
Heterogeneity in prisoners' children's adjustment and family risk and protective factors

Lucy Markson¹, Friedrich Lösel², Michael Lamb¹, Caroline¹
Lanskey, & Karen Souza³

¹University of Cambridge

²University of Erlangen-Nuremberg

³City University, London

ESC 2017, Cardiff



BACKGROUND

- ✘ Increasing numbers of families affected by imprisonment
- ✘ Imprisonment impacts families differently. What helps them to be resilient?
- ✘ Prisoners and their families rarely been studied from a resilience or protective factors perspective.
- ✘ Family processes in children's adjustment rarely studied (Arditti, 2015).

THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT

- ✘ Provides risk and protective influences
- ✘ Family stress, (cumulative) risk (parent education, income, mental illness, poverty, substances)
- ✘ Family resources important for coping with adversity- stability, cohesion, shared values, respect, collaborative problem solving, emotional expression (McCubbin & Patterson, 2008; Walsh, 2003).
- ✘ How to encourage positive outcomes
- ✘ Inform support policies

METHOD

- ✘ FAIR study (Losel et al., 2012)
- ✘ 50 children of imprisoned fathers, mean age, $M=8.61$, $SD=3.98$, range 4-18 years.
- ✘ Time 1, Time 2 (first two sweeps)
- ✘ Measured cumulative risk, family protective factors
- ✘ Qualitative case studies

CUMULATIVE RISK (TIME 1)

Indicator	Risk defined by	Proportion reaching risk threshold (%)
1. Maternal education	Did not finish school/finished but no quals	36.4
2. Paternal education	Did not finish school/finished but no quals	45.5
3. Maternal depressive symptoms	Total General Health Q'nairre >3	42.4
4. Paternal depressive symptoms	Total General Health Q'nairre>3	24.2
5. Maternal alcohol and drug use	Weekly alcohol units >14 or using any illegal drugs	27.3
6. Paternal alcohol and drug use	Weekly alcohol units >21 or used any illegal drugs in previous year	78.8
7. Living below poverty threshold (mother report)	Income to poverty threshold: below 60% weekly median before housing costs (BHC)	81.8
8. Paternal involvement with cjs	At or above 75 th percentile	21.2

FAMILY PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Time 1 measures (mothers):

- ✘ Problem solving communication – 10 item family problem solving communication scale (McCubbin, McCubbin & Thompson, 1996). ‘*We yelled and screamed at each other*’, ‘*we talked things through till we reached a solution*’, $\alpha = .89$, $M = 17.07$, $SD = 6.98$
- ✘ Family support- 4 item family subscale of multi dimensional scale of perceived family support, ‘*my family really tries to help me*’, ‘*I can talk about my problems with my family*’, $\alpha = .90$. (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet &, Farley, 1988), $M = 19.98$, $SD = 8.32$
- ✘ Parents relationship- mothers rating 1-5, $M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.33$
- ✘ Accumulated protective factors- z transformed and summed.

CHILD ADJUSTMENT

- × Time 2:
- × Strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997), 20 items- emotions, peers, behaviour, hyperactivity
- × *'many worries, often seems worried'*
- × *'often fights with other children or bullies them'*
- × *'generally liked by other children'*
- × Not true, somewhat true, completely true.
- × $M=9.35$, $SD=4.79$

CUMULATIVE RISK AND BEHAVIOURAL DIFFICULTIES

Indicator (Time 1)	Behavioural difficulties (Time 2) (<i>r</i>)
Maternal education	0.28*
Paternal education	0.39*
Maternal depression	-0.02
Paternal depression	0.14
Maternal problem alc/drug	0.16
Paternal problem alc/drug	0.43**
Family poverty	0.24
Paternal contact with the CJS	0.13
Cumulative risk total	0.49**

* $p < 0.05$ level (2-tailed), ** $p < 0.01$ level (2 tailed)

MODERATION ANALYSES

Protective factor	Median split	Correlation (r) between cumulative risk and behavioural difficulties	Difference between correlations (z_{obs})
Problem solving communication	High (N=22)	0.39	$z_{obs} = -0.63$ (ns)
	Low (N=28)	0.54**	
Family support	High (N=24)	0.43*	$z_{obs} = -0.67$ (ns)
	Low (N=26)	0.58**	
Parents relationship	High (N=25)	0.40*	$z_{obs} = -0.64$ (ns)
	Low (N=25)	0.55**	
Accumulated protective factors	High (N=25)	0.25	$z_{obs} = -0.85$ (ns)
	Low (N=25)	0.47*	

* $p < 0.05$ level (2-tailed), ** $p < 0.01$ level (2 tailed)

FAMILY CASE STUDIES- TOM 😊

Time 1:

“One teacher leaves me out...make stuff up, make out like I’m bad”

“I argue with them a lot” and “usually do not turn up” (to detentions)

“There are some groups that I don’t get on with...I had a fight with a boy at school the other day”

“I would stop to tie my shoe next to a car and be suspected of looking in” (by the police)

“Really, really angry” about father’s imprisonment

TOM- TIME 2 😊

“Things have changed quite a lot since last time”

“I get on well with all my teachers, except one-she stops me from learning”

“There’s more trust between dad and me”

Adjusted “extremely well” to father’s release

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

- ✘ Stacey and Adam “quite close” during imprisonment
- ✘ “It’s embarrassing- having to say your dad’s in prison”
- ✘ “Seeing what they’re doing...sharing their interests and opinions”
- ✘ Adam intended to “guide them in the right way”

FAMILY COMMUNICATION

- ✘ “Don’t bottle up problems...sort out problems...share everything....always truthful”
- ✘ “We don’t do lies in this house, saves heartache”
- ✘ “When they (school) call home I explain to mum what’s happened.”
- ✘ “They are always there to listen and do not jump to conclusions”
- ✘ “He always writes to them, sends them pictures, always helps them with homework if I don’t know”

FAMILY SUPPORT

- ✘ “When he first went away we tried to make the most of Christmas and birthdays (Stacey)
- ✘ “Being there for them”
- ✘ “Every time I say can you help me with something, he always does it” (Sophie, youngest child)

EMILY – TIME 1 ☹️

- ✘ “She’s always been a madam and is naughty”
- ✘ “I have got 6 best friends. There are four people who aren’t my friends because they say I can’t play.”
- ✘ When I’m at my nanny’s I have a good day as I can go in the garden and shoot a BB gun. I shoot my nanny.”
- ✘ Wished to “break the door”

EMILY- TIME 2 ☹️

- ✘ She's mouthy. The teachers pulled me in. Turns out Emily' just as bad as them" (other girls)
- ✘ "I'm not very good at being very good in the playground. Sometimes I go on the wall. If you're naughty you have to stand by the wall"
- ✘ "They said I spitted on one of them but I didn't"

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Time 1

- ✘ “In/out when younger, but best friends” (Claire)
- ✘ “Love her more than anything in the world.” (Chris)

Time 2

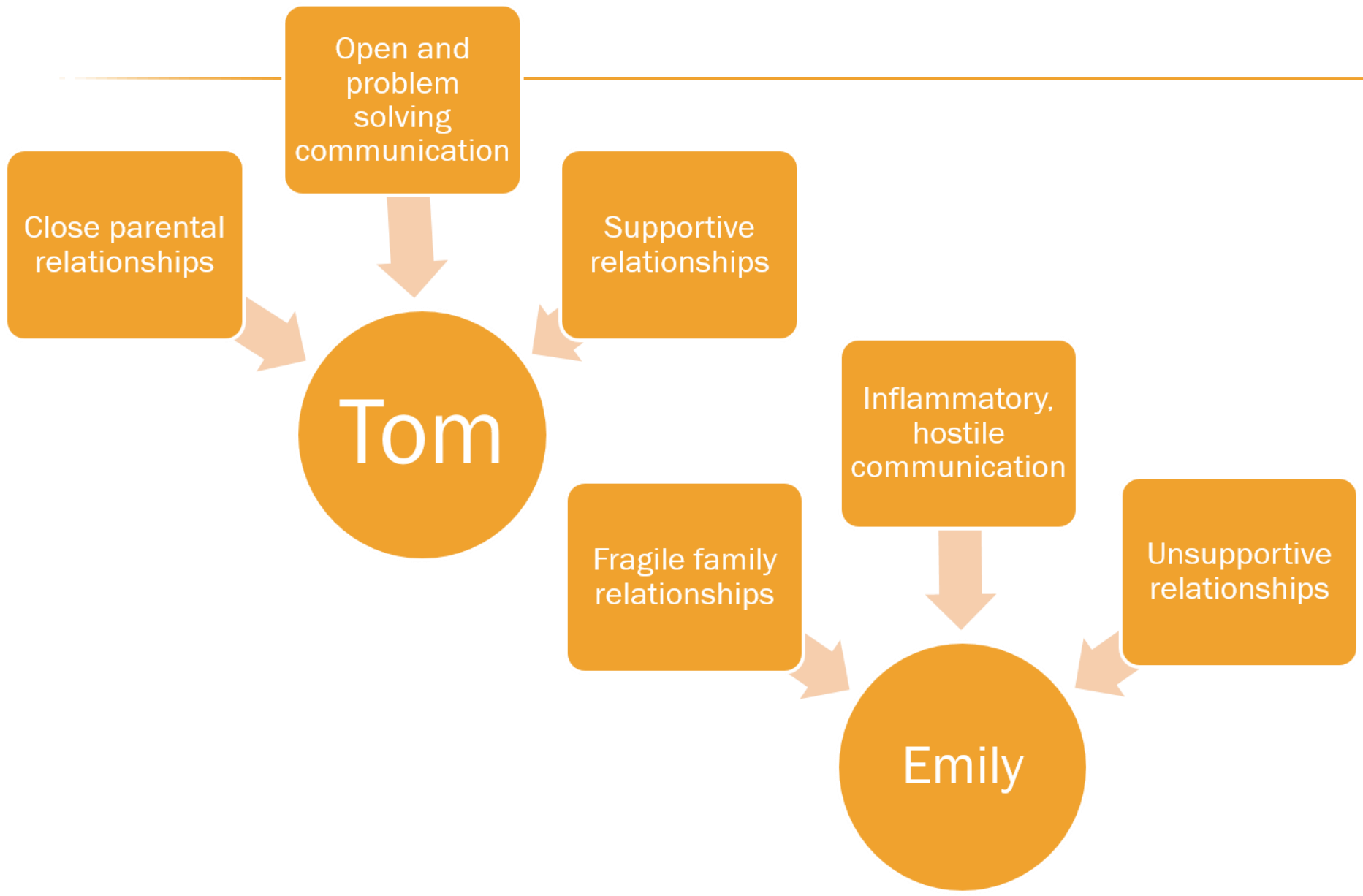
- ✘ “He’s one miserable bastard”
- ✘ “She sticks up for me when daddy shouts at me”
- ✘ “Worried about whether he loves me”
- ✘ “He makes me feel happy but worried because he never comes back, only at night time”

COMMUNICATION

- ✘ “I’m a truthful person. I just tell it like it is.”
- ✘ “He needs to see someone (a counsellor), but he won’t go”
- ✘ “He tells her off a lot. She is shouted at and sent to her room. She’ll be at the top of the stairs shouting down at him. He bickers with Emily and winds her up. That’s how they play”.
- ✘ “He rang twice today to say to mum when he comes home to put the kettle on”
- ✘ “He doesn’t like it when they (the children) don’t want to talk to him”
- ✘ “He always goes out. I am trying to tell him that I don’t want him to go out anymore.” (Emily)
- ✘ “I ask mummy and if its daddy I don’t really tell him”

FAMILY SUPPORT

- ✘ “I tell (Emily) off, but then Chris tells me not to.”
- ✘ “Chris told her off and said ‘see, daddy went to prison and if you do that you can go to prison too.’”
- ✘ “I want to go and do something with my life. Chris thinks he can’t”



DISCUSSION

- ✘ Family environment source of risk and protection for children. May help explain variability in adjustment to imprisonment
- ✘ Risk factors increased stress and strain on resources.
- ✘ Cumulative risk predicted adjustment difficulties
- ✘ This relationship may be weakened when family protective factors are present
- ✘ Family environment (supportive, cooperative, structured, responsive, accepting) can foster positive emotions, coping and adjustment, thereby reducing impact of stress.
- ✘ Parent-child relations help shape child adjustment (Lamb, 2012)
- ✘ Policy: reduce family risks and strengthen protective factors

-
- ✘ Statistical power, small sample
 - ✘ In high-risk samples effects may be very small.
 - ✘ Capture complexities of family environment?

REFERENCES

- Arditti, J. A. (2015). Family process perspective on the heterogeneous effects of maternal incarceration on child wellbeing. *Criminology & Public Policy*, *14*(1), 169–182. doi:10.1111/1745-9133.12117
- Geller, A., Cooper, C. E., Garfinkel, I., Schwartz-Soicher, O., & Mincy, R. B. (2012). Beyond absenteeism: father incarceration and child development. *Demography*, *49*(1), 49–76. doi:10.1007/s13524-011-0081-9
- Goodman, R. (1997). The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire: a research note. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines*, *38*(5), 581–6.
- Lamb, M. E. (2012). Mothers, fathers, families, and circumstances: factors affecting children's adjustment. *Applied Developmental Science*, *16*(2), 98–111. doi:10.1080/10888691.2012.667344
- Lanskey, C., Lösel, F., Markson, L., & Souza, K. A. (2014b). Re-framing the analysis: a 3-dimensional perspective of prisoners' children's well-being. *Children and Society*, *29*(5), 484–494. doi:10.1111/chso.12088.
- Lösel, F., Pugh, G., Markson, L., Souza, K., & Lanskey, C. (2012). *Risk and protective factors in the resettlement of imprisoned fathers with their families*. Ipswich: Ormiston Children and Families Trust.

REFERENCES

- McCubbin, H. I., & Patterson, J. M. (2008). The family stress process. *Marriage & Family Review, 6*(1-2), 7–37. doi:10.1300/J002v06n01
- McCubbin, M. A., McCubbin, H. I., & Thompson, A. (1996). Family problem solving communication (FPSC). In H. I. McCubbin, A. I. Thompson, & M. A. McCubbin (Eds.), *Family assessment resiliency, coping and adaptation. Inventories for research and practice* (pp. 639–686). Madison: University of Wisconsin.
- Zimet, G. D., Dahlem, N. W., Zimet, S. G., & Farley, G. K. (1988). The multidimensional scale of perceived social support. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 52*, 30–41.
- Turney, K., & Wildeman, C. (2013). Redefining relationships: explaining the countervailing consequences of paternal incarceration for parenting. *American Sociological Review, 78*(6), 949–979. doi:10.1177/0003122413505589
- Turney, K., & Wildeman, C. (2015). Detrimental for some? The heterogeneous effects of maternal incarceration on child wellbeing. *Criminology & Public Policy, 14*(1), 1–41. doi:10.1111/1745-9133.12109
- Walsh, F. (2003). Family resilience: a framework for clinical practice. *Family Process, 42*(1), 1–18.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- ✘ Professor Friedrich Lösel, Professor Michael Lamb, and the ESRC



PRISONERS FAMILIES: A HETEROGENEOUS GROUP

- ✘ Many factors that influence how they experience imprisonment
- ✘ Fathers living with family, relationship with children's mothers, mother re-partnering (Turney & Wildeman, 2013).
- ✘ Resident fathers prior to imprisonment = more detrimental to children (Geller et al., 2012).
- ✘ Time (past experience and future expectations), space (home and school), agency (coping) (Lanskey et al., 2014).
- ✘ Lower risk of maternal imprisonment (MI) more detrimental for children than high risk of MI. High risk group more accustomed to adversity? (Arditti, 2015; Turney & Wildeman, 2013).