

Families affected by paternal imprisonment in the UK

Ethnic and cultural perspectives

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Rationale, Sample, and Methods

- ▶ From the 54 families involved in the FAIR Study, 19 had a member who identified themselves (or their children) as belonging to an ethnic minority group. At the individual level:
- ▶ 15 Black or Black British; 5 Gypsy or Traveller; 4 Mixed ethnicity; 2 Other; 1 Asian or Asian British
- ▶ Categorisation disguises the rich complexities of ethnic and cultural heritage in the sample. For example, families from African and Caribbean backgrounds (many countries), Polish, English/Irish Travellers and Showmen. Also a variety of class backgrounds.
- ▶ Consequently, qualitative analytical methods adopted to fully explore and be sensitive to cultural, national, and social context.
- ▶ Interviewed 11 of the 19 families at Time 3. Better retention rate for ethnic minority participants than at Time 2.
- ▶ Culture is a vital part of an ecological conception of resilience. Understanding the influence of cultural context can assist in understanding individual families' experiences.
- ▶ There is limited exploration of ethnic and cultural factors affecting prisoners' families in the UK. There is therefore a danger that the experiences of minority groups are absorbed into a generalised narrative.

The present analysis

- ▶ Identifies 4 themes that describe the adversity these families faced, where cultural factors appear to be shaping their experiences.
- ▶ Describes the relationship of those adversities to paternal imprisonment and resettlement, and to other social and contextual factors.
- ▶ Describes cultural resources that feed into resilience processes.

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Cultural factors and experiences of adversity: Themes

#1 Family Activities

- ▶ *“Whereas when I do phone him, he’s on the Xbox! I say to him ‘try and limit that to 2 hours a day maximum’, just don’t go brain dead on these computers. What about even just instruments, like a keyboard or something, drum, get him into something more positive.”*
 - ▶ - Lloyd (father)

▶ *“He’s learning at the minute, till I come home, then he’ll be working when I’ll come home. I want him to have life skills as well. Not just educational skills.....because obviously, in our world, 12 years old, they leave school and go to work with their dad.”*

▶ - Gerry (father of Billy)

▶ *“But they’re used to, actually, getting up with Gerry, getting in the van and go out to work. Spending that father and son time, doing work, gardens or whatever Gerry was doing.”*

▶ - Esther (mother of Billy)

▶ *“Yeah, If I wanna join school I’d talk to my dad about it, and dad will make a decision if I go back or not, but if I don’t wanna go back.*

▶ - Billy (aged 13)

#2 Experiences of support

“Because, if it’s cocaine to sell, it’s a favour, but it’s not a handout.... it’s like one of them unwritten rules. You’ll get the drugs, but not the money. Cash is what you’ve gotta work for.”

- Ramon (father), talking about his friends

“I mean, it’s all good telling your mum...But she’s just your mum... you know, it’s your mum at the end of the day. What can she really do? If anything, it’ll just stress her up.”

- Ramon, talking about his family

“The thing I like about [him], we both understand. People like me, we just make your... life even easier, ‘cause you see there’s nothing you can do.”

- Ramon, talking about his Probation Officer

▶ *“She didn’t like that fact what I had to do to get the money and....trying to do something that I didn’t need to do. But she supports me no matter what, ‘cause she’s my wife.”*

▶ - Gerry (father)

▶ *“Travellers do tend to stick together, they support each other, there’s always ‘if you ain’t got - we’ve got, come and take it’ kinda thing. They understand how the feeling is of being treated different, whereas other people don’t.”*

- Esther (mother)

► *“Being 21 and 22, and I’m there with a baby and pregnant. And dealing with a angry new person, was really strange. Actually I found like a mummy daycare group thing that I used to go to. But everyone seemed so happy and jolly and there was no....for example there was no black girls....So I felt so alone.”*

► - Zuriela (mother)

#3 Lifestyle and values

- ▶ *“Don’t do that. You’re your own person. Don’t follow the crowd. The crowd’s just gonna lead you somewhere and you’re just gonna be thinking what am I doing here? ...You can have fun any time. But you make sure that you need to get your education.”*
 - ▶ - Tyler (father)

- ▶ *“She only knows one side of her identity. She only knows the African side. She doesn’t know her Caribbean side. ...But the opportunity there for her [and it] is so important to me. Sometimes she just identifies as African. Other times she just identifies as Caribbean. And I just want to tell her you’re both.”*
 - ▶ - Zuriela (mother)

▶ *“And I met their parents, and their parents was a bit, like, I could tell, yeah, based on our conversation, they didn’t really want..... their children hanging round with Isaac, ‘cause, of course, they’ve got a preconception of black kids already.”*

▶ - Ramon, father of Isaac

▶ *“I think he’s aware of his....like obviously he’s a minority here. And I think he’s aware of how - how he feels more represented there than he does here. That’s the impression I get from him. I’ve been trying to say well it’s not about being stuck here. It’s the same freaking world. It’s about how you choose to live it, which path you choose to walk.”*

▶ - Hope, mother of Isaac

▶ *“I’ve got friends from all walks of life..... then I’ve got friends that are like... .. they’re not - - criminal or something, if you actually got to know them, they’re actually not like the way they talk. I have been told about myself as well, that’s why I think I relate to them as people.”*

▶ - Isaac (aged 12)

#4 Experiences of discrimination

“If another race is gonna apply for the same job interview, you’re at a disadvantage automatically, just because the media portrays that the majority of crime is committed by black people.....and, you know, class makes a difference as well. So, we automatically fill that lie.”

”Every time I’ve told them about my criminal record I get knocked back. And every time I’ve lied I’ve got the job.

- Ramon (father)

- ▶ *“I don’t know if he experiences any kind of racism because at the school that he goes to, she’s told me that - - some other kids sort of like called him a ‘nigger’ now and then and obviously, that, that pains me a lot because I’m not there to tell him how to deal with it”*
 - ▶ - Lloyd (father of Leo)
- ▶ *“Sometimes people call me a - -....”*
 - ▶ - Leo (aged 9)

Cultural resources and processes of resilience

▶ *“It’s a relief - - sense of life for me, I love it.”*

▶ - Gerry (father)

▶ *“Because, you know what it is, when we’re all together, it gives you... it’s, like, a sense... it gives you a better sense of who you are. Like, where you come from.”*

▶ - Ramon (father)

▶ *“It’s the grace of God, and the help of the godparents.”*

▶ - Paulette (mother)

▶ *“I do go by their morals. I was brought up as a Jehovah’s Witness, so... we do raise the children with them standards.”*

▶ - Jade (mother)

Questions to keep in mind when working with individual families

- ▶ What does the extended family structure look like and how is it valued?
- ▶ What family activities are culturally meaningful/important for this family?
- ▶ What cultural practices/traditions/skills do this family want to teach their children?
- ▶ What are the family preferences for type and amount of support?
- ▶ Are there any cultural factors that might cause particular resettlement related strains for this family?
- ▶ Is discrimination an issue and in what way?

Conclusions

- ▶ Supports the general FAIR Study findings about family resilience experiences and processes, but demonstrates how these can be culturally shaped.
- ▶ “Cultural” factors affect the experiences of families when they interact with individual, familial, communal and socio-structural factors. They are linked to experiences of both adversity and resilience.
- ▶ The ways in which families interact with services and prisons is not straightforward, and cultural factors can sometimes be poorly recognised/understood.
- ▶ Families from ethnic minority groups have experiences that are sometimes placed within a wider background of discrimination, that can enhance social hostilities and difficulties experienced as a result of paternal imprisonment.