditti, 2012; Murray & Farrington, 2008).

A range of studies, predominantly from Europe and the US, have drawn attention to and focussed on the social, emotional and behavioural impacts of parental incarceration on children (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2003; Travis & Waul, 2003). Stigma and shame have frequently been described as unintended consequences of parental incarceration (see author's own work; Myers, Smarsh, Amlund-Hagen, &

Kennon, 1999; Travis, McBride, & Solomon, 2003). Phillips and Gates (2011) report that very little research has been conducted on this issue, its role in the development of emotional or behavioural challenges or about how it manifests in children's lives and the impact of this. Drawing on data from a research project conducted in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT¹), Australia in 2013, about children's experiences of parental incarceration, this paper reports on a key finding about how the stigma associated with parental incarceration manifests in children's lives and the how children and young people manage the impact of this.

2. Background

Sociologist Erving Goffman (1963) defined stigma as a discrediting mark that sets individuals apart from others. Typically it is understood as a social process that connects individuals to a set of negative characteristics that result in discrimination and devaluation (Scambler, 2009). More recently Link & Phelan, (2001) have conceptualised stigma as a process consisting of key elements that include labelling, stereotyping, differentiating, devaluing and discriminating. Stigma is characteristically associated with having a negative impact on personal identity formation and may result in social exclusion which in turn may impact upon an individual's capacity to access resources and opportunities.

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¹ The Australian Capital Territory is the capital of Australia with a population of about 380,000.

The literature indicates that stigma is commonly organised into three typologies, felt or perceived stigma, enacted stigma and project stigma (Link & Phelan, 2001; Phillips & Gates, 2011; Scambler, 2009; Scambler & Paoli, 2008; Link, Wells, Phelan & Yang, 2015). Felt or perceived stigma is described as the internalised perception or fear of devaluation (Phillips & Gates, 2011). Enacted stigma is defined as experiences of direct discrimination where individuals may be ostracised from their community or prevented in some way from participating in or taking up opportunities available to “others” (Jacoby, 1994). The concept of project stigma developed by Scambler and Paoli (2008) refers to individuals feeling or experiencing perceived stigma, but only involves the act of avoiding enacted stigma. Those who experience project stigma do not experience any associated shame but rather show resistance and defiance in the face of the issue (Scambler & Paoli, 2008). Nevertheless, it is argued that the anticipation of rejection or devaluation can be as damaging to individuals as the experience of direct discrimination. Felt or perceived stigma can reduce self-confidence and may prevent full social interaction resulting in individuals becoming isolated and experiencing lower levels of support (Scambler & Paoli, 2008).

The majority of literature regarding stigma focuses on “primary stigma” for example those who directly experience stigma because of disability, mental illness or poor health such as HIV (Fielden, Chapman, & Cadell, 2011; Moses, 2010). Goffman (1963) suggests that stigma not only affects the individuals directly experiencing these, but that it also affects those who are associated with the “stigmatised”. Goffman argues that “courtesy stigma”, the stigma passed to otherwise “normal” people, is structurally embedded and dependent on the social location of both the stigmatised person and the people that they associate with (p.30). While Scambler (2009), argues that the concepts of primary and courtesy stigma do not differ in their basic social processes, others highlight that there is a notable difference between them. Courtesy stigma originates from kinship or family, while primary stigma originates from deviant behaviour, physical conditions or through group identity. Furthermore, Corrigan and Miller (2004) maintain that courtesy stigma is underpinned by notions of not only shame, but also of blame and contamination.

2.1. Children of prisoners

Early studies about children of prisoners found that shame and stigma associated with incarceration are more likely to be experienced by the caregiver of children with an incarcerated parent rather than by the children or their incarcerated parent (Johnston, 1995). Other earlier studies considering parental incarceration also found that shame or stigma were not significant factors in producing the negative “effects” of parental incarceration (Bloom & Steinhart, 1993). Morris (1965) and Johnston (1995) suggest that as parental incarceration is frequently more common amongst particular groups and therefore this experience is widely shared, the experience of stigma is reduced or nullified for individuals positioned in that particular group.

Conversely, other studies directly involving children have described that the stigma associated with parental incarceration does have significant consequences. In a study by Bocknek, Sanderson, and Britner (2009), the children interviewed expressed feelings of isolation, and reported having few friendships and troubled relationships at school. Children and young people in studies by Boswell (2002), Katz (2002), Lee (2005) and Chui (2010) all described experiences of bullying and shaming when people became aware of their incarcerated parent. This was most frequently carried out by peers but also from teachers and neighbours. In Katz's study (2002), children reported being stigmatised by their friends about their parents' incarceration more frequently than describing them as a source of support.

Nesmith and Ruhland (2008) describe how it is not uncommon for children whose parents are incarcerated to want to maintain a level of secrecy about this. Many of the children in their study revealed an effort

to keep their parent's incarceration private and demonstrated considerable anxiety about being found out. While some children in this study benefited from telling others about their parent in prison, others remained isolated and fearful of social stigma.

How much children know about their parent's incarceration is also linked to the concerns about children being subjected to stigmatisation (Manby, 2014). Parents and caregivers often do not discuss parental incarceration with children because of the often difficult emotions experienced by parents and children, associated with this (Bocknek et al., 2009). Chui's study (2010) describes that in order to deal with the stigma associated with parental incarceration children will lie about their parent's whereabouts in order to protect themselves. Research also highlights that families who demand that children do not disclose information about their parent's incarceration also infer to children that incarceration is a stigmatised issue. Hagen and Myers (2003) in their study about secrecy and social support for children with a mother in prison report that children who are at greatest risk of behaviour problems are those who have low levels of social support and who also speak with anyone about their mothers' incarceration. However, they also state that secrecy alone did not predict behavioural outcomes for children.

The possible ongoing harmful effects of stigmatisation for children with a parent in prison have been considered in a small number of studies (Boswell & Wedge, 2002; Sack, 1977; Sack & Seidler, 1978). Such effects can be detrimental for a range of reasons including a lowered self-esteem, a heightened risk of bullying and peer victimisation and isolation from family and friends (Murray & Murray, 2010). A number of other studies have indicated that children, when asked, are often unable to identify support figures who they would talk to about their parents' imprisonment in times of stress or trauma (Bocknek et al., 2009; Lösel, et al., 2012; Flynn, 2011; Loureiro, 2010).

A recent report from Europe concerning the mental health outcomes for children of prisoners describes that the stigma of having a parent in prison can cause children of prisoners ‘to be labelled and rejected by peers, and children may feel they are different from others and withdraw from social contacts’ (Jones et al., 2013, p. 484). The differences between how children experience and manage perceived or felt stigma and difference compared to how they may experience and manage active discrimination is less understood but important if we are to support children of prisoners to not take on problematic beliefs and attitudes that may impact their wellbeing.

3. Methodology

This paper reports on the findings of a qualitative study commissioned by SHINE for Kids.² The overall study sought to identify the needs of children living in the ACT who had or were currently experiencing parental incarceration. To develop knowledge in this area, data were sought from a number of sources including parents and caregivers, stakeholders that included government and not for profit services and children and young people. This paper concentrates on the findings from children and young people to explore how stigma manifests in their lives.

3.1. Ethics

Approval for the study was provided by the University's Human Research Ethics Committee. In order to ensure the rights and interests of children and young people were upheld in the research process, particular care was taken to address issues such as informed consent, protection and confidentiality (Powell, Fitzgerald, Taylor, & Graham, 2012; see authors's own work). Child friendly information letters and

² SHINE for Kids is a not-for-profit organization for children and young people affected by family member involvement in the criminal justice system.

consent forms were developed and used, and follow up support was offered; although no child or young person required this. All children were provided with remuneration for their time and expertise.

The commitment to the rights of children and the importance of upholding children's perspectives was also reflected in the chosen research methods. A semi-structured interview schedule was developed with the children's reference group (see authors own work). The overarching research question was "what are the experiences of children with a parent in prison?" The questions were designed to elicit responses from children that reflected their experiences of having a parent in prison; the types of formal and informal supports they currently used and the supports they needed but were currently unable to access. The children's reference group developed open ended questions that addressed the social, emotional and practical challenges experienced by them when their parent was in prison. Children and young people also provided feedback in regard to the use of activities and tools. The St Lukes innovative resource card sets and other similar cards were identified by children and young people as important ways for them to identify and discuss some of the feelings they experienced when a parent was in prison.

3.2. Data analysis

The interviews were audiotaped with permission of participants and transcribed verbatim and provided rich data for a thematic analysis. Consistent with phenomenological approach, the aim of the thematic analysis was to gain insight into the perspectives and experiences of the children and young people. Data analysis was assisted through the use of NVIVO software to enable the recording, sorting and retrieval of interview data (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). Data were then coded, compared and contrasted to draw connections between concepts, explain areas of conflict and find alignments which may not be immediately evident (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). Themes were developed both deductively, using knowledge gained from the literature review and interview schedule, and inductively, ensuring coding stayed close to participant's accounts and the issues important to them (Boyatzis, 1998).

It is important at this point to highlight that children and young people did not directly use the terms "stigma" or "being stigmatised", rather they described feelings and experiences as they appeared in their consciousness. In undertaking a phenomenological approach, I attempted to access the participant's own world through a process of "interpretative activity" (Smith, 2004), which relied on the children and young people's capacity to articulate their thoughts and experiences and my ability to reflect and analyse these. Thus, this article reveals the analytic account derived from the joint reflections of both children and young people and the researcher.

3.3. Limitations

This qualitative study is exploratory and the sample does not represent all children with incarcerated parents. A number of limitations can be identified in relation to the present study. Due to the challenges of recruitment, it is a small sample which held a diversity of experience including age, maternal and paternal incarceration and length of sentence for the incarcerated parent. While we invited children between the ages of 8 and 18 to participate, the views of younger children have not been captured and it is possible that the experiences of these children would reveal a different understanding than told here. The diversity of experience between genders is also not able to be captured due to the small sample size. Finally, only three of the children described having a mother who was incarcerated so the experiences described in this paper are more closely linked to the experiences of children with an incarcerated father than with a mother in prison. What this study does achieve is an account of the perspectives and experiences of children and young people as described by them which has

been rarely considered. As such we can highlight some of the implications of this for practice and provide some insight into directions for further research.

3.4. Participants

Participants were recruited not only with the assistance of the ACT prison but also from diverse range of organisations including youth groups, statutory child protection services and family support services located in the ACT. A total of sixteen children who have or have had a parent incarcerated in the ACT were interviewed. Of the 16 children who participated, ten children were aged between 15 and 18 years, and six were aged between 8 and 14 years. There were an equal number of males (8) as females (8) who participated. Four children identified as Aboriginal.

Parents had been sentenced and incarcerated for a range of crimes but predominantly for drug or alcohol related offences. A smaller number of parents had been detained for more violent offences. Parent prison sentences ranged from a few months to many years. However, for the parents of 14 children participating in this study, prison re-entry was a common occurrence. All of these children identified their father as the parent who was either currently in prison or who had been previously incarcerated. Three children and young people reported that their mother had also been in prison.

In listening to children it became evident that children experienced three types of contact with their parents: regular contact including visits, telephone calls and letters; more infrequent contact including intermittent visits and telephone calls; and no direct contact where children received information about their parent from other sources (see author work).

In line with the participatory approach embedded within the study, and to ensure children's voices remain central to the dissemination phase of the research process, children's words and stories are used throughout this paper to demonstrate particular findings of the research. To protect the confidentiality of participants pseudonyms have been used.

4. Findings

When discussing the impact of parental incarceration, many of the children and young people who participated in this study expressed feelings and thoughts that could be associated with the notion of stigma. Two principal themes were identified across the interviews with children and young people, internal experiences of stigma and external experiences of stigma.

The following discussion provides insights about how children and young people experienced these different types of stigma and concludes with the key strategies children and young people used to manage these experiences in their daily life.

4.1. Internal experiences of stigma

The following discussion explores the experiences of internal stigma common to both children and young people. These experiences were described by children and young people in the following three ways, altered perceptions of self, anticipation of judgement from others and feelings of being different to their peers.

4.1.1. Perceptions of self

All of the young people in this study described how their parent's incarceration had had a considerable impact upon how they perceived and understood themselves as individuals. They highlighted that knowing that their parents had engaged in criminal activity which had hurt others made them wonder whether they also had certain characteristics that made them a "bad person" too. Young people spoke about how they had this sense of a "damaged" or "tainted" self, as

though the biological link that they had with their incarcerated parent somehow affected or influenced who they were or what they were going to be.

Alongside this, approximately half of the children and young people also discussed how they felt concerned that they would also 'end up in prison' or 'committing an offence' because somehow they might be like their parent. These children and young people spoke about how, even though they believed they 'were not like' their incarcerated parent, they feared that there was some "internal driver" that would send them "off course" and they would end up in prison. They described that this made them feel anxious and not in control of their lives.

The apple doesn't fall far from the tree was a saying that the majority of adolescent males and a smaller number of females recited in their interviews. Over a quarter of the participants spoke about how they were already experiencing a life course similar to their incarcerated parents. They described that from a young age they had been told by family members and other adults such as teachers that they would "end up" like their incarcerated parent. Young people, reported that they believed that this expectation by others considerably contributed to their own negative internal beliefs about themselves and in turn contributed to their criminal behaviours.

Like everyone gives up on me...they just know that I'm going to be exactly like my mum. My grandma does, everyone does. I got told since the age of eight that I'm going to be pregnant by the time I'm 14... at times I'm like I want to prove everyone they're wrong but at the end of the day I know me and I know that's too much fucking effort so fuck that I'll just have fun and die young, that's pretty much what I'm doing (Natasha, 14 years).

4.1.2. Anticipating judgement

The anticipation of how people might perceive and judge children and young people was another considerable worry for the older participants in the study. While a very small number of older young people said that other people's opinions did not matter to them, the majority of participants described feeling fearful about being judged or being treated negatively in some way by others, and were constantly alert to questions that may "expose" them and their parent's criminality. Young people spoke about how this was more apparent where they shared the same family name with their incarcerated parent. Young people described being constantly alert to other people connecting them to their incarcerated parent and that this provided a relentless source of stress for them. This meant that they sometimes avoided going into new situations or meeting new people.

Then when people ask you, oh yeah what does your dad do for a living, you're like hmmm. You're not really sure what you say to people, you don't want to be judged and you feel like if you tell someone you're going to be shamed and embarrassed and humiliated. (Julie, 15 years).

4.1.3. Feeling different

The last subtheme children and young people spoke about was how they felt they were different to their peers. The majority of young people spoke about how they felt lacking in some way and socially different to others. They described that having this feeling frequently prevented them from joining in at school or making new friendships.

For example, one young person felt that because their parent was in prison they were often the 'odd one out' and were often unable to participate in regular family activities and celebrations such as Father's Day. These children and young people also described how they would compare their family and themselves to others and would frequently feel worse off or lacking in some way.

Additionally, a number of young people described that they frequently felt more mature and "grown up" than their peers due to the extra responsibilities they had at home when their parent was in prison.

Children and young people reported that this altered their capacity to engage and connect with others of a similar age leaving them feeling alienated from friendship groups and activities that they believed they would otherwise be involved with.

I wish I had nothing to do with mum's stresses, it's hard to deal with, it's hard. It's kind of just like, I've just gone from a child to an adult in five months like that, and now I'm dealing with all these things I wasn't prepared for, and it's stressful, and I have bad anxiety, and that kicks in all the time now. (Jessie Claire, 17 years).

4.2. External experiences of stigma

Accounts of external stigma provided by the majority of the children and young people in this study most frequently included experiences of discrimination and bullying. Examples provided by children and young people included emotional and physical abuse as well as online bullying and exclusion from friendship groups and other family members. These experiences and the influence of social media and news reporters are discussed below.

Bullying from both adults and peers was a common occurrence for all children and young people. Such experiences often began when children were young and at primary school. Eight of the young people reflected on how teachers would commonly make negative assumptions about them because of having their parent in prison. One young person described how, when asking for some assistance with homework, the teacher became aware of the fact that their parent was currently incarcerated. Rather than responding to the young person's needs, the young person described that the teacher reflected inaccurate and offensive ideas about the young person. A one young person noted:

It's not very common for somebody to tell you their parents are in jail, and that's [the reason] why you're struggling because you've had to take on all these responsibilities... So when you tell somebody they kind of take a step back ... Yeah. He [the teacher] just... started telling me stories about these children in the drug world and yeah I was just like, 'is that how you see me, is that like what you're visualising me as?' I didn't really know how to take it so yeah, it was just awkward, very awkward. (Jessie Claire, 17 years).

Young people also described that teachers would also use the information about their parents as a way of managing young people's behaviour. Teachers would compare their behaviour to their incarcerated parent or suggest that incarceration would also be their future if they continued to behave in a particular manner. Young people described how this was hurtful and made them feel angry and humiliated. This was particularly evident in the narratives of the three older males that participated in the study.

Even where young people did not disclose directly that their parents were incarcerated, they reported that they could still be discriminated by others. Four of the young people spoke about the shame of having a shared surname with their incarcerated parent. This meant for some young people that there were instances where particular services or institutions, including the police and other support services, identified the young person as a child of a "known" prisoner and treated them in a way that resulted in them feeling discriminated against and devalued. One young person described how she went to report a theft at the local police station and how the police had subsequently treated her when they had found out who her father was.

My dad is well known in the ACT and they were treating me like a criminal and it got to the point where the police officer was telling me I was in the wrong, and my mum turned around and said, "She's not a criminal, she's nothing like her father, just stop". (Jane, 15 years).

Older young males in this study also described how they believed they were more likely to be "targeted" by the police, compared to their

friends, and that they often felt that they became the focus of police attention because of their parents' offending behaviour.

Bullying by peers was also described as problematic by participants. The majority of children and young people spoke about how rumours and embellished stories would be spread about them and their family at school by other students. Children and young people discussed how some of their peer groups at school would "bully" them when they found out about their parents being in prison; this ranged from direct physical abuse to being excluded from peer groups or recurrently being teased.

So it was really hard because every kid was teasing me and they're like "I'm going to see my mum this weekend, what are you doing?" and then I'd be like "I don't know" and they'd be like "well at least I get to see my mum" and then it'd just be really hard especially because there's lots of bullies in primary school and high school. (Rebecca 15 yrs).

The bullying by peers for children and young people was also compounded by newspaper and social media reports about their parent's incarceration. Over half of participants reported that their parent's criminal activities had been reported on the news or in the newspaper. While children and young people were not usually identified in mainstream media reports, there were often details about their parents which led to them being recognisable to others. Once identified, a small number of young people described how the bullying they experienced was exacerbated by social media channels such as Facebook. One young person described in detail how "Facebook friends" would share information about them and leave derogatory comments for them to read. This young person described how they felt they had no privacy or protection and this further added to their feelings of shame and social exclusion.

So I felt really embarrassed that people I'd never even met before know who I am because of my dad. So I just want to change my last name because it's embarrassing. I don't have a criminal record, I've never done anything wrong but the police know who I am because of my dad's mistakes. Yeah, and even at work, like because it was published in a newspaper article about him, I didn't really appreciate that, whoever published it, because they said where I worked and they said my dad's name. And at work when I serve people my name comes up on the screen that they can see so actually like the week after that I started working again and these customers came in, like: oh, yeah, you're the girl that had the dad....And I felt so embarrassed...(Rochelle, 16 years).

Exclusion from extended family was also reported by many of the children and young people. Over half of participants spoke about how contact with family members such as grandparents and aunts and uncles had ceased when their parent had been incarcerated. A smaller number of children and young people described how they also had lost contact with step-siblings who had been removed by statutory child protection services and how this was sad and confusing for them. They further highlighted that losing family members also meant that they lost support networks and sense of family.

They kind of disowned me and my brother. If it wasn't for my dad I reckon I would be able to go and stay with that side of the family. (Jane, 15 years).

4.3. Managing stigma

The majority of children and young people spoke about how they managed experiences of internal and external stigma. They described these coping strategies as self-protective actions which included keeping secrets and withholding information, self-exclusion and managing friendships.

4.3.1. Keeping secrets and withholding information

Keeping secrets and withholding information were the most common strategies that children and young people used to manage external experience of stigma. Children and young people discussed that a key way to manage feeling stigmatised was to ensure that all their personal information remained private. They indicated a strong desire for privacy, and said they rarely provided information about themselves and their family to their peers or to others who they came into contact with.

Over half of children and young people reported that keeping this information secret had been encouraged by their parents since they were a small child. For others, it had been a personal choice to ensure that they were not teased. Eleven young people reported that they had not told peers or teachers at school about their parent's incarceration or, if they had told anyone, they had spoken to only one or two select friends.

However, over two thirds of participants described that keeping secrets and withholding information created particular challenges for them. Children and young people described that it changed the way they interacted with their peers as they could not talk freely about their lives and frequently had to hide their feelings from their peers. This made it difficult for them to have any meaningful connection with friends. Additionally, these young people described that concealing the truth about their parent from friends created stress and guilt for them.

I just don't want them to know that. When I'm on the phone to my boyfriend, to my dad and stuff when I'm at my boyfriend's house it's really awkward, like I've got to walk away and stuff because I don't want them knowing what it's like to have a parent like my own. It's really embarrassing. (Julie, 15 years).

4.3.2. Exclusion and self-reliance

Exclusion and self-reliance as both a consequence of keeping of secrets and as preferred self-protection strategies were discussed by the majority of young people. Young people highlighted that they chose to not access extra supports at school or participate in more generic support programs available in the community as they did not want to draw attention to the fact that their parent was in prison. Young people spoke about how they did not access supports such as school counsellors because their families, particularly non-incarcerated parents, were concerned about others knowing "too much".

As a result children and young people advised that they frequently chose to exclude themselves either from formal or informal supports in order to protect their families and to ensure that they did not need to disclose any information about their incarcerated parent. Instead they described their capacity to be self-reliant and look after themselves.

On the other hand, two young people indicated that when they were younger they had felt so overwhelmed when they thought about their parent in prison that they withdrew from situations or circumstances that made them think about it. They explained that their shame was so considerable that they could not imagine that any other person could understand such an experience.

Both of my parents are drug dealers and alcoholics and when my mum and dad went to prison, I didn't want to talk to anyone because I thought I would be the only kid that didn't have a mum and dad (Rebecca, 15 years).

4.3.3. Managing friendships

In addition to children's strategies of keeping secrets and self-exclusion, children and young people also described how they managed their friendships in order to protect themselves from future harm. Children and young people reflected on how they had been hurt or let down by adults and peers in the past, who had little understanding of their situation and who had made them feel ashamed or embarrassed because of their incarcerated parent.

Subsequently, children and young people felt that building friendships was often problematic because of the lack of trust that they had in individuals. For many participants there was often considerable caution in building peer relationships and four of the children and young people described how they would set “tests” for peers in order for them to know whether or not they could rely on them.

I know it probably sounds really stupid but like you make up a white lie and you tell someone and then if they go and tell someone else you know you're left on the seat. You shut down that friendship. Well you don't shut down the friendship you just can't trust them. (Jane, 15 years).

Despite such problems with making friends, children and young people described the importance of the good friends they had and how they relied on a small number of close friends to confide in and share their joys as well as their concerns. Frequently a good friend was described as someone who had shared similar experiences to them. This allowed children and young people to talk more freely about the issues they were experiencing. Young people spoke about how this sharing allowed them to be more authentic in their interactions and engage in a reciprocal relationship, whereby they could also help their friends in return for the support they received.

So [my friend] is like a sister I never had pretty much. So she's always been there for me so I mainly came back to her... she is pretty much the same situation as mine, so we talk about it all the time, we compare our dads and how much of arseholes they are to us. It's good to have someone there who knows what you're going through. (Julie, 15 years).

Conversely, five of the young people also described that while it was a relief for them to have friendships where they could be open about their experiences and not feel judged, being accepted in to some of these friendships brought other challenges for them. Adolescent male participants in particular highlighted that these peers could negatively influence their behaviours, particularly around drinking and drug use.

5. Discussion

This study draws attention to the subjective experiences of stigma for children and young people who have a parent in prison. While this study is limited in its scale and its use of a convenience sample, it does provide some interesting pathways for future research and policy and practice development.

It was apparent in this study that as children and young people became older and as their worlds became bigger, they also became more aware of their parents incarceration and the impact that this had on them. However, while young people had a larger number of experiences of stigma to describe, younger children also described similar experiences.

Earlier studies reflect many of the challenges faced by the children in this study (Loureiro, 2010; Loucks, 2012 and Murray & Farrington, 2008). Many of the children and young people in this study described feeling discriminated against, judged and shamed by their peers, family members, general community and the broader society for simply being associated with a stigmatised person, their incarcerated parent. These findings are consistent with Corrigan and Miller's (2004) idea of courtesy stigma originating from kinship and family connections and being underpinned by the notion of contamination. In addition children and young people who hadn't experienced tangible acts of discrimination, still identified that they experienced considerable anticipated judgement and fear of stereotyping. This perceived or felt stigma (Phillips and Gates, 2011) was described by children and young people as distressing as it was for those who had experienced direct discrimination.

Of interest this study also highlights that children and young people of prisoners vary in their responses to adopting these stigma typologies. Those children who were more connected to their incarcerated parent

were more likely to report less feelings of shame and embarrassment. This was evident for both males and females. Both Manby (2014) and Arditti (2012) have reported the importance of a supportive family environment for children with a parent in prison. Such findings suggest it is critical for those children who have safe and loving relationships with their incarcerated parent that good quality contact is maintained throughout the parent's incarceration (See authors own work).

It has also been evident throughout this study that the coping strategies children and young people use to manage the stigma associated with parental incarceration further contribute to the continued silent and hidden challenges of this group. The findings suggest that children and young people go out of their way to conceal and manage the impact of parental incarceration by restricting their own access to formal and informal supports to avoid instances of enacted discrimination or felt stigma. Keeping secrets for a number of children and young people clearly acts as a protective mechanism; however, it is also evident that such strategies may leave children more vulnerable and isolated.

The findings of this study suggest that not only is there a need to enable children and young people to selectively disclose to safe and supportive individuals as identified in other research (Lockwood & Raikes, 2016) but there is also a need for more holistic interventions to be available to children and young people. As Phillips and Gates (2011) argue reinforcing an ‘us and them’ approach may further contribute to their experienced stigma. In other words, there is a need for children to be empowered to access interventions that respond to their needs as children and not necessarily as children of prisoners.

As well as empowering children and young people to seek support, there is also value in providing parents and professionals working with children with information and advice on how to assist children when their parent has been arrested and incarcerated (Jones et al., 2013). As reported by the children and young people in this study, teachers are well placed to provide them with the support they need. However, there is need to educate teachers about the impact of parental incarceration on children so that they can be better placed to support them.

This research further reaffirms the important role that friendships and informal supports have for children and young people when their parent is in prison (Loureiro, 2010; Hagen & Myers, 2003). However, what the findings from this study also suggest is that the purposeful selection of friends with similar experiences by children and young people sometimes have negative consequences for them. Other research has demonstrated that the affiliation only with individuals from a stigmatised group limits access to opportunities and resources and prevents the acquisition of skills (Barker, 2012; Moses, 2010). Young people in this study acknowledged that they did not want to “end up” like their parent in prison, but felt that they had limited opportunities to follow other pathways. While there is an argument for the benefits of children and young people with shared experiences supporting one another, it is also important that children and young people are provided with opportunities to access other networks and relationships that may be of benefit to them.

6. Conclusion

It is evident that children and young people experience a range of negative effects as a result of the stigma that arises from parental incarceration and this situation creates dilemmas for them in which they must weigh the costs of seeking support against others learning about their circumstances.

Helping children and young people to challenge the stigma associated with parental incarceration while providing them with the tools and supports to do this is an important undertaking for social workers and other professionals working with this group of children. It is the responsibility of academics, policy makers and practitioners to work together to create the change necessary to better support this group of children and young people. Without challenging the attitudes and

beliefs that currently surround this children are at risk of remaining hidden and marginalised.

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Conflict of interest

The author has no involvement in any organization or entity with a financial or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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Appendix G: Ethics approval

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2012 254N Modification



Kylie Pashley <Kylie.Pashley@acu.edu.au>
Mon 10/02/2014, 1:58 PM
Morag McArthur; Ms Vicky Saunders <vmsaun001@myacu.edu.au>; Kylie Pashley 

You forwarded this message on 10/02/2014 1:59 PM

Dear Morag,

Ethics Register Number : 2012 254N
Project Title : Building resilience in a uniquely vulnerable group:
children of prisoners
End Date : 30/06/2014

Thank you for submitting the request to modify form for the above project.

The Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee has approved the following modification(s):

1. Approval to use the findings of the research as part of a PhD by publication.

We wish you well in this ongoing research project.

Kind regards,
Kylie Pashley

Ethics Officer | Research Services
Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)
Australian Catholic University
PO Box 456, Virginia, QLD, 4014
T: 07 3623 7429 F: 07 3623 7328

THIS IS AN AUTOMATICALLY GENERATED RESEARCHMASTER EMAIL



Dear Morag and Vicki,

Principal Investigator: Prof Morag McArthur

Co-Investigator: Vicki Saunders

Ethics Register Number: 2012 254N

Project Title: Building resilience in a uniquely vulnerable group: children of prisoners

Risk Level: Low Risk 3

Date Approved: 22/11/2012

Ethics Clearance End Date: 30/06/2013

This email is to advise that your application has been reviewed by the Australian Catholic University's Human Research Ethics Committee and confirmed as meeting the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

This project has been awarded ethical clearance until 30/06/2013. In order to comply with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, progress reports are to be submitted on an annual basis. If an extension of time is required researchers must submit a progress report.

Whilst the data collection of your project has received ethical clearance, the decision and authority to commence may be dependent on factors beyond the remit of the ethics review process. For example, your research may need ethics clearance or permissions from other organisations to access staff. Therefore the proposed data collection should not commence until you have satisfied these requirements.

If you require a formal approval certificate, please respond via reply email and one will be issued.

Decisions related to low risk ethical review are subject to ratification at the next available Committee meeting. You will only be contacted again in relation to this matter if the Committee raises any additional questions or concerns.

Researchers who fail to submit an appropriate progress report may have their ethical clearance revoked and/or the ethical clearances of other projects suspended. When your project has been completed please complete and submit a progress/final report form and advise us by email at your earliest convenience. The information researchers provide on the security of records, compliance with approval consent procedures and documentation and responses to special conditions is reported to the NHMRC on an annual basis. In accordance with NHMRC the ACU HREC may undertake annual audits of any projects considered to be of more than low risk.

It is the Principal Investigators / Supervisors responsibility to ensure that:

1. All serious and unexpected adverse events should be reported to the HREC with 72 hours.
2. Any changes to the protocol must be approved by the HREC by submitting a Modification Form prior to the research commencing or continuing.

3. All research participants are to be provided with a Participant Information Letter and consent form, unless otherwise agreed by the Committee.

For progress and/or final reports, please complete and submit a Progress / Final Report form:
http://www.acu.edu.au/about_acu/research/staff/research_ethics/

For modifications to your project, please complete and submit a Modification form:
http://www.acu.edu.au/about_acu/research/staff/research_ethics/

Researchers must immediately report to HREC any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol eg: changes to protocols or unforeseen circumstances or adverse effects on participants.

Please do not hesitate to contact the office if you have any queries.

Kind regards,
Jo Mushin

Ethics Officer | Research Services
Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) Australian Catholic University

THIS IS AN AUTOMATICALLY GENERATED RESEARCHMASTER EMAIL

Appendix H: Reference group plan

AGENDA

- (1) Welcome and Introductions
- (2) About the study
 - Discuss the back ground to the study and the key research question.

What are the experiences of children and young people who have or have had a parent in prison?

- (3) What is a reference group and what your role is:
 - Discuss the purpose of the reference group
 - Discuss other thoughts about how participants would like to make to this plan (re: role of group and proposed meeting times)
- (4) Complete consent forms, explanation of rights and confidentiality, and provide vouchers
- (5) Further introductions and ice breaker: sentence stems (participants choose a sentence to complete such as I like pizza with ?? topping) and 'one truth' game (this game requires participants to say three statements about themselves with only one being true. People have to guess which statement is true).
- (6) Brainstorming activity
 - a. Describe some of the issues that children and young people experience when a parent is in prison
 - b. Consider factors such as age and gender and sensitive issues
- (7) Develop interview questions
- (8) What could I do to make the interview more comfortable for children and young people?
 - a. What do I need to be careful about asking?
 - b. What is really important for me to ask?
 - c. Where would be the best place to have the interview?
- (9) What activities would be useful and fun to use? (provide examples)
- (10) Any other ideas you may have?

Appendix I: Recruitment pamphlet



What are my rights?

If you choose to participate in the project you've got a number of rights around how you get involved and how workers work with you. These include:

- The right to be informed about the project and your involvement in it
- The right to choose whether you get involved and how you get involved in the project and whether you want to continue your involvement
- The right to be treated with respect and to not be harmed or negatively affected because of your involvement
- The right to not be discriminated against because of who you are or what your background is
- The right to benefit from the project
- The right to stop at any time
- The right to complain if you are not happy about how you are treated

What do I do if I want to be involved or have some more Questions?

If you would like to take part in this project or have any questions, you can call Vicky on 6209 1219. She's in charge of the project and can give you any more information that you need.



Institute of
Child
Protection
Studies



What's the go?

**TALKING ABOUT WHAT I
NEED WHEN MUM or DAD
ARE IN PRISON.**

Whats the project about?

Many children and young people live in families where they have a mum or dad who has gone to prison. We believe that sometimes their lives are the same as for other children and young people, but sometimes they might have tough times or need some help in dealing with challenges.



We want to find out a bit more about what it is like to live in a family where their mum or dad has gone to prison and, most importantly, how they might be helped if they need it. This project is about finding out what is needed and will include a report for services with ideas on how they might better help children, young people and families.

How are we going to find out about young people's lives?

In this project, we are hoping to talk to children and young people aged 10 - 18 yrs about their lives. This will take about an hour, and can take place somewhere where you feel comfortable it might be at a park or a café or at home (everyone has a choice where they'd like to meet).

Who will be talking to young people?

The interviewer on this project will be Vicki Saunders. Vicki is a social worker with lots of experience working with young people and has completed research projects like this one before.

If I got involved—what choices would I have?

Your involvement in the project is completely voluntary. This means that you can choose whether you take part in a one on one interview, what things you want to talk about (and things you don't) and whether you stop at ANY time.

You can change your mind at ANY stage



Is what I say confidential?

Besides the research team, no one will know what things you have said about your family or about the experiences you have had—except if we are worried about your safety or the safety of someone else. In these cases we will talk to you about our concerns and decide, together, what might need to happen.

Otherwise, we will do our best to keep what you say anonymous. At your first meeting we'll explain some ideas

about how we might do this.

We'll do everything we can to protect your privacy and confidentiality

Appendix J: Information letter and consent form

J1: Information letter



Information Letter to Young People

EXPLORING THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN OF PRISONERS LIVING IN THE ACT

Name of principal investigator: Professor Morag McArthur

Name of Student Investigator: Vicky Saunders

invitation

You are invited to take part in a project which looks at what children and young people think and feel about having a parent in prison. This letter has information to help you decide if you would like to take part in this project.

what is the project about?

Through the project we hope to find out more about children and young people's experiences of having a parent in prison. We would also like to ask children and young people what sort of help they think would make having a parent in prison easier for them. Finding out these things will help us to better understand what children and young people need when they have a parent in prison and what other people can do to help.

what do I get to do?

We'd like to meet with you for an interview to talk about what it is like to have a parent in prison and what might make it easier for you. If you decide you would like to take part in this we will meet for about one hour at a time and place that works best for you. The interviews will be done by Vicky who has lots of experience with talking to children and young people. Because some things we talk about might remind you of times that you felt upset, if you feel that you need any extra support after the interviews or want to talk about it with someone we will be able to help you find someone to talk to.

will anyone else find out & what if I change my mind?

If you decide you would like to take part in these interviews, the only people who will know you are taking part are your parents and the researchers. We will not let anyone else know that you are taking part or tell them about what you say to us. You don't have to talk about anything you don't want to talk about, or stay for the whole interview if you don't want to.

The interview will be taped on an audio recorder, however if you decide that you don't want us to record you then we will take notes instead. The recording will only be listened to by the researchers, and no one else will be able to hear what you have told us. You can have a support person like a parent or friend with you during the interview if you would like.

why would I want to be in this study?

This research project will give you an opportunity to talk about what it's like to have a parent in prison in a safe and confidential environment, and to let us know what could be done to make things easier for you. Your interview will help us know more about the experiences and needs of other children and young people who have a parent in prison in Canberra, and what can be done to best help these children and young people and their families. We will also write some articles about the project for other people to read, but we will make sure that no one who reads the articles will be able to tell who you are. These articles will also be linked together to form a book that will be used as part of a university degree.

do I have to take part?

You can decide whether or not you would like to participate in this project and you don't have to do it if you don't want to – it is up to you whether you would like to or not. If you decide you would like to take part you can still change your mind whenever you want to, even if the interview has already started.

Nothing that you tell us during this project will be told to anyone else, unless you tell us that someone has hurt you or another person. If you tell us something that makes us

worry that you aren't going to be safe we will have to tell someone else, but we won't tell anyone without letting you know first.

what if I've got questions?

If you have any questions about the project you or your parent or guardian can talk to either of the researchers:

Professor Morag McArthur
Australian Catholic University
Institute of Child Protection Studies
223 Antill Street
Watson ACT 2602
Phone: 02 6209 1225

Or

Ms Vicky Saunders
Australian Catholic University
Institute of Child Protection Studies
223 Antill Street
Watson ACT 2602
Phone: 02 6209 1219

If, at the end of the project, you would like to know how it went we can send you some information about it and what we learnt.

what if I have any complaints?

This project is conducted with the approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee at the Australian Catholic University. If, during the course of the research, you have any complaint about the way that you have been treated or if you have a query that you think has not been dealt with by the project researchers, you can talk to your parents and they can contact the ethics committee to have your complaint fully investigated:

Human Research Ethics Committee Chair

Research Services
Australian Catholic University
Strathfield Campus
Locked Bag 2002
STRATHFIELD NSW 2135
Ph: 02 9701 4159

Fax: 02 9701 4350

what now?

If you decide that you would like to take part in this research project, you and your parent or guardian need to sign the consent form and give it to Gloria at SHINE for Kids and she'll let us know. We're looking forward to meeting you!

Yours sincerely,

Professor Morag McArthur
Principal investigator

Vicky Saunders
Student Researcher



J2: Consent form



Consent Form for Young People

EXPLORING THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN OF PRISONERS LIVING IN THE ACT

Copy for participants

I _____ (please print name) agree to take part in a project about children and young people's experiences of having mum or dad in prison and what children and young people need when they are apart from their mum or dad.

My parents/carers have agreed for me to take part in the project.

I know that:

	Please Tick
A researcher will come and visit me at place I feel comfortable with. We will spend about an hour together. I can bring along someone I feel comfortable with if I want to.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some of the things we might do are talk about what it is like to have mum or dad in prison. We will also talk about what help I need and who can give me that when mum or dad is in prison.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't have to answer questions that I don't like or don't want to answer.	<input type="checkbox"/>
It is okay for me to stop being part of the project whenever I want to and I will still get the voucher.	<input type="checkbox"/>
If anything we talk about makes me feel upset, I can choose to stop the project. The researchers can tell my parents/carers if I want them to. We will be given the names of people who I can talk to about what is making me upset.	<input type="checkbox"/>
What I say during the project is special and belongs to me. The researchers won't tell anyone else that I took part.	<input type="checkbox"/>
What I say to the researcher will be used in a report, but the researchers will make sure that nobody will be able to tell who I am.	<input type="checkbox"/>

The only time the researchers would have to tell someone else is if they were worried: ☐

- that I might be badly hurt by someone
- that I am not being cared for properly
- that I might hurt myself
- that I might hurt someone else.

To say thanks I will be given a voucher for a music store or the cinema. I will get the voucher even if I decide not to answer some of the questions or if I change my mind later on and I don't want to take part any more. ☐

I will be given a copy of this form to take home with me ☐

It is okay for me to ask questions if I don't understand anything ☐

It is okay for me to complain if I'm not happy about the way I've been treated or anything else ☐

Any Questions?

If you have any questions about the project you or Mum or Dad can talk to either of the researchers:

Professor Morag McArthur
Australian Catholic University
Institute of Child Protection Studies
223 Antill Street
Watson ACT 2602
Phone: 02 6209 1225

Or

Ms Vicky Saunders
Australian Catholic University
Institute of Child Protection Studies
223 Antill Street
Watson ACT 2602
Phone: 02 6209 1219

If, during the course of the research, you have any complaints about the way that you have been treated or if you have a query that you think has not been dealt with by the project researchers, you can talk to your parents and you or them they can contact the ethics committee to have your complaint fully investigated:

Human Research Ethics Committee Chair
Research Services
Australian Catholic University
Strathfield Campus
Locked Bag 2002
STRATHFIELD NSW 2135
Ph: 02 9701 4159
Fax: 02 9701 4350

Name of participant: _____

Signature of participant: _____

(Indicate if verbal consent [☐])

Name of researcher: _____

Signature of researcher: _____

Date: _____

Consent Form for Young People

EXPLORING THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN OF PRISONERS LIVING IN THE ACT

Copy for Researcher

I _____ (please print name) agree to take part in a project about children and young people's experiences of having mum or dad in prison and what children and young people need when they apart from their mum or dad.

My parents/carers have agreed for me to take part in the project.

I know that:

	Please Tick
A researcher will come and visit me at place I feel comfortable with. We will spend about an hour together. I can bring along someone I feel comfortable with if I want to.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some of the things we might do are talk about what it is like to have mum or dad in prison. We will also talk about what help I need and who can give me that when mum or dad is in prison.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't have to answer questions that I don't like or don't want to answer.	<input type="checkbox"/>
It is okay for me to stop being part of the project whenever I want to and I will still get the voucher.	<input type="checkbox"/>
If anything we talk about makes me feel upset, I can choose to stop the project. The researchers can tell my parents/carers if I want them to. We will be given the names of people who I can talk to about what is making me upset.	<input type="checkbox"/>
What I say during the project is special and belongs to me. The researchers won't tell anyone else that I took part.	<input type="checkbox"/>
What I say to the researcher will be used in a report, but the researchers will make sure that nobody will be able to tell who I am.	<input type="checkbox"/>

The only time the researchers would have to tell someone else is if they were worried: ☐

- that I might be badly hurt by someone
- that I am not being cared for properly
- that I might hurt myself
- that I might hurt someone else.

To say thanks I will be given a voucher for a music store or the cinema. I will get the voucher even if I decide not to answer some of the questions or if I change my mind later on and I don't want to take part any more. ☐

I will be given a copy of this form to take home with me ☐

It is okay for me to ask questions if I don't understand anything ☐

It is okay for me to complain if I'm not happy about the way I've been treated or anything else ☐

Any Questions?

If you have any questions about the project you or Mum or Dad can talk to either of the researchers:

Professor Morag McArthur
Australian Catholic University
Institute of Child Protection Studies
223 Antill Street
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Phone: 02 6209 1219

If, during the course of the research, you have any complaints about the way that you have been treated or if you have a query that you think has not been dealt with by the project researchers, you can talk to your parents and you or them they can contact the ethics committee to have your complaint fully investigated:

Human Research Ethics Committee Chair
Research Services
Australian Catholic University
Strathfield Campus
Locked Bag 2002
STRATHFIELD NSW 2135
Ph: 02 9701 4159
Fax: 02 9701 4350

Name of participant: _____

Signature of participant: _____

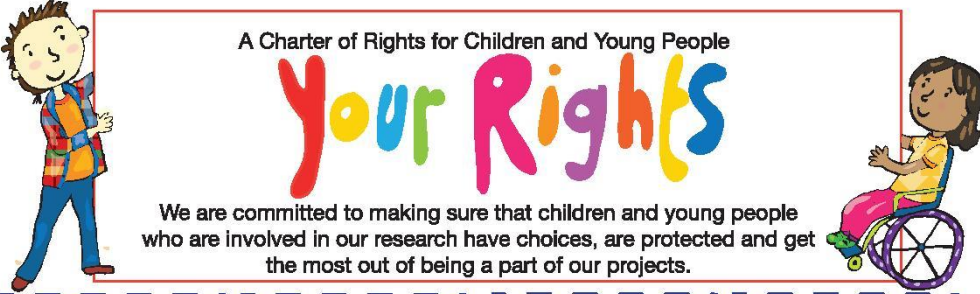
(Indicate if verbal consent [_])

Name of researcher: _____

Signature of researcher: _____

Date: _____

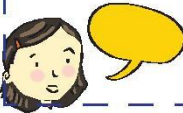




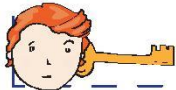





J3: Children's rights



Your Rights



A Charter of Rights for Children and Young People

We are committed to making sure that children and young people who are involved in our research have choices, are protected and get the most out of being a part of our projects.

<p>You have the right to have your say We believe that children and young people should be involved in any research that focuses on their lives.</p> 	<p>You have the right to privacy We will not identify you in our reports unless you give us permission.</p> 	<p>You have the right to participate in a way you like It's up to you if you get involved in the research or not and how you want to be involved.</p> 	<p>You have the right to be treated well We will respect you for who you are and treat you well.</p> 
<p>You have the right to be informed We will help you understand what you're being asked to do. We'll use child-friendly words and activities.</p> 	<p>You have the right to confidentiality If you tell us that you aren't safe, that you are being hurt or if we are worried about you we will need to tell someone about it. Otherwise people won't know which specific things you told us.</p> 	<p>You have the right not to be hurt We will not hurt or tease you and we will stand up for you if others do.</p> 	<p>You have the right not to be discriminated against We will not treat people badly because of who they are or where they come from.</p> 
<p>You have the right to benefit from the research We hope that our project will make things better for children. We will give you a gift for participating.</p> 	<p>You have the right to stop participating If you want to stop working with us you can at any time.</p> 	<p>You have the right to complain If you're not happy you can tell us or our supervisors and we'll take it on board.</p> 	

Want more information?

If you would like any more information about your rights you can talk about them to one of our researchers. If you are not happy with how you have been treated or anything about the research you can contact _____

J4: Interview cheat sheet for participants

We want to talk about:

***“What life has been like for
you when you have had a parent
in prison”***



This may include talking about:

- ❖ Some of the challenges that you have experienced when your mum or dad went into prison
- ❖ The important people or things that have had an influence on 'who you are'
- ❖ Who or what has helped you deal with seeing (or not seeing) your mum and dad when they have been in prison?
- ❖ How you cope with day to day issues
- ❖ Who you talk to about this stuff
- ❖ What role you think support workers should play in helping you to talk about or sort through these issues
- ❖ Your hopes and dreams for the future

*If you need to talk to someone about how you are feeling after the interview please talk to your support worker or call
LIFELINE (Ph) 13 11 14*

Remember your RIGHTS...

- To be **informed** about the project and your involvement in it
- To **choose** whether you get involved and how you get involved in the project and whether you want to **continue your involvement**
- To be **treated with respect** and to **not be harmed** or negatively affected because of your involvement
- To **not be discriminated against** because of who you are or your background
- To **confidentiality**
- To **benefit from the project** and be **compensated for your time**.
- To **STOP** at any time
- To **complain** if you are not happy about how you are treated:

You can complain to our boss:

Morag McArthur
Director of Institute of Child
Protection Studies
Australian Catholic University
(ph) 6209 1225

OR

The Chairperson
Human Research Ethics Committee
C/- Research Services
Australian Catholic University
North Sydney Campus
PO Box 968
NORTH SYDNEY NSW 2059
Tel: 02 9739 2105
Fax: 02 9739 2870

Remember your RIGHTS...

- To be **informed** about the project and your involvement in it
- To **choose** whether you get involved and how you get involved in the project and whether you want to **continue your involvement**
- To be **treated with respect** and to **not be harmed** or negatively affected because of your involvement
- To **not be discriminated against** because of who you are or your background
- To **benefit from the project** and **be compensated for your time.**
- To **STOP** at any time
- To **complain** if you are not happy about how you are treated

Morag McArthur
Director of Institute of Child
Protection Studies
Australian Catholic University
(ph) 6209 1225

OR

The Chairperson
Human Research Ethics Committee
C/- Research Services
Australian Catholic University
North Sydney Campus
PO Box 968
NORTH SYDNEY NSW 2059

*If you need to talk to someone about how you are feeling after
the interview please talk to your support worker or call
LIFELINE (Ph) 13 11 14*

Appendix K: Interview questions

Interview Schedule

Preamble

Interviewer to begin with general conversation to put participant at ease.

Provide study information and explain the purpose of the interview and how it will be conducted (Recording, note taking etc). Provide information about confidentiality and privacy.

Explain that the questions will focus on the participant's experiences of their parent in prison and how this has impacted on their lives. Identify that we will also discuss how, if they have faced any particular issues, what could have been done to improve their circumstances.

Provide participants with information letter, cheat sheet and child rights poster. Provide voucher to participant and reiterate that they are free to leave at any time and do not have to answer questions that they might feel uncomfortable with.

Ask participant if they have any further questions.

Ask participants if they are still happy to proceed and ask them to sign consent forms.

This is a semi structured interview schedule, if participants begin to speak about something different or lead on to other topics, follow this line of conversation but if possible ensure all topic areas are covered by the end of the interview.

Interview Questions

1. Ask participants for demographic information:
 - a. Age/ date of birth
 - b. Sex / Gender
 - c. Ethnicity
 - d. Place of birth
2. Who are you currently living with now? Provide opportunity to complete Activity Sheets if participant would like. Prompts: Parent, extended family members, other adults, foster carers, step family. Include siblings. Ask about family they do not live with.
3. Is this the same as before mum/dad went to prison? How did this change when mum or dad went into prison? Prompt: where else and who else have you lived with. Complete timeline to map this.
4. How and when did you find out that mum/dad had gone to prison?

5. How did life change when your parent went into prison? prompts – care giving arrangements, family relationships, relationship with incarcerated parent, school, etc)
6. How have you coped during the time/s your parent was in prison?
 - a. What are some of the things that made you feel better?
 - b. Who are some of the important people or things in your life?
 - c. What are some of things that made it difficult and why is this?
 - d. What haven't you been able to get help with?
7. If you went to see your parent, what was visiting a prison like for you?
8. How do you see your life being different because of having a parent in prison?
9. Who do you share information with about your parent?
 - a. How comfortable are you with telling people about your parent?
 - b. What makes this difficult?
10. How has having a parent in prison impacted or affected your life and future decisions. Prompts: Physical & mental health, housing, school, employment, friendships.
11. How has life changed since the release of your parent?
12. If there was one thing looking back that you could change about your life what would that be?
13. What do you worry about for your future?
14. What is the one good thing you bring with you that you have learnt from your past?

Appendix L: Examples of children and young people’s activities



What is it like to have
a parent in prison?



-to young to
know much



-not having a
full family was
hurtful.



-lost because father
figures not around.

What could help?



-Comfort.
again someone
to turn to.



-Support,
People to turn
to when you
need help.

Here and there

How is life right now?

school? friends? feelings?

family? home?

not having a father figure is hard, school, life wise because you need that parent to be able to talk about things. Getting a father's perspective rather than just a mother's.

How would you like your life to be?

school? friends? feelings?

family? home?

go back in time, change his mind. Having a father figure.

Having someone older to share advice

People in my life



Family that lives with me?

Family that doesn't live with me?

Friends of the family? Teachers? Counsellors?

Friends? Class mates?

Anyone else?



Sharing my story



Who needs to know?

Close friends
youth workers
family.
teachers



When is it OK to tell them?

When the time is right
when you feel comfortable
around them
I can trust.
- close bond.



What I don't want them to know

My signature

Handwritten signature: Mike



We'll talk about this again on ___/___/___ and we'll see if it's still what I want.
If you tell us that your or your family aren't safe or that you've been hurt then we might need to do something about it.

My worker has explained this to me

In our service we will

Step 1:
Step 2:
Step 3: