



“It’s hard for me having a dad in prison who has come out”: an analysis of the impact of a father’s imprisonment on children’s relationships with their parents and on their lives outside the home

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1. Introduction

- The research project:
- *“Risk and protective factors in the resettlement of imprisoned fathers with their families”*
- A collaboration between the Ormiston Children and Families Trust and the Institute of Criminology, Cambridge University. Funded by the Big Lottery Fund

Context

- High incarceration rates and prison crowding in the UK
- England & Wales: ca. 153 prisoners per 100,000 of the population (Scotland similar)
- UK & Spain: highest rate in Western Europe
- Ca. two fifth of prisoners married or living with a partner before imprisonment
- 54% of male prisoners in E & W have children under age 18
- Approximately 200,000 children per annum are experiencing parental imprisonment (Ministry of Justice, 2012)

Previous Research Findings

- Problems of stigmatisation and isolation for parents and children (Fishman, 1990; Braman, 2004)
- Emotional ambivalence and stress for children (Boswell, 2002)
- High risk of behavioural, school, employment and other problems for children of imprisoned fathers (Murray & Farrington, 2008)
- They are at greater risk of involvement in the criminal justice system than the general population (Murray et al., 2012)

Previous Research Methodology

- Mostly cross-sectional
- Often small qualitative studies
- Partially out-dated due to changes in society
- Most research from North America
- No longitudinal study in Europe that gathered data from whole family sets (mothers, fathers and children)

2. Method

- Prospective longitudinal design
- Interviews and standardized assessments with fathers, mothers and children. Quantitative and qualitative data
- Interviews conducted within 4 months before release (Time 1) and within 6 months after release (Time 2)
- Inclusion criteria:
 - East Anglia and London (13/8 prisons)
 - Father's sentence between 8 months and 6 years
 - Due for release within 4 months
 - Planning to have contact with one or more children/step-children aged 0-18
 - Prisoner partner consent to participate in the research

3. Sample: the children in the 40 families

- 69 children in the 40 families
- 48% boys (n = 33) 52% girls (n = 36)
- 9 months – 18 yrs. Mean age at T1: 6.25 yrs (*SD* = 4.46)
- 22% BAME, 78% White British
- Diverse range of socio-economic backgrounds
- Different family situations
- 35 interviewed aged 4 to 18 years

Retention rates: (T1-T2)

- 74.1% fathers, 90.7% mothers, 88.9% children

4. Findings(1)

Children's experiences

Father's Absence

- **Sadness**

'(I) feel sad with dad being away. Everything is different' (Joe, 5).

'I get sad when I think about why dad left me but I try not to think about it' (Kwesi, 18).

'I was upset at first but then got used to it' (Chris, 13).

'Mum's not happy now I'm sad about my daddy... I just wait and wait for a long time for daddy to come back. I lie on the sofa' (Luke, 4).

- **Anxiety**

'(I'm) worried in case he might not come (back)' (Callum, 8).

'When my mum told me I cried and wouldn't leave my mum at school' (Kayleigh, 7).

Father's Absence

•Anger

'I wasn't told at first what was going on. It was a shock when they did tell me...I was really angry at first' (Peter, 15).

'I feel sad, bored, sometimes angry that dad's not around' (Ben, 11).

•Respite

'My mum and dad used to fight' (Shana, 7).

'I feel very scared (when dad is around) as I once got into trouble and he got drunk and was very angry... and made me cry a lot' (Max, 11).

'When he's not drinking, he's a normal dad. When he's drinking he's a stranger' (Ben, 11).

Talking to Others

'(I've just talked to one person) because she's good at keeping secrets' (Amy, 10).

'I don't talk about it' (Josh, 13).

'I don't talk to people at school, don't talk to teachers. I don't want anybody to get me into trouble' (Lydia, 8).

'They call me names, sometimes about my dad being in prison, sometimes not. Sometimes I get into fights' (Ellen, 8).

'A girl saw it in the paper and told the whole school. Some people took the Mickey out of me as I haven't got a dad' (Max, 11).

Coping and Support

- **Mum:** *'Go and tell mummy'* (Elliott, 7). *'I cuddle mummy'* (Laura, 8).
- **Other close family and relatives:** *'(They were) always there when dad went away'* (Leah, 16). *'(She) stays in the house with me. I'm not home alone. I feel safer'* (Peter, 15).
- **Friends:** *'If I feel upset or angry they calm me down, they understand and help me'* (Sara, 10).
- **Dad:** *'(When I am sad) I cry and stop and ring up dad'* (Alicia, 10). *'I go to his picture in our room and look at him and kiss it'* (Ellen, 8).
- **Coping Alone:** *'(When I'm sad) I go upstairs in my room and try not to think about it'* (Callum, 8). *'I mostly keep it bottled inside; don't think it helps to talk about it because it won't get him out any sooner'* (Leah, 16).

Visits

- *'I like talking to him, catching up on letting him know what I've been doing... I don't like having a limit on the time you spend' (Ben, 11).*
- *'I like it when he comes through the gates. Seeing him makes me feel really happy. I like it when he doesn't have to wear the red vest because he is like my dad not like a prisoner' (Sara, 10).*
- *'I don't like it when he and mum don't get along' (Kayleigh, 7).*
- *'I feel bored when it's a normal visit and I have to wait a long time' (Sam, 7).*
- *'I like seeing him. He plays with me, he plays football' (Steven, 7).*
- *'I don't like leaving. It's weird leaving him behind' (Leah, 16).*

Father's Return

- *'I got my dad back, it's like my family's been put back together (Leah, 16).*
- *'Today I liked it because daddy picked me up from school' (Marie 6).*
- *'At weekends when I play football dad comes' (Jake 15).*
- *'When he was away it was sad and quiet. Now it's fun and happy' (Amy, 10).*
- *'I am not as upset or angry as I used to be' (Sara, 10).*

Father's Return

- *Me and Jessie cry when (mummy and daddy) argue. I think it's all my fault. I don't know why.... why daddy moved. Maybe it's because of mummy and him (Callum, 8).*
- *Mum has a friend (a boy) and daddy doesn't want him to hurt me and my sister' (Sam, 7).*
- *When dad is back I get bored. He sleeps in mummy's bed' (Steven, 7)*
- *'He doesn't play with me much. He tells me off quite a lot' (Laura, 7).*
- *'He's embarrassing and I don't like everybody seeing him when he's drunk' (Ben, 11).*

Authority

- *'Before I got grounded, now nothing. (Things are) good now at school. No drugs or alcohol. No more trouble with police'* (Tola, 15).
- *'He's still strict but not as before. Before when he was depressed he used to scream and shout but now he's on his tablets he's realised that screaming/shouting don't get you nowhere. When things go wrong he sits us down and talks to us about it'* (Leah, 16).
- *'He was always starting arguments. Sometimes he'd tell us off for no reason when he was drunk'* (Jessie, 13).
- *'Things that I used to have to do but don't have to do them now. I used to have a 'leading man role' and I liked it. It's hard now....'* (Jake, 15).
- *'there's more trust between dad and me. He lets me do things more and we do things together – never used to before'* (Jake, 15)

Aspirations

- **Material circumstances**

- *'A new house'* (Kayleigh, 7)
- *'A nice house, nice car'* (Alesha, 5)
- *'A pretty bedroom'* (Laura, 7);

- **Closer relationships**

- *'(I wish) that daddy would be nice, if he could live with us'* (Max, 11).
- *'I would like to live with my mum AND dad'* (Ellen, 8).
- *'(our family) needs to chill out a bit, not take things too far, not take it to heart'* (Jake, 15).
- *'We need a nice break just to get away for two weeks, spend family time without being disrupted'* (Leah, 16).

4. Findings(2)

What predicts positive and negative outcomes for children after their father's release?

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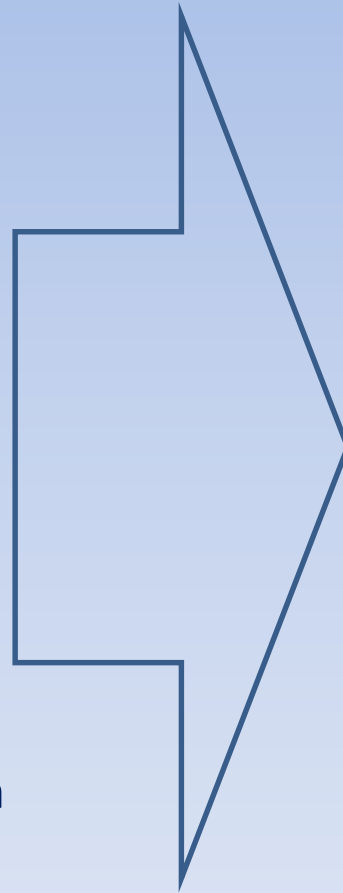
Time 1 predictors:

(Parents' combined reports)

1. Parents' quality of relationship
2. Quality of parents' communication during imprisonment
3. Father's involvement with children
4. Parents' support from family and friends

(children's reports)

5. Children's relationship with father
6. Children's relationship with teachers
7. Children's help from others



Time 2 outcomes:

(children's reports)

1. Family relationships
2. Wider context (school, peers, police)

(parents' combined reports)

3. Overall adjustment

Outcome 1: Family

Time 2 outcomes: Relationship with father (11 & under) Relationship with father (12 & over)

Time 1 predictors:

	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>
Quality of parents' relationship	.27	.53*
Quality of parents' communication during prison sentence	.16	.78***
Father's involvement with children before prison	.26	.27
Parents' support from family and friends	.42**	.24
Children's relationship with father	.37*	.66**
Children's relationship with teachers	.39*	.18
Children's help from others	-.13	.15

* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, and *** $p < .01$, two-tailed. $n = 22-24$, variation due to missing data or non-applicable items.

Outcome 2: wider context (Children 11 Years and Under)

Time 2 outcomes: Experience of bullying Learning difficulties Trouble with school behaviour

Time 1 predictors:

	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>
Quality of parents' relationship	-.41*	-.24	.15
Quality of parents' communication during prison sentence	.02	-.43**	-.05
Father's involvement with children before prison	-.34	-.35*	.07
Parents' support from family and friends	-.19	-.32	.02
Children's relationship with father	-.42*	-.25	.30
Children's relationship with teachers	.08	-.44**	-.17
Children's help from others	.41*	-.22	-.40*

* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, and *** $p < .01$, two-tailed. $n = 22-24$, variation due to missing data or non-applicable items.

Outcome 2: wider context (Children 12 Years and Over)

Time 1 predictors:	Time 2 outcomes: School achievement	Trouble/encounters with police
	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>
Quality of parents' relationship	.62*	-.65**
Quality of parents' communication during prison sentence	.60*	-.64**
Father's involvement with children before prison	.78***	-.75***
Parents' support from family and friends	.13	-.28
Children's relationship with father	.29	.38
Children's relationship with teachers	-.49	.20
Children's help from others	.00	-.36

* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, and *** $p < .01$, two-tailed. $n = 10-11$, variation due to missing data or non-applicable items.

Findings: Children's adjustment

Time 2 outcomes: Children's Adjustment

Time 1 predictors:

	<i>r</i>
Quality of parents' relationship	.65***
Frequency of contact during imprisonment	.63***
Quality of parents' communication during imprisonment	.46***
Father's involvement with children before prison	.48***
Parents' support from family and friends	.51***
Parents' material resources/circumstances	.43***
Father's involvement with CJS	-.13
Total variance explained (R^2)	$R^2 = .70$ ***

* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$, $n=61-69$

4. Findings(3)

Distinguishing between children coping relatively well and children coping less well

Cluster analysis

Time 2 Outcomes (in order of weighting in the model)	Cluster 1 (Coping relatively well) (23 children) <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Cluster 2 (Coping Less well) (12 children) <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)
Problematic/Risk-related Behaviour	1 (.00)	0 (.52)
Mother's rating of child's adjustment	4.4 (.58)	3.1 (1.2)
Child's view of relationship with father	1.8 (.32)	1.1 (.74)
Mother's view of child-father relationship	4.4 (.84)	3.1 (1.2)
Father's rating of child's adjustment	4.5 (.51)	3.5 (1.2)
Father's view of relationship with child	4.7 (.47)	3.9 (1.0)
Mother's indicators of child's negative adjustment	1.0 (1.0)	1.5 (1.2)
Mother's indicators of child's positive adjustment	2.6 (.95)	2.2 (1.2)

Environmental Indicators of Children's Adjustment at Time 2

Indicator:	Child Clusters	
	1 (coping relatively well) <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	2 (coping less well) <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)
Mother's physical and mental health (GHQ)	11.57 (6.37)	16.33 (9.03)
Mother's resilience score	43.48 (5.91)	36.55 (7.99)
Mother's weekly income	359.15 (376.73)	181.42 (74.53)
Father's resettlement difficulties	1.85 (0.63)	2.88 (0.78)
Family Communication (FPSC)	22.89 (4.53)	15.08 (5.36)

Conclusions

- First study in Europe that investigated family sets of fathers, ex/partners and children during imprisonment and after release.
- Qualitative analysis revealed the fragility of the well-being of the children and young people in the study.
- Family, social and economic factors predicted children's outcomes at Time 2.
- In particular, quality of parents' relationships, frequency and quality of communication during the imprisonment, and father's involvement with the children before prison, and children's relationship with father were the strongest and most consistent predictors of children's outcomes.
- Note that we provide correlational data, therefore, our findings should be interpreted as predictors, not causal relations.
- In comparison to the other children in the study, those who were coping less well at Time 2 were in families with lower income and where less positive forms of family communication were used. Their mother's well-being was lower and their fathers experienced more difficulties in resettlement.

Policy recommendations

- Findings reinforce the need for children of prisoners to be recognised and cared for as vulnerable individuals in local and national policy and for organisations involved with children of prisoners to be sensitive to their vulnerabilities.
- NOMS and family organisations need to consider the further actions that can be taken to maintain family relationships, as well as extending family support services and family learning programmes.
- Families should not only receive adequate help and guidance when the father is in prison, but also when there are vulnerabilities in child development e.g. risks of offending, substance misuse.
- Careful recording of information about prisoners' families would facilitate the provision of appropriate support after the father's release.

Read the final report at:

[http://www.crim.cam.ac.uk/research/fathers
in_prison/final_report.pdf](http://www.crim.cam.ac.uk/research/fathers_in_prison/final_report.pdf)

Publications are in progress!

Thanks for listening

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