



FAMILIES NEED FATHERS

Imprisoned Fathers

Information and Research

Most recent publications show that the UK has 82,023 prisoners of which 77,435 are male, representing 94.4% of those imprisoned in the UK. Of the male population 55,142 are adult offenders (aged 21 and over) representing 71.2% of those imprisoned while 8,943 are young offenders (aged 18 – 21) representing 11.5%. In adult male offenders the highest percentage (38%) are serving sentences of 4 or more years while for young offenders the highest percentage (40%) are serving between 12 month and 4 years.¹

No formal auditing of men's parental status is in place within prison². Surveys, however, have revealed some figures: in 2003 it was revealed that 25% of young men are fathers or expectant fathers³ and it was estimated in 2003 that 32% of male prison population have dependant children under the age of 18⁴.

Challenges:

The primary challenge facing imprisoned fathers is restricted contact with their children. This lack of contact represents a risk for the child's development. Three key factors may be identified as affecting the regularity and quality of contact for fathers in prison. These are: partner relationships, institutional constraint and the contact environment. One of the main concerns is security.

Institutional Constraint:

- Current prison policy allows for visits at a minimum of 60 minutes every 2 weeks. Up to three adults and accompanying children may visit at one time. Prisoners may gain further visit time through incentive schemes and visiting times may be accumulated to allow for longer visits⁵.
- Some prisons fail to cater adequately for visiting families and the quality of provision differs between prisons. Many prisons are still without a visitor's centre (49/134 in 2004⁶) and there is no statutory agency to cater for the needs of prisoners' families and children⁷. As mentioned there are also no official systems in place to record information regarding prisoner parenthood or family responsibilities.
- Distance from the family may also be a constraint, particularly for families on low incomes. Research indicates that a high number of prisoners are incarcerated over 100 miles from home⁸.

Contact Environment:

Contact refers to not only visitation times but also contact via telephone and mail. The contact being referred to here is limited to visitation. Two impacts on contact caused by the prison environment can be identified: firstly, the possibility of inadequate facilities and a reduction in quality of contact. Secondly, the change in parent role experienced by the father and the impact this has on quality of contact.

1 All figures: Ministry of Justice 'population in custody monthly timetables' (Dec '08)

2 'Fathering behind bars in English prisons: imprisoned fathers' identity and contact with their children' (Men's Studies Press 2005)

3 Dennison, C. (2003). Parenting education for young fathers in young offender institutions. Brighton: Trust for the Study of Adolescence

4 Hansard, (2003). Questions to minister on prisoners with dependent children

5 HM Prison services visitors guide, accessed 05/02/09 <http://www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/adviceand-support/keepingintouch/visitorsguide/>

6 Fathers Direct 'Inside Fatherhood, a guide to giving inmates, children and partners a fresh start' (June 2004)

7 'Fathering behind bars in English prisons: imprisoned fathers' identity and contact with their children' (Men's Studies Press 2005)

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Facilities/environment – Children can't be unaccompanied, mothers' input important

- Prisons with less dedicated visitation facilities can have a negative impact on the quality of a visit. While some prisons facilitate family visits and offer dedicated environments, others restrict the contact allowed and provide only basic seating facilities. One study revealed a contrast in which one prison provided only a "large room with tables surrounded by four chairs" one of which the prisoner was constrained to, while another offered a 'dedicated family centre' where parents could move around and play with their children.⁹
- The unnatural nature of visiting times also affects impacts the quality of time spent with a child. The increased pressure to make the most of limited time within ridged constraints, alongside the hostile and unusual environment, can lead to increased stress or awkwardness of interaction.
- Other research has indicated the difficulty visitation presents to children. One study notes that, "Visiting a parent in prison can be an upsetting and frightening experience for many children. Long journeys, waiting at the prison gates, searches and sniffer dogs, an environment where physical contact or play is difficult can all exacerbate the problem".

Changing role:

- Research indicated that accessibility and economic contribution are essential to a strong father/child relationship and are key identifying features for a father's self-worth as a parent¹⁰.

9 Fathering behind bars in English prisons: imprisoned fathers' identity and contact with their children' (Men's Studies Press 2005)

10 Day, R.D., Lewis, C., O'Brien, M., & Lamb, M.E. 'Fatherhood and father involvement: Emerging constructs and theoretical orientations' (2005 London-Sage)

Within a prison environment these functions are taken away and research suggests that fathers feel their identity as a father becomes 'unsettled and fragmented', as they have to create new roles for themselves¹¹.

- For some fathers the stigma associated with incarceration coupled with their lack of contribution means that some will not want to have visitation with their children. One survey suggests that some families created different reasons for the father's absence to prevent the difficulties this situation may present to the child¹².
- The new role which fathers adopt within prison and the changes they will undergo through conforming to the values of the institution may either positively or negatively affect their parenting roles following incarnation. One study suggests that, "For some the process of being removed from civic society and their family undermined any sense of a responsible father identity, whereas for others prison provided a space to reappraise the meaning of fatherhood in their lives."¹³

Partner Relationship:

- One of the key relationships when fathering from prison is with the mother, whose presence will be needed during visitation and whose cooperation is imperative when facilitating letters and telephone calls with the child.
- Studies in the UK and America indicate that a higher than average proportion of imprisoned fathers had a fragile relationship with their partner before imprisonment¹⁴.

11 Day, R.D., Lewis, C., O'Brien, M., & Lamb, M.E. 'Fatherhood and father involvement: Emerging constructs and theoretical orientations' (2005 London-Sage)

12 Fathering behind bars in English prisons: imprisoned fathers' identity and contact with their children' (Men's Studies Press 2005)

13 Doherty, W.J, Kouneski, E.F., & Erickson, M.F. Responsible fathering: An overview and conceptual framework. Journal of Marriage and the Family (1998)

14 Fathering behind bars in English prisons: impris-



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- There is evidence for a correlation between child visitation and couple-relationship, with fathers claiming a poor pre-imprisonment relationship enjoying far less visitation with their child than those in a positive relationship. One study notes, "In essence a good relationship with the child's mother, as perceived by the father, was usually critical for maintaining access to children."¹⁵

Impact:

- The primary concern for families with an imprisoned father is the impact on the child and the increased risk of anti-social behaviour in later development. Also strong family links are a positive factor in preventing male-reoffending (reducing rates by up to six times research indicates¹⁶) working as a preventative for child anti-social activity.
- Current statistics indicate approximately 150,000 children in the UK ¹⁷are currently affected by having an imprisoned parent. It is important again to note that the majority of UK prisoners are male and likely to present the highest proportion of imprisoned parents.
- Studies reveal that children with an imprisoned parent are three times more at risk of committing anti-social behaviour than their peers and three times as likely to suffer from mental health problems¹⁸.
- 48% of children under 10 with an imprisoned parent are likely to commit future anti-social acts compared to 14% of children under 10

oned fathers' identity and contact with their children' (Men's Studies Press 2005)

15 Fathering behind bars in English prisons: imprisoned fathers' identity and contact with their children' (Men's Studies Press 2005)

16 Fathers Direct 'Inside Fatherhood, a guide to giving inmates, children and partners a fresh start' (June 2004)

17 Fathers Direct 'Inside Fatherhood, a guide to giving inmates, children and partners a fresh start' (June 2004)

18 Lords Hansard Text (June 12 2007) accessed at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200607/ld-hansrd/text/70612-0006.htm> accessed on 06/02/09

where no parents are imprisoned¹⁹.

Opportunities:

As discussed the primary factors affecting imprisoned father contact are some institutional failings to accommodate families and the pre-existing relationship with the mother, essential to accommodating contact. As in any situation the strongest safeguard for a child's development is maintaining strong parental relationships and a healthy family environment. Introducing standard practice to accommodate imprisoned parents would only benefit child and family development.

Links and Support:

Visits and assisted prison visit scheme helpline - 0845 300 1423

<http://www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/adviceandsupport/keepingintouch/> Provides official guidelines on maintaining contact and visitation procedures.

<http://www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/adviceandsupport/keepingintouch/assistscheme/> Details on how to qualify for financial assistance when visiting an imprisoned relative/partner

Support Groups/Charities

<http://www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk/> Action for Prisoners Families is a national membership organisation providing advice and support to families affected by imprisonment

<http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/index.php?id=6> The fatherhood institute provides details on current research and policy regarding

19 Lords Hansard Text (June 12 2007) accessed at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200607/ld-hansrd/text/70612-0006.htm> accessed on 06/02/09



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imprisoned father as well as advice for professionals in contact with imprisoned fathers.

<http://www.prisonersfamilieshelpline.org.uk/php/bin/readarticle.php?articlecode=9241> The family's prisoner helpline is a free and confidential service coordinated by Action for Prisoners Families and two other organisations.

<http://www.storybookdads.org.uk/> An award winning national charity which helps facilitate contact between imprisoned fathers and children – specifically they provide fathers with the opportunities to record messages/videos/stories and deliver them to their children.