



Project 3 - University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Risk, protection and resilience in the family life of children and young people with a parent in prison.
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Surveys of prisoners and in depth interviews with prisoners, children and carers are being undertaken within this project, to explore how young people respond to the risk represented by parental imprisonment. It examines how families with a member in prison organise their lives to cope with that member's absence.

This project is collecting valuable data on a topic about which very little is known and for which there are no official statistics: the number of children who have a parent in prison. The information collected includes:

- 948 completed filter questionnaires from prisoners, 170 of whom met our criteria for more in-depth work.
- 48 facilitated follow up questionnaires with prisoners
- 21 post-release family case studies, which comprise in depth interviews with 44 adults and 31 children. The adults consisted of 21 prisoners (10 male, 11 female) and 23 caretakers (10 grandparents and 13 partners), and the children (19 boys and 12 girls) were aged between 8 and 17.
- Interviewees (adults and children) completed Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires relating to each child.

Progress has been affected by continuing challenges, including

- Inconsistency of behaviour between prison security departments, resulting in delays in interviewing prisoners involved in different stages of the study.
- High turnover among liaison and prison staff requiring frequent renegotiation of our access to prisons.
- Prisoners being transferred to other prisons or prematurely discharged before we could return to do facilitated questionnaires and in-depth interviews.

These data are providing extensive insights into how imprisonment affects family life and how young people cope with the imprisonment of a parent. Most of these young people seem to have coped rather well with their parent's imprisonment, often in extremely adverse circumstances. Adverse circumstances were particularly evident among the children of mothers imprisoned for crimes relating to drug abuse, and such children were apt to welcome their parent's imprisonment since it offered them some relief from the trauma and afforded their parent the opportunity to change their behaviour. Unfortunately, most of the parents resumed drug use almost immediately after release.

It is too early for definitive policy recommendations but our data point to a need for more support for families of prisoners during and after sentence. Families often need help to re-establish themselves after imprisonment. One of the key issues that we hope to address relates to how to enable ex-prisoners to return to healthy and supportive family structures.