



“Stressful” and “Homely”: Young people’s experiences of inter- and intra-prison family relationships

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Background

- PhD – “Families – Inside Prison and Out: Young people’s experiences of having a family member in prison”
- Two groups of participants
 - 8 young people aged 16-25 who were part of an arts collective KIN
 - 10 young men aged 17-21 who were currently within a Young Offenders Institution
- 6 young men aged 17-20
 - 5 had experienced imprisonment at the same time as a sibling (brother/step-brother)
 - 4 had experienced imprisonment in the same institution as their (step)sibling
 - 3 had experienced imprisonment at the same time as a parent (dad/step-dad)

Maintaining a Relationship

- Intra-prison relationships (same institution)
 - Contact can be dependent on individual prison officers

Maintaining a Relationship

“So I see him aw the time and I speak to him and that tae. So they’re alright wae that, the staff, know what I mean, the staff know I’m awright, I’m quiet, I just get on wae ma sentence, so it’s awright [...] There’s rules, aye, sometimes it’s like that, some staff are like that but see some of the staff that I got on wae, they’re like that, aye, well we’ll get you doon to see your brother and that so it’s awright [...] they take me, aye, that’s where, they take us to the visit room and just sit doon and they get us a tea and that, and we just obviously speak and I ask him how he was getting on and that...” (Chris)

“So, the officers doing the hall, they werenae very happy about it but we still got down once a week, once every two weeks, which was awright.” but then he goes on later in the interview to say “So, again, they, they would take him doon to my hall and I’d speak to him, sitting in this wee office room, and then, I think that was, like, the only time that I got, like, to sit doon and have a chat wae him but, other than that it was just me and him and ma parents and that.” “And they try and make you not see him as much as they can, just because they know that you’ll back each other up, more fights, all that.” (John)

Maintaining a Relationship

- Inter-prison relationships (different institutions)
 - No clarity over provision
 - In Scotland contact with an imprisoned parent is the right of the child not a privilege for the prisoner – what does this mean when the child is also in prison (or secure accommodation)?

Maintaining a Relationship

"...you get a phone call, well you can put in for one every two week but sometimes when you put in for one you don't get it [...] You don't always, no, 'cause sometimes, like, they can, they can say, you've had it too much and that, know what I mean, you only get it, it's like once every fortnight. Sometimes, like, the way it works you don't get it for, like, every three week and that." (Darren)

"...my last one was when I first come in, three months ago. So then it's, like, it's, it's time wise, say it's, cos if, if I phoned him [his brother] today and then wanted another phone call with him in, like, two days' time they'd be wondering why, know what I mean. (Scott)

"I tried to get them the noo but-, his [his step-father] wee boy's in doon the stair fae me-, so he's got them wae him so I don't know if they're gonna accept two fae [the same prison], you know what I mean..." (Grant)

Darren had received inter-prison visits with his dad, Scott knew about the possibility of visits but had not had any, Grant did not know anything about these.

“Stressful” or “Homely”

“It’s a bit, like, the first time he came in obviously my stomach dropped, but you just, every time he comes out, just drops basically.” (John)

“Just stressful, just stressful cos obviously although he gets money on his canteen I’ll still buy him stuff like snout and all that, and then I’ll gie him ma pin number for ma phone so he uses all the money on my phone so, aye.” (John)

“Because if he ends up fighting wae somebody, know what I mean, I, I said to him, I mean I’ll have to back you up and that, and he’s like, no, no because you’re in the open side and that tae. But it’s still ma brother, you know what I mean.” (Chris)

“...I was just, know what I mean, I was glad to see him, know what I mean, ‘cause I’d just came in [...] It was kinda like a homely feeling when I seen him, know what I mean, ‘cause I know I’ve got somebody in here that I kin trust, you know what I mean. ‘Cause there’s no many people in here you can trust, know what I mean...” (Chris)

“It made, it made me feel mair homely, see when I seen him I was, like, that, know what I mean...” (Chris)

Family in Prison

- Perceived risk of violence
 - “So, again, they, they would take him doon to my hall and I’d speak to him, sitting in this wee office room, and then, I think that was, like, the only time that I got, like, to sit doon and have a chat wae him but, other than that it was just me and him and ma parents and that. [...] And they try and make you not see him as much as they can, just because they know that you’ll back each other up, more fights, all that.” (John)
 - “I’m glad that he’s out noo, know what I mean, cos it’s, it’s something that I dinnae have to worry about while I’m in here now, know what I mean [...] Because if he ends up fighting wae somebody, know what I mean, I, I said to him, ‘I mean I’ll have to back you up and that’” (Chris)

Family in Prison

- Lack of trust
 - “It was kinda like a homely feeling when I seen him, know what I mean, ‘cause I know I’ve got somebody in here that I kin trust, you know what I mean. ‘Cause there’s no many people in here you can trust...” (Chris)
 - Links in to intimacy (Jamieson, 2005)
- Changes in how you ‘care’ for a family member
- Constructed by prison officers in terms of risk

Conclusions

- We do not fully understand either inter- or intra-prison relationships
 - How do these experiences impact on prisons and prison staff?
 - How do these experiences impact on the individuals within the prison in these relationships?
- Where one of the people in prison is a child how do we deal with contact (particularly in Scotland where this contact is the right of the child not a privilege for the prisoner)?