



FAIR Conference

Families and Imprisonment Research Conference

A Longitudinal Perspective on Women's Experiences of Their Partner's Imprisonment, Release, & Resettlement

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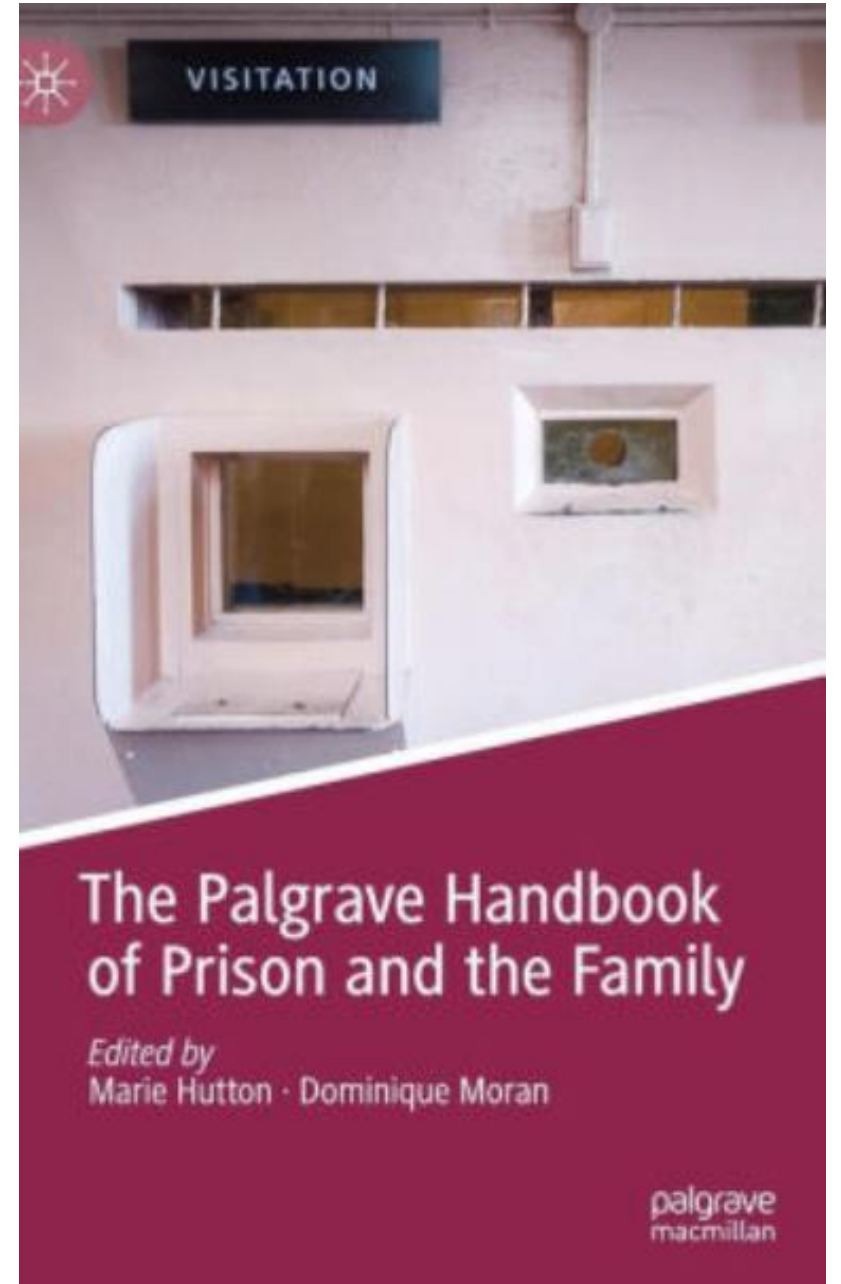
Overview

- Penal policies tend to appeal to families to provide support to prisoners.
- However, the assumption that families are *willing* and *able* to fulfill a supportive role through and after imprisonment places a strong burden of responsibility on them.
- It also puts those who are already vulnerable at greater risk.

Objective

To examine the women's experiences over time in a number of areas:

- Socioeconomic
- Health
- Social support



Earlier findings...

Overall, the men's incarceration placed more burden on the women, as they faced increased family, work and caregiving demands:

- her parental responsibilities increased
- her household income decreased significantly
- primary caregiving was seen as a barrier to employment
- her mental health declined

The Present Sample

- 34 women who participated in all 3 waves of the research

Time 1 (<i>N</i>)	Time 2 (<i>N</i>)	Participation rate T1–2 (%)	Time 3 (<i>N</i>)	Participation rate T1–3 (%)
54	49	91	35*	66

- *M* age at Time 3 = 36.7 (*SD* = 7.9)
 - range was 28 to 54 years
- Women had 2 children, on average

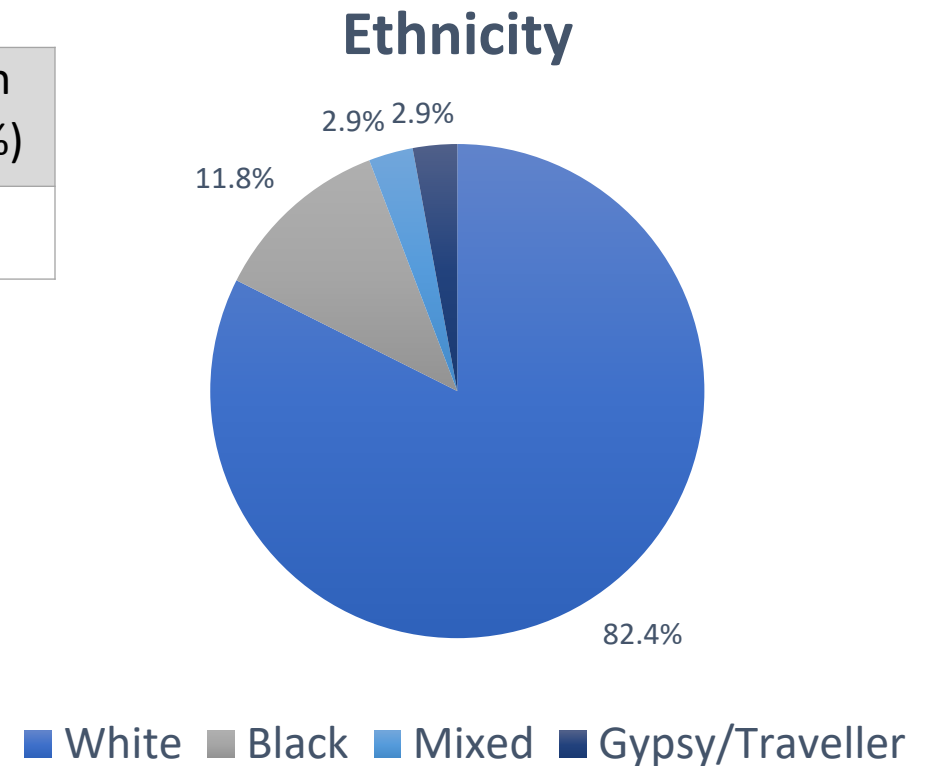
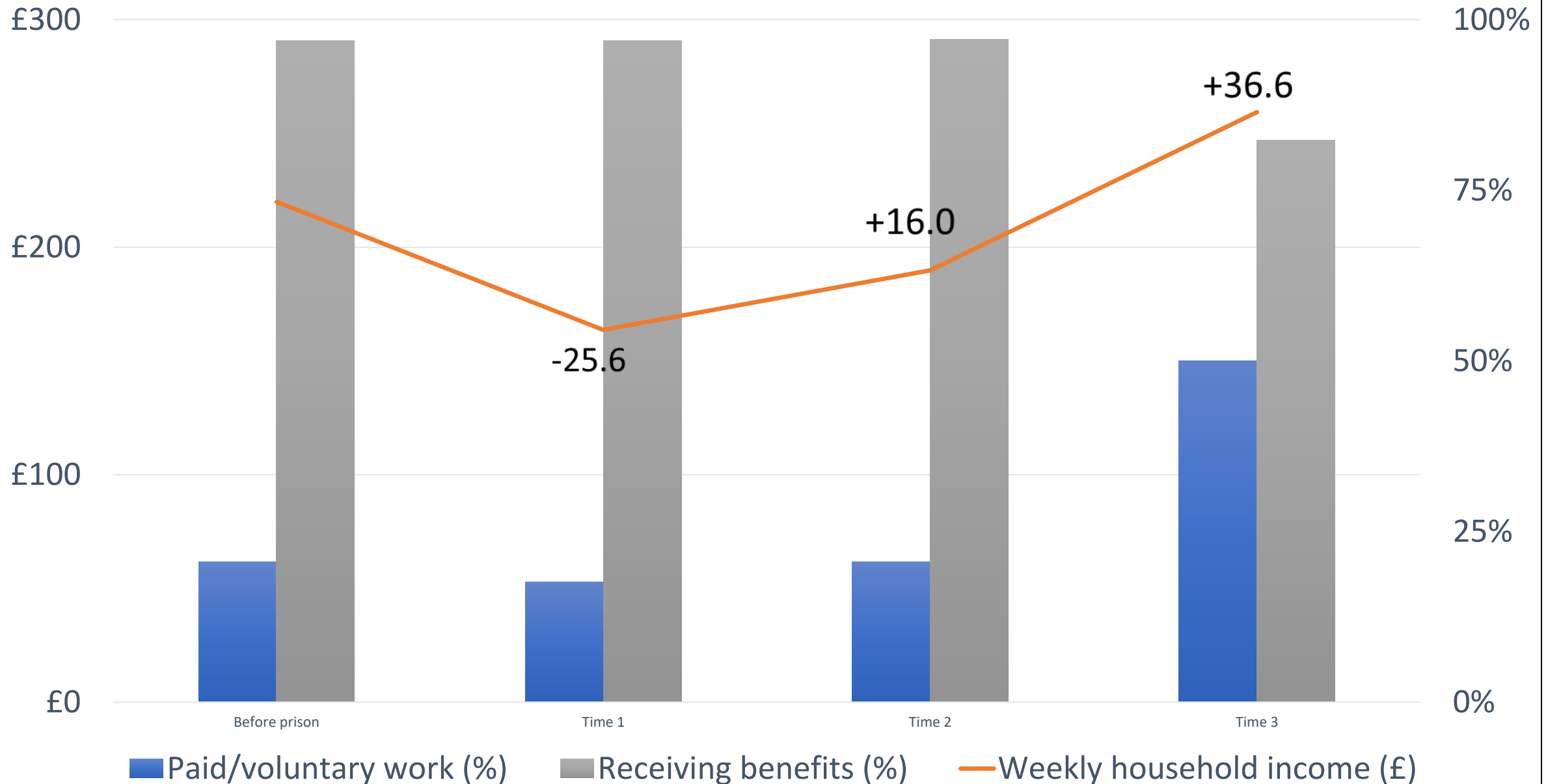


Table 1. Parents' relationship status

	Time 1		Time 2		Time 3	
	Together	Separated	Together	Separated	Together	Separated
Parents (%)	76.5	23.5	64.7	35.3	21.2	78.8
# children (M, SD)	1.94 (1.01)		1.74 (.86)		2.39 (1.00)	

Women's economic situations before, during and after prison (N = 34)



Women's comments about their financial situations:

Having difficulties = 76.5%

- Struggling/not enough money
- Barely getting by/making ends meet
- Falling behind/in arrears
- Other

Positive experiences = 17.6%

- Shared expenses
- Doing well/better

Women's comments about their financial situations:

Difficulties

- “Really bad. I avoid opening letters. I’ve got 51 parking tickets!”
- “Some weeks are okay, others are difficult to make ends meet.”
- “As soon as it goes in, it goes out. I pay £700 to live here a month.”

Positive

- “He pays rent. I pay weekly shopping bills.”
- “I just got out of debt.”
- “You can only do what you can do. But I’m not on the breadline. I feel really capable and able to budget.”

Table 2. Reasons for women's unemployment

%	Before prison (<i>n</i> = 27)	Time 1 (<i>n</i> = 28)	Time 2 (<i>n</i> = 27)	Time 3 (<i>n</i> = 17)	
Full-time caregiver	63.0	71.4	55.6	40.0	↓
Health-related reasons	7.4	7.2	14.8	33.3	↑
Can't find work	11.1	10.7	14.8	40.0	↑

Women's comments about finding/retaining employment:

Positive Experiences	Difficulties Cited
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• steady employment “Because I’ve been in the NHS for 15 years, it’s always been easy.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• job competition “50 people going for 1 position”• health-related obstacles “Because I’m dyslexic, I just found it hard.”• role as carer “I had a part-time cleaning job but gave it up because of childcare issues.”• criminal conviction

Table 3. Health-related factors before, during and after prison (*N* = 34)

	Before prison	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
Weekly alcohol units (M, SD)	11.04 (21.67)	11.04 (21.67)	2.69 (6.27)	13.13 (15.11)
Illicit drug use (%)	26.5	5.9	11.8	5.9
Physical health problems (%)	--	29.4	17.6	41.2
Mental health problems (%)	--	38.2	50.0	47.1
Total GHQ* (M, SD)	--	14.48 (8.31)	10.91 (6.69)	11.24 (5.24)

*GHQ-12 gives a total score of 36, with high scores indicating problems.

Table 4. Social support during and after prison ($N = 34$)

	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
Informal support	88.2	73.5	97.0
Formal support	28.1	32.4	48.5

Women's comments about informal social support:

Time 1

- “Really lucky. I have loads of family a 10 minute walk away.” (22, ex)
- “I see [partner’s] mum quite a lot. This helps us both.” (38, partner)
- “Always talking to nan and grandad. They are my main support.” (22, partner)

Time 3

- “My aunt gives emotional and financial help. Would turn to [partner’s] family more than my own. My mum has early stages of Alzheimer’s.” (46, partner)
- “If I need to let off steam then it would be my eldest daughter.” (53, partner)

Women who had no social support:

- Isolation

“Contact with partner cheers me up. He’s the only person I’ve got.”

- Level of secrecy

“Haven’t told my parents he’s gone to jail.”

- Family disapproval

“Mum’s not supportive of [partner’s] drugs.”

- Reluctance to ask for help

“Yeah, if I needed it, but we’re quite proud like that. We try to get through it ourselves.”

Women's comments about formal support at Time 3:

Sources of formal support:

- School
- Social services
- Council
- Domestic abuse
- Family oriented programme
- Hostel
- Other

Implications

- Employment situations improved for some... but all still low income!
 - What employment/financial resources are available to assist women with a CJ involved partner?
- Health declined for those who had pre-existing conditions.
 - How do we identify and better support these women?
- Formal support increased over time... but experiences are not always positive!
 - How can support services be enhanced?

Conclusions

- The expectations of partners and families to shoulder the burden of caring for and supporting current and former prisoners may not be feasible, given their situations and circumstances, and limited support.
- Given the important role that women play in imprisoned fathers' lives, they should be viewed as a vulnerable group in their own right, with specific needs and concerns.

As one mother states...

*“They go to prison, and we get left
with all the rest of it.”*

